

Pre-Spring Fishing 2013

## Redfish In The Marsh

Cranking  
Up The  
Spring  
Bass Bite

Deep  
Adjustment  
for Walleyes

LAST ICE: Bluegill Secrets Revealed



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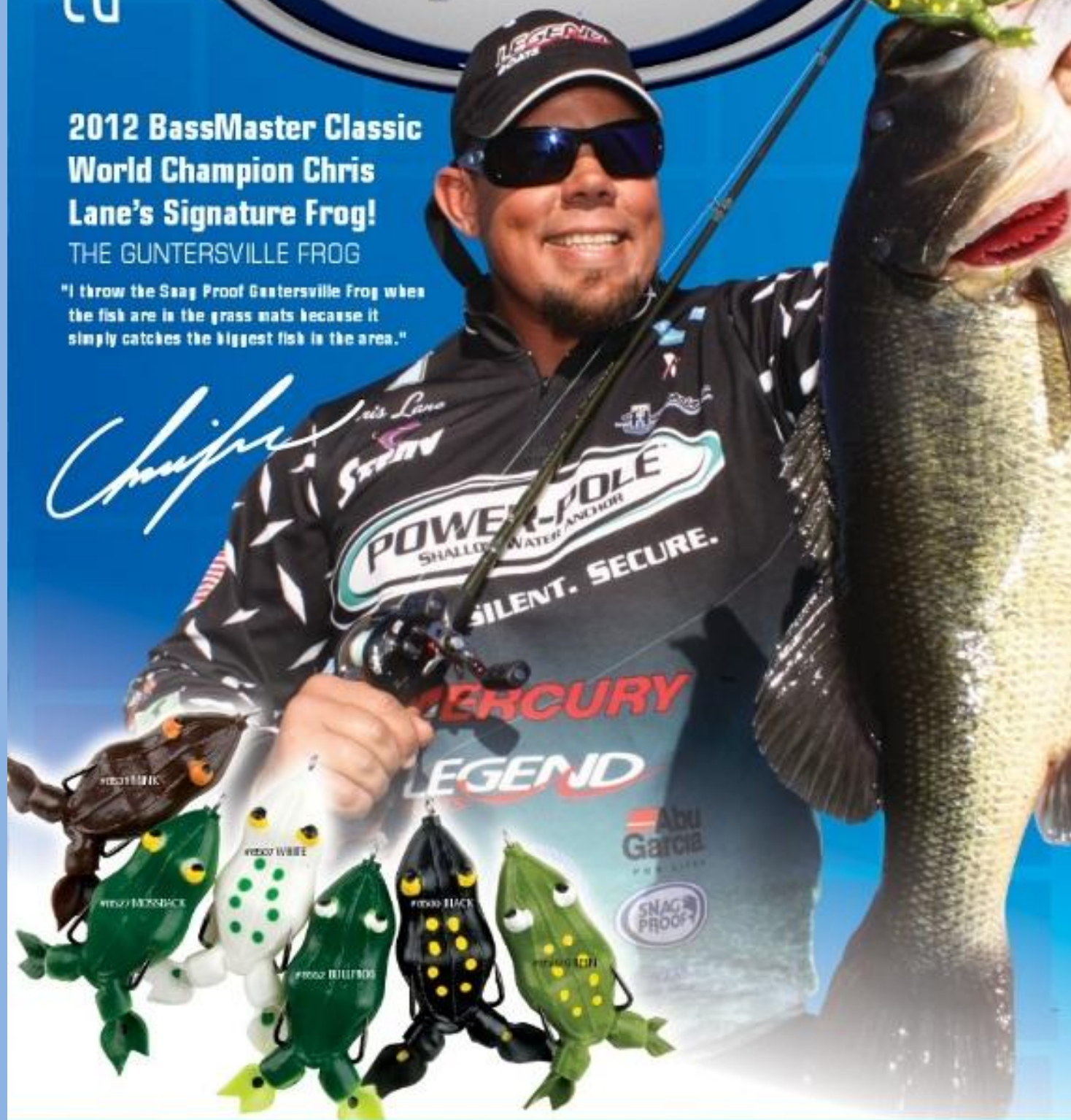
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ODUMagazine™ January was another record-setting month with over 3,000,000 page views and 1,100,000 hits, and 23,000 unique visitors (readers). What a great start to the New Year.

As you may or may not have noticed I try to keep politics, and my personal opinions out of the magazine, but I felt that in this particular case, I had to say something. Keep in mind that I also believe that people at times do the right thing, do dumb things and occasionally do stupid things? You can decide which category this falls into. I know where this falls for me.

What I am referring to is the decision of the promoters of "Eastern Sports Outdoor Show" in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to limit the sale or display of modern sporting rifles, i.e. AR'S, etc., and the subsequent postponing of the show until further notice.

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I have read headlines that it was postponed due to MASS Withdrawals, and that may be an understatement. I personally have received letters from numerous manufacturers and individuals who were not planning on attending the show because of this decision. You have to ask yourself "could they not have seen

this coming"? From the reports that I have read one of their largest sponsors met with them numerous times and asks them not to follow through on their decision. To me this would have been a huge RED FLAG. What would you have done when you received notification that Cabela's, Smith Wesson, Ruger, and the National Rifle Association would no longer be attending the show? And they are just a few of the hundreds of exhibitors who decided not to attend.

After reading all the press releases and listening to the rhetoric associated with this mess, I guess what really set me off was the political BS in their press release blaming everyone else for causing this decision and not taking any responsibility. We are getting inundated with individuals that don't want to accept any responsibility for their decisions and it's always someone else's fault. It's great to see companies and individuals that are willing to stand up for our 2nd Amendment rights!!!

Furthermore, keep in mind this is one of the, if not the largest, Sports Outdoor Show in the country. People and exhibitors come from all over the country to attend the show. Keep in mind also that these are the same people that just put on the Shot Show in Vegas, so they definitely know the industry.

I don't know about you, but if I had made this fubar, I would be looking for a job.

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Enjoy the outdoors,

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# Redfish in the Marsh

By Lou Mintzer

Fishing for redfish deep in the salt marsh is something I had never experienced; until this September.

My fishing buddy, Richard Doering and I went to the low country, Georgetown, S.C. to fish with Captain Fred Rourk. Fred has been guiding

*Lou Mintzer with a nice redfish*

for redfish in the marsh for 12 years. Captain Rourk has many years of experience fishing for redfish and king mackerel in tournaments across the southeast.

I met Captain Rourk at a Bass Pro coastal fishing seminar held in Concord, N.C. He was highly recommended by Eric Winter, the Bass Pro manager.

Georgetown is a quaint old town tucked away on the coast of South Carolina. The town has a nice waterfront, great bars, restaurants, beautiful old houses, lots of history and great fishing.

At 8 in the morning we met Captain Fred Rourk at the landing in Georgetown and headed out into the thick spooky fog and across Winyah Bay. As we got close to the marsh the fog was lifting and we headed into No Mans Friend Creek and into a giant maze; Captain Rourk spun the wheel on his Hewes Bonefisher boat, twisted and turned through narrow creeks in the marsh. The tide was close to dead low and we could not even see over the tall marsh grass. After many twists and turns, Captain Fred slowed the boat and we could see mullet jumping everywhere.



*Captain Fred Rourke throwing for mullet*





*The first double hook-up,  
Rich Doering, left,  
Lou Mintzer on the right*

Fred dropped the trolling motor and pulled out his cast net. Fred's skill throwing the net was impressive; after 2-3 throws we had enough mullet to get started.

Fred showed us how to hook the live mullet and cut up the bigger mullet for cut bait. No sooner than the first baits hit the water, I had a nice redfish hit on cut bait and it was giving me quite a fight. The first redfish was 28" and weighed about 8 pounds. The slot size is 24" so back in the water she went.

The weather was perfect all day; low 70s, partly cloudy, continuous breeze and no bugs.

Captain Fred uses Loomis 8445 GL2 medium heavy rods with Penn SG 3000 spinning reels spooled with 45 pound braided line, fluorocarbon leaders and Owner circle hooks. He has



*Captain Rourke nets another redfish*





*Another nice red for Rich Doering*

tried many other brands but has a much better hook rate with the Owners.

We moved from spot to spot and caught bait along the way. If we didn't get a strike in 5-10 minutes we moved on.

We stalked the redfish and watched for the mud swirls as they moved through the creek. They left a very minimal wake as they chased the black mullet.

We were in very shallow water and moving was rough on his Minn Kota trolling motor. "I chew up lots of props and get a new trolling motor every two years," Captain Fred told us, "my prop is my fishfinder."

Some of the creeks were too narrow to even get the boat through the exposed oyster beds. We cast past the beds and got several more nice fish. We had to horse them around the oyster beds, hoping the braid would hold up.

"The redfish or red drum are truly beautiful hard fighting fish," said Rich, "having two on at a time was exciting. Then comparing them to see who caught the biggest was a

blast!" We pulled in two that were just under 24" and Fred put them in the live-well for us.

"The pace of the creeks is slower, quiet, and relaxing. The creeks are not affected by the weather as much as the ocean, so most days are possible for good redfish," said Rourk.

A couple dolphins came into the creek, Captain Fred yelled at them, told them to leave and we were amazed that they did. Fred told us, "I am on a first name basis with them and I see them almost every trip. I try to run them off because they scare the fish."

The marsh was eerie, beautiful and full of wildlife. A pair of bald eagles flew over us and landed on a nearby sign so we could get a good look. Some kingfishers were hunting for their lunch and lots of wading birds were seen.

After a couple hours of good fishing I told Fred, "I am impressed but I want to be wowed. Show me more!" Ten minutes later at another new spot we were getting strikes on almost every cast. I



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even hooked two stingrays or “flatfish” as Fred called them. We lost several fish at the side of the boat but we were having a ball.

The biggest redfish was 31” and weighed 12-14 pounds. We think we caught at least 20 redfish, it may have been more. Captain is a firm believer in catch and release but we did keep two for the grill. And, they were delicious!

By 2 o'clock we were wearing down and the tide was coming in so we headed back. The ride was a thriller to say the least; Captain Fred roared through the narrow shallow creeks spinning the wheel with his “suicide knob.” “Sharp turns, spray flying; it was like a chase scene from an old James Bond movie,” exclaimed Rich.

Captain Fred was very entertaining, informative and just great to spend time with. Open water anglers like Rich and I really got hooked on marsh redfish and plan to go out with Captain Fred again this summer.

Captain Rourk fishes year round. Check out [www.sweetteacharters.com](http://www.sweetteacharters.com), Call Captain Fred Rourk @1-843-241-4767 or send him an email: [fishfred1@yahoo.com](mailto:fishfred1@yahoo.com). Go to low country South Carolina for some great fishing.

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*Rich Doering with his first redfish*



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# Looking Ahead To Open Water

By Bob Jensen

There is still a lot of ice-fishing to be had in the next few weeks, and in fact, some of the best ice-fishing of the year is ahead of us. But it's at about this time every year that I like to look ahead to the open water season and the things that I'm looking forward to in open water fishing. There are places that I'm looking forward to going to and products that I'm looking forward to trying. Following are a few of the things that I'm looking forward to in the upcoming open water fishing season.

I'm really looking forward to the first fishing trip in nice weather. Sometimes those early season runs to the river can provide good walleye action, but the air temps can be chilly, and even light winds can make it chillier. These are fun trips, and fishing is usually pretty good, but that first trip of the year when the sun is shining and you can wear just jeans and a sweatshirt are my favorite.

I'm looking forward to casting topwater baits to largemouth bass in shallow water. This style of fishing is visual and exciting: You'll see the fish take your bait almost all the time. Much of the time there are better ways to catch largemouth, but I don't know of any technique that's more exciting.

Using plastic baits has become more and more popular every year. Live bait is still the go-to stuff under tough conditions, but the more we know about plastics, the more we use them. I started using the new Impulse plastic baits last year and really like what I'm seeing. They







don't require any special care, and the fish seem to like them better than other plastics. I've been using them for ice-fishing most recently. They work just as well as live, and you catch more fish per bait.

Late last year I as was introduced to a new rod series that really impressed me. Cabela's has created a very nice selection of rods in a variety of price ranges. The new Platinum Series of Cabela's rods are top quality rods that carry a lower price tag than most rods of similar quality. The Platinum rods are super-sensitive, the actions are perfect for many applications, and they're engineered for fishing comfort. Cabela's has several series of their own rods that will fit anyone's needs.

Last thing, and this may sound strange, but it really has made my days on the water more pleasant. For quite a while, I've been looking for a different drink to take on the water. Soda makes me feel bloated and some say it's not good for you. Water is good, but sometimes I like something with a little more snap than water. This past fall I discover Nature's Fury. Nature's Fury is a fruit juice drink that doesn't have the bad sugars, has more vitamins, but most importantly to me, it tastes good and makes me feel good. It comes in twenty ounce resealable bottles in several flavors. It's not sticky or syrupy. Every now and then I cheat and have a soda, but the Nature's Fury products are now what I greatly prefer. They truly do help me enjoy my time on the water even more.

All this talk about open water fishing has me even more anxious to get out. For now, I'm going ice-fishing, but in a couple of months, I will be in a boat doing the things we just talked about. To see all the newest episodes of Fishing the Midwest television, visit [www.fishingthemidwest.com](http://www.fishingthemidwest.com) or join us at [www.Facebook.com/fishingthemidwest](http://www.Facebook.com/fishingthemidwest)

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# Depth and Speed

By Bobby Barrack

Hmmmmmm, those seem to be two of the most important pieces of the puzzle when fishing for any species of fish. During the four seasons, Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter, those puzzle pieces will vary. Most of the lures that are available are restricted to a particular water column. For example, most shallow diving crankbaits will run to about 4 feet, the medium divers will run to about 9 feet, and the deeper crankbaits can reach depths of 17 feet plus. If an angler wants to cover the 1 to 20 foot water column, with crankbaits, then he/she will have to have a minimum of 3 crankbait rods rigged with the appropriate lures. This is a great way to locate a group of active fish, but if you are looking for a new technique to play with, try targeting this same zone with a swimbait.

I guide a lot, so I am always looking for “user friendly” lures and techniques that will help make my job easier and more productive. I never know the “talent level” that my clients possess until I’ve seen them make a few throws in the morning. Most of the fishing we do is in and around vegetation and heavy cover, whether that be against the bank or offshore. Many of the clients that I have are not used to casting a treble hook lure into a pocket that is the size of a bathtub. I had to come up with a bait and technique that could be used on a daily basis, at a variety of water depths, could be cast into a 15+ mph wind, and most importantly generate bites!

The swimbait has become my “Go To” lure for most of my guiding. Whether we are targeting Largemouth or Stripers, the swimbait will get it done more often than not. There are many swimbaits on the market from 1” to 15”+. Some float, suspend, sink slowly, are made of wood, balsa, pine, plastic etc., the list is endless. For me, I have found that a 4 to 7 inch plastic swimbait, rigged on a jighead weighing between ¼oz and ¾ oz, is extremely effective under the widest variety of conditions.

I don’t like to have a bunch of rods laying on the deck of the boat, so to simplify things, I usually start with a 3/8 oz and ½ oz Bladerunner Weedless Swimbait head, rigged on a 5 or 6 inch AA’s Shad Tail Swimbait. My rods of choice are the Falcon LowRider LFC-6-276T and Bucoo BMC76H. Both of these rods are medium heavy 7’ 6”. I like the length and action of these two rods for hook penetration and being able to “control” an above average size fish. I use two different reels for this style of swimbait fishing. The Lew’s TLP1SH which is a 7:1 ratio







model, and the Lew's TS1S that has a 5:4 gear ratio. The TS1S is a great reel to utilize when the fish are a bit sluggish, especially after a cold front has gone through.

If the target zone is open water with minimal obstructions, I will pull the weedguard out of the Bladerunner head. Most of the time we are casting towards wood, vegetation, tules and rock, so I will leave the weedguard intact. My favorite colors are Pearl, Jackson Trout, Sexy Shad, and Baitfish.

I evaluate the foliage base, watercolor, depth and time of year when making my color choice for that particular day. In water that has a heavy stain with less than 1 or 2 feet of visibility, I will always start with Pearl. If I can see my AA Shad Tail Swimbait at a depth of more than 2 feet, then the color choices will be a bit more specific. The Sexy Shad pattern is an excellent choice in water that has 2 to 4 foot visibility. The slight hint of chartreuse running parallel down the body is perfect for these conditions. When visibility is 3 or 4 feet and beyond, I will opt for the Jackson Trout or Baitfish patterns. The clearer the water, the more natural a pattern I will choose. If you are going down a bank and catch a few fish on the Jackson Trout color, many times you can go right back through the same stretch with the baitfish scheme and pick off a few more.

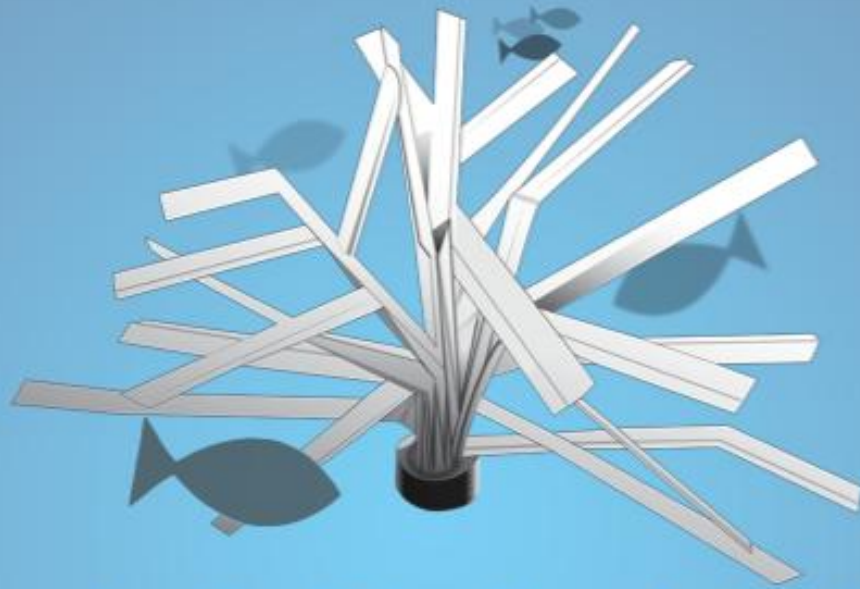
The 3/8 oz to 3/4 oz Bladerunner Weedless Swimbait Heads are the sizes I use the most on my AA Shad Tails. Occasionally I will use a 1/4oz head when fishing 2 feet deep or less. Wind, and the depth I am targeting, will determine which size head to go with. 80% of the time, I prefer to fish my swimbait while staying in contact with the bottom. I like the 3/8 or 1/2 sizes, however if the wind is not allowing me to keep in contact with the bottom, then I will use my AA Shad Tail on a 3/4 oz head.

Give the AA's swimbait system a shot. The colors I mentioned in the article are a good place to start. You will notice at times that fish will change their color preferences. In some lakes fishermen have more success with a little blue, orange or green in the bait. No problem, AA's has 42 different colors to choose from in 9 different sizes, so I am sure that they have the right color for you and your home lake.





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# Cranking Up The Spring Bass Bite

By Bill Vanderford



Every spring as the trees start to bud, the geese begin to nest, and the surface temperature of the water rises above 50 degrees to stay, many lakes experience an extended period when a number of diving crankbaits become the best lure in your tackle box to catch large, pre-spawn bass in impressive numbers. The reason for this phenomenon is that the warming waters start

to draw the bass away from their deeper winter homes towards the flowering shorelines. It is actually a transition time when the bass are sort of suspended between the seasons of spring and winter.

In the beginning of this process, most bass tend to hold and feed suspended away from the banks of the lake in 10 to 20 feet of water. Therefore, for an angler to be successful, it is necessary to have a lure pass through this magic depth at a very slow pace, but with enough action to attract the bass's curiosity and appetite. This is accomplished by utilizing diving crankbaits in 1/4 to 1/2 ounce sizes with enough of a diving lip to easily take the lure to the desired depth with the proper wiggle. For the deeper fish that are closer to the 20 foot level, the lure doesn't even have to go that far down. Those bass will see and feel the moving bait above them and come up to attack.

In clearer waters, color never seems to make much of a difference, but when fishing stained or slightly muddy water, brighter chartreuse or white crankbaits tend to be more productive. The most important ingredient is always the speed of the retrieve!

Most anglers seem to think that the more casts they make the better their chances, but during this prime crankbait period, that is certainly not the case. It is imperative that one finds the "happy medium" to be successful. The retrieve must be just fast enough to allow the crankbait to dive and wiggle, but not one bit more than that. Only the trial of success or failure will show a fisherman when he has achieved the proper speed.

About a year ago, I was fishing during this period with two clients in a really productive area of my home lake with mixed results. I was catching plenty of bass in the front of the boat and the guy





in the back was keeping up with me, but the fellow between us wasn't catching anything. I watched him for a few minutes and advised him that he was cranking far too fast for these sluggish bass, but he attributed our success to a difference in crankbaits and my position in the front of the boat. So, for the next section, I gave him my rod and reel, put him in the front of the boat, and both myself and the other man quit fishing for more than a hundred yards. He still didn't catch a fish! I then turned the boat around, told him to sit and observe while his buddy and I fished back over the same territory. We landed ten nice bass in the same place that he had failed, and he finally realized that it was truly the speed of his retrieve and not the lures or boat position that made the difference.



We landed ten nice bass in the same place that he had failed, and he finally realized that it was truly the speed of his retrieve and not the lures or boat position that made the difference.

Best places to cast are usually points and coves in the beginning of this period, but look for clay banks rather than rocky or sandy ones. It's best to use spinning tackle with 8 pound test line to be more efficient and allow the lure to go deep enough to attract the bass. Smaller diameter lines will let the lure go even deeper, but one is more at risk of losing fish and lures with the lighter lines.

If an angler casts directly at the bank, finds the right speed of retrieve, and diligently works the proper places, he can expect to catch 10 to 25 bass and a few other species of fish in an 8-hour period each day for several weeks during this early spring season. As soon as the surface temperature all over the lake reaches 60 degrees, however, one can put the crankbaits away and use other methods for the rest of the spring season.

The beauty and excitement of this kind of fishing with crankbaits in the early spring is that almost anyone can catch bass successfully, these fish are the healthiest they will be at any time during the year, and in the cooler waters, they will give the best fight of the year! Cranking up spring bass (if done properly) can be one of the most thrilling experiences in fishing!



Bill Vanderford has won numerous awards for his writing and photography, and has been inducted into the National Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame as a Legendary Guide. He can be reached at 770-289-1543, at [jfish51@aol.com](mailto:jfish51@aol.com) or at his web site: [www.georgiafishing.com](http://www.georgiafishing.com).





*Photo credit: David A. Brown*

## **Making the Most of a Mild Winter**

**By Capt. Bill Miller**

I'm confused. I'm looking for fish in their normal winter hangouts and they are not there. I'm guessing the fish are also confused because it's supposed to be winter, yet it feels like spring. When mild winters disrupt normal patterns, the fish must wonder if they should go to their winter spots, their spring spots or something in between.

In this scenario, I start in the winter spots and work backward to the spring spots. When we have cold fronts and the water temperature drops, the winter spots are more successful. But when it is warm for a week or two, the spring spots will be very active. Fish probably will be moving back and forth, rather than locking into winter hibernation.

Capt. Billy Miller and I are seeing that when the water temperature is warm, the speckled trout will be over the grass flats and feeding actively as the day warms up. When the temperature drops for a few days, the trout will move off into the channels and potholes.

Spanish mackerel are not normally caught here in the winter, but plenty have been caught during this traditionally cold period. In January, I caught some while trolling off Redington Beach and Spanish catches have also been reported in Old Tampa Bay.



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Kingfish should still be in South Florida, but January saw catches in the Egmont Channel and offshore of the Bay Area. Likewise, snook should be huddled back in deep canals or river spots, but they've recently been seen and caught on the flats.

Pompano are still very actively feeding along the South shore of Tampa Bay and in the passes up and down the gulf coast. In mid-January, I saw a tarpon at the South Skyway fishing pier and I'll bet if you went to the Howard Frankland or Gandy bridges at night, you would see plenty of tarpon under the lights.

So, what do we make of these unseasonable happenings? Well, this mild winter might hasten the spawning of some fish, which could be good or bad. Migrations will likely be slowed and disrupted. Again, I'm not sure if it is good or bad.

The good news is this is not the first mild winter we have had and the fishery always adapts and remains vibrant. As anglers, we have to be flexible and adapt as the seasonal changes no matter how different or erratic they may be.

Will this mild winter become the new normal? Who knows? What controls El Nino or La Nina? Where does global warming play into this, or does it?

These are all questions I cannot answer so all I can do is pay attention to the weather patterns and try to figure out the associated fish patterns. Pay attention to how your local fish adapt to changing weather and you might discover a productive new pattern to enjoy.

For fishing videos, catch photos and lots of angling resources, visit [www.fishingwithbillmiller.com](http://www.fishingwithbillmiller.com). For fishing charters in the Tampa Bay area, call 813-363-9927.

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# Spring Time Equals Slab Time!

By Jason Freed

Rituals of spring include March madness, The Masters, our feathered friends returning from their southern journeys and, in LOA country, spring crappies return from the winter abyss and make themselves accessible once again! Crappies are a favorite in the Upper Midwest for their accessibility to catch and tastiness in the frying pan. How to find'em and what to use are often times the question anglers ponder when they hit the water each spring.

## The Spring Migration

When crappies return from their winter hangouts, which were spent suspending over deeper water basins or deeper holes within lakes, they are in search of the shallows to feed. The migration to the shallows will shortly be followed by their need to spawn. Finding where the water will warm the fastest will be key to finding early baitfish for crappies and areas will they will make their nest to spawn. As crappies move to the shallows, their desire for food increases drastically because the water warms and their metabolism beings to fire up. Both females and males will undergo extreme duress during the spawning period and an angler needs to use this to their advantage. The females will eventually be building their nests, which the males will then defend with vigor. All of this leads them to feed with ferocity and means they are less wary and more aggressive biters than in those mid winter months. As they stalk the shallows, they congregate in greater numbers than they do at other times of the year. As you are moving along a bank and find one or two to bite, there will be others nearby. Crappies are much like other panfish in sense that by catching one or two you ignite the school into a feed frenzy and allows you to keep the school biting. Often times it can be the hardest thing, but getting that first crappie to bite can be the key to locating and ambushing a school of hungry crappies. Another tip a local guide gave me one time is to take your lure and run it against the outer skin of the crappie, and it serves as a scent attractant to drawing in crappies as well. Conversely, if you are not finding anything, move on until you find some biters. Fishing for crappies, especially earlier in the open water season, needs to be aggressively seeking out schools of fish.



*Photo credit: Jeff Andersen*

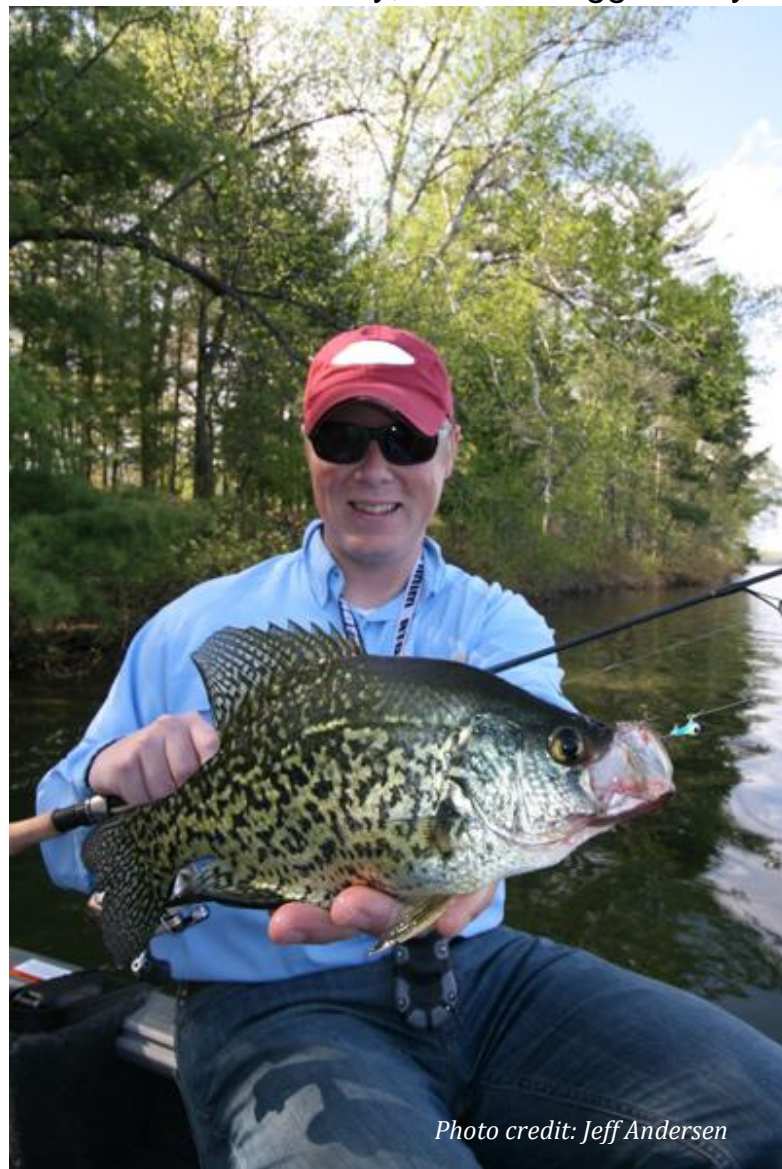


## Where to Look

Where to start can be an intimidating question for any angler especially on a body of water that you are not familiar with. When starting out look to northern shores or northern bays first, especially ones with darker bottom composition. Additionally one should look for emerging weeds or any submerged timber; this includes trees and branches that are hanging into the water. Bridges and bridge pilings are also good early season options but likely after the water has warmed a bit since they tend to be in deeper water. These places are also home to moving current, which often times is a honing device for baitfish to come to, causing crappies to migrate there as well. Not every spring day brings 60 degrees and sunny skies. When that typical spring cold front does come, look at those same black bottom bays, but look to the basins that

are directly near them or to the mouths of the bays. Crappies will often times slide out of the bays and suspend over the deeper water. When looking for these fish drive around until you begin marking them on your graph, set a waypoint or two, and begin working them. Other locations to look for cold front crappies are any holes or depressions in the bays because they are places they will suspend or even hunker down in. Ultimately, one of the biggest keys are to pay attention to your depth finder and its thermometer readings. Crappies will tend to spawn between 42-50 degrees, and once the water reaches these temperatures they will become more aggressive.

Early in the season the crappies are subject to great mood and movement swings because of the water temperature as such they will adjust accordingly. If you get a frosty morning, skinny water is not where you should start, you should look deeper, adjacent to where they will move once it is later in the day and the water has had a chance to warm. When it is warmer and water temperatures have stabilized, crappies will move toward this skinny water. When fishing shallow, it is important to remember that you need to be a bit stealthy in your approach. This might mean making longer casts or using a longer crappie pole, which are popular down in the southern United States. Generally, these are about 10-12 feet in length, which will give you the advantage to set the bait amidst a brush pile, silently lifting it up and down without fear of getting hung up from a bad cast.



*Photo credit: Jeff Andersen*

*Photo credit: Jeff Andersen*





## The Presentation

The final component is a presentation that revolves around the right rod/reel/line combination. Small jigs can be fished below bobbers' fish well on light line. It is tough to decide between 2- and 4-pound test monofilament. With 2-pound test, there is stealth, but one can get leery of breaking off a slab crappie on the way to the boat. The new Bionic Panfish Line has solved this dilemma because it is offered as an "in-between" 3-pound test. Not only that, Bionic Line handles extremely well and is available in a blue camo color pattern that blends into the blue sky background which can be important for upward feeding crappies holding in clear water. A 6-foot Jason Mitchell Elite Series modified ultra light or the 5' ultra light action-spinning rod and quality reel completes the LOA spring crappie set-up. This combination allows for long casts letting a crappie stalker cover lots of water in their search of likely crappie haunts. When looking for lures a simple 1/16th oz jig and tube or a jig and puddle jumper or Maki Plastic are great places to start. Experiment with different colors of both the jig and plastic until you find something that works for you. When looking for those suspended crappies in deep water, put down the trolling motor and slowly troll through them with a split shot about 3-4' above a jig and plastic. It is a great search technique as well in the shallow bays. When fish get finicky you may have to add a crappie minnow, but with the proper technique a plastic can often times out fish the live bait and allow you to stay on the school without having to rebait. Heading to a crappie spot is something the LOA crew looks forward to each year. If you get out and chase crappies, we know you will "GET HOOKED" on crappie fishing!

Editor's note: Leisure Outdoor Adventures is a premier guide service, and promotional group is partnered with Chase on the Lake resort in Walker, MN & other businesses in Minnesota.

# Out For An Evening Of Fishing

By O'Neill Williams

It was during my 19th summer that I decided it might be worthwhile to take my younger brother, 11 years old at the time, and my girlfriend of recent vintage out for an evening of fishing. I was an experienced fisherman. Not many guys were at that age. I felt I needed to impress her with my knowledge and aptitude. Okay! Maybe I did not think things through. It turned out to being a learning experience for us all that would foreshadow the future.

I had been catching a few crappie from around the docks at Norris Lake near Lithonia, Georgia. A short trip, from 7pm to mid-night, did not seem too difficult. Knowing about the lake, docks, and general layout served us well and we soon located a small 14 foot aluminum boat. With lanterns and gear in hand, off we went into the gathering darkness.

Well, first of all, my brother lost the only paddle overboard, never to be retrieved. Eleven year old boys are rarely known for their coordination. However, refusing to give in, we scrounged a lengthy 2x4, about 12 feet long, and I rowed on 'kayak' style toward a destination not yet realized. That necessary paddling style unfortunately wet the matches in my shirt pocket. That situation unfolded as we reached the chosen dock. No matches for the lanterns. What now?

Press on; we were there, so fish anyway. As hands and feet scrambled in the darkness on the uneven planks, my tackle box was kicked into the water and floated away. This frazzled 18-year old, trying his best to impress his beautiful date, attempted to decide who should take the blame. Well, it seemed important at the time.

No light, no tackle, little resolve! Give Up! Live to fish another day. Paddle back to the dock. As I tied a stern line to the post at the dock, I was assured by my date that they bow was likewise secured. The lone female on this little jaunt needed to visit the little girl's room. She hurried away, privacy; and all that. "No problem, I'll unload, go ahead".

Alone now, I placed the remaining gear on the dock and stepped out. Secured bow line? No, and I quickly did an acrobatic split and plunged into the dark water head first. My returning date noticed the soggy foot prints on the pavement, and recalled the part about the bow line. Teenage giggles mounted into infectious laughter as she surveyed the scene. Remember now these people were only 18-year olds.

There I stood, no glasses, they were lost during the impromptu dive, soaked to the bone, dignity dripping wet! Hardly the impressive conclusion I had envisioned.

Anyway, we got through that evening, sense of humor finely tuned, knowing a great deal how we would react to and eventually overcome adversity. It was kind of a rehearsal, I guess, that first fishing trip. We are still paddling, that girl and I, sometimes ill equipped, but always willing to go back and start over, during some of the darkest times, with dignity and shared humor. We were married after I graduated from Emory University three years later and have been together now for 50 years.









## Heading Off Big Bass At The Spring Pass

By Chris Jenkins

As it pertains to freshwater fishing, March and April are my favorite months to target jumbo largemouth bass. You can't beat it,

and the numbers don't lie. From here to Texas to California, no other months can match the explosive results when it comes to sticking big fat donkey bass. The reason? It's all about the spawn. The females which are the bigger of the two sexes move from their deep water haunts with the intention of insuring the species future by laying millions of eggs in the shallows. Heading them off prior to the spawn is by far the best time to catch numbers of big bass in my opinion. If you are like most anglers, your time on the water is limited to weekends, so take full advantage of every moment when you are out there. To do this, I like to break a body of water down into sections to maximize my time and odds. By applying the method of seasonally patterning bass, you are concentrating your efforts on high probability areas that should hold bass during the season at hand.

During the winter I think it's safe to say that most of the bass in any given body of water dwell off shore. As the days get longer and the water temps start to warm, these fish start their migration toward the shallows. Before arriving to their destination they will generally make a couple of stops along the way. I like to refer to these stops as staging areas. They are merely a mid way point or pit stop that is typically associated with some form of structure in that body of water. If there is limited structure, cover will suffice. Bass will gather in these safety zones before committing to the shallows, and often the biggest bass will dominate these areas early in the year. Points at the mouth of any cove can be very productive. Secondary points within a cove can be equally productive also. Fish will at times stack up in creek channels that lead to the backs of coves and deserve some attention. Drop offs that are adjacent to flats can be a goal mine. Notice that all these spots I have mentioned are a pathway to a spawning area.

The object is to intercept the big girls before they get there. Because once they become obsessed with finding a mate and a bed, it's a different ball game.

Until that happens, I am all about throwing big baits to entice big bass. By concentrating my efforts near or around these staging areas, it's just a matter of time before I hook up.

Also if you have four or five or more spots like this, you can rotate them throughout the day. Something else I would like to point out is that most anglers are not fishing these spots. If anything, they have their boats positioned 50 feet off the bank and in many cases, are sitting right over or near the bass and casting at the shoreline in vain.

As the month progresses however, the fish will gradually move to the shallows and you can move with them.



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When I shove off in March I will be looking for fish in the 10 to 16 foot depths on these staging areas. I will be throwing big baits like the Optimum 7 inch original, Top of the line, 6 inch Titan, Line Thru, Castaic 6 inch Catch-22, and Huddleston Deluxe and 68 Special. My goal is to catch the biggest bass in the lake, so I am targeting these fish with a big offering. This is the only time of the year that the masses of these goliaths will move shallow, so don't be scared to lob hand grenades. (Big baits) March and April are undoubtedly the best times of the year to throw swimbaits and will

make you a true believer in their ability to land the fish of a lifetime. I understand that these baits are not for everyone, but if there is one month of the year to experiment with them, this is it. Save all your 2 inch crankbaits and shaky heads for the other 10 months. Now that's not to say that I am so narrow minded that I will not diversify my tactics when necessary. As the month progresses and the fish move up into the 2 to 6 foot depths, I will rely on a spinnerbait for many applications. I also love to use a jig and craw combination around wood and rocks. If the water clarity is poor, a swimbait is just not the best choice, and I rely almost solely on these two baits as well as wide bodied wake baits. I think we can all agree that most lakes fish a little differently, but a bass is a bass from New York to New Mexico.

The goal of these fish is to reproduce and eat hardily along the way. Your goal this month should be to head them off at the pass.

For comments, questions or suggestions, please feel free to email me at

[sowbelly.hunter@yahoo.com](mailto:sowbelly.hunter@yahoo.com)







## We Use to Catch Fish Here

By David Ewald

How many times have we all sat perplexed in a proven spot that Always had fish, only to find no form of life, not even a nibble? Since I have an extra hard head, I had to go back six, seven, eight.....times before I started to accept this spot was cooked. Why, what had changed over the years and was keeping the fish away? Wrong bait, deeper, faster, what...why aren't they here anymore? It was the same spot but no longer had the same ingredients. Too much valuable fishing time is wasted in areas that used to produce and no longer do.

I hope you all have as fond of memories growing up fishing as myself. I grew up in a rural area 50 or so miles, northwest of Chicago, I enjoyed wide open spaces, the large Fox River Watershed and the surrounding, various creeks and tributaries. Fishing alone in a creek by age 5 and only two blocks from home, no wider than a lane of highway.

This particular creek had a lush weed line on both sides and only, four feet of deep, clear, cold spring water. I drank from this creek directly for many years growing up and never thought twice, let alone had a problem. Deadfalls and overhangs lined the banks, with frogs, birds, grasshoppers and crawfish in view at almost all times. If I hadn't dug worms from the garden at home, a quick heel in the bank at the water's edge, would produce another handful of vigorous, long armed soldiers, ready to swim into battle. Grasshoppers worked equally as well but always spit that black goo on your hands, remember?



The tackle was simple, a cane pole, spilt shot, wire hook and a red/white bobber. Two feet of line, three if you felt daring and into the pool of monsters it went. Bluegills, bass, sunfish, creek chub, again the bobber went down and another fish in the bucket.

The habitat required for these species to flourish, including the fish is gone, removed by us, humans. If there is no habitat to sustain life from the smallest forms, there will be no larger forms of life around either, make sense? Those fish and other critters had to move on and find a better place to live.

Somewhere there is plenty of food, protection and other critters. What if they run out of places to go?

That spot no longer exists. My grandkids can't fish there, everything has changed. The trees are all gone and the fields are developed. The water has been re-directed, leaving no more than a trickle. No frogs, birds, or grasshoppers, not even crawfish. High nutrient levels from runoff, sedimentation and water abuse, combined with development has left barely a scar in the terrain in my go-to spot.

The reason your go-to spot no longer produces is because the habitat to sustain life no longer exists. Deadfalls, weeds, rocks, logs, piers, reeds, brush, etc. all provide shelter and surface area to grow food for fish and protect small life forms. The bluegills your bass want to feed on aren't there because the food that the minnows eat can't grow on anything so the gills aren't there. Bio-film, periphyton, algae... fuzz, whatever you want to call it, they all need surfaces to cling to. Some of these surfaces and materials last forever and some only last a number of months, before rotting away. Forever is better for the fish and has to be installed once, only getting better with time. Bio film starts first and turns these surfaces into fly strips.

Remember that gooey long yellow tape that pulled out of the roll? Anything in the air within no less than six miles and 10,000 feet would fly near and stick to the goo and die. This stuff had power, flies, knats, skeeters, birds, ducks....it didn't matter, they all stuck. They would just pile up on top of each other and stick to the glue on the tape and build up. Depending on location, it could be full and have to be replaced in a few days, looking more now like a 3 pound rope of





mass murder sausage. Those tapes are not available anymore. Something about bad chemicals and it has been a while since I've seen them in the stores.....quite a while.

The start of the food chain simply needs objects to grow on, it's really that simple. When the wood rots away and the silt covers the rock/rubble, a huge amount of surface area is lost to grow food on. When I talk about food, I mean the fuzz and tiny bugs that form on objects when left under water. All small fish eat only this food for their first year. You can see that if there isn't any food and shelter around for the babies, the P's aren't moving in. As natural shorelines are developed into seawalls and lawns, this valuable, necessary habitat is lost. When water levels drop, aquatic plants die off, leaving this all important nursery like a desert.

The good news is we are making better decisions as a Nation regarding our water resources, with fisherman and women being recognized for leading the way in habitat improvement and restoration work. Volunteer labor drives this movement to improve our lost fishing holes and waters. Corporate America is also playing a big part in the funding being utilized to help our waters and fisheries improve and flourish. The Fed is pumping millions annually into our habitat restoration plans from Coast to coast. We have to, our water is in dire straits as a Nation and now we are playing catch up.

More fishermen now than ever, have been involved in some kind of habitat installation project. It's not new, just to the point we can't wait and is finally being better understood. Fish attractors attract food. The bigger the fish attractor, the more available food. Bigger means more square footage of surface area. No longer need fisherman look at this process as



creating a secret fish attractor spot for themselves, but rather a long term investment in their sport and future generations.

Habitat is for the fish to succeed, in turn so will your fishing success. They attract fish because that's where the food is. Habitat is no more than the framework allowing nature to begin the building process of aquatic life. Provide a surface to grow the fuzz for larvae for the minnows for the pan

fish for the bass for dinner. Remember Gerber baby food, same for fish and it grows on objects under water.

Are all objects, products and materials used in habitat installations the same, does it matter? Truth is, they are not the same and all have different uses and situations where they shine. The cool part is as long as the product or materials are safe, you can't screw it up. Any added habitat is beneficial with few exceptions. Aquatic weeds and vegetation should be handled by a professional. That stuff can have a mind of its own and you don't want to "plant" your lake to destruction. Stay away from treated wood of any kind.

Great habitat can be made out of many free materials. Long lasting artificial habitat products have become the choice of many of the leaders in the industry. We can build up some spots







and never have to come back and replace it. It improves with age as life forms adhere and grow. From Concrete and pipes to reclaimed PVC siding and even Floating Islands made from recycled water bottles, plastics are well accepted and being installed to grow, improve and create this available habitat base that has been lost. There is a wealth of ideas available utilizing free discarded materials. If you have the time, jump in, otherwise plenty of products to buy online.

Don't get the boat and deep water break lines in your head just yet. Remember, first we need to stock the shelves at the local feed store. In every town and community, it's over there in shallow water. Brush piles, Christmas trees, pallets and rock all make perfect shallow habitat to protect young fry. Shallow grass and weeds is nature's way, but not always available. We all know our Bass spawn shallow and that is where the babies need to find cover the moment they hatch out. Fine, dense cover is needed for these tiny infants to hide and "nurse". A big oak log and a few boulders won't cut it here if you want to draw in numbers. Habitat is always best for the fish when placed in larger groups and this is why. The larger a store is the more customers can shop at the same time. In other words, quantity is everything and we want customers.

Fish use individual objects under water to rest, hide and navigate through, using them as stopping points. What you want to create with additional habitat is an oasis of sorts. A gathering place with enough room for countless beings, entertaining guests from invertebrates to that one that got away. Build a shopping mall with food court for creatures of all sizes to



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hang out, eat, interact and hunt. You will do far more good for the fish and yourself by concentrating your efforts in a few selected spots and expand on them over time.

After creating a good sized area of shallow cover, next we need to give the fish room to wander deeper as they mature. Four feet and under is where these fish will spend the first months before exploring deeper into five to eight feet. It is extremely important to connect this shallow cover and deeper mid depth cover with a line of habitat materials. The fish need protection to hide in as they venture deeper and mature or they will get eaten too soon, before they get fat. We want to grow big fat minnows and baby fry because they become meals for the next sized fish, our bluegills, brim, etc. The same applies here, if these fish don't have a continuous forest or line of cover, they too will get eaten before maturity. Your goal in producing big Bass, Crappie, Walleye, etc. is to grow them lots of high quality food.

The bigger the forest of cover, the more fish it holds, along with food for them all. Take a close look at your old, go-to spots and really look at what has changed. Get involved in a habitat project and bring back what has been lost and everyone wins. We now have the tools and understanding to bring back what we have lost. Fix that old spot if you can, or create some new ones. The critters will be near what they need most.....food and cover, maybe some companionship too.

Installing Fish Habitat is like baiting.....but it's legal in all 50 states all year around!

For more information about habitat ideas, information and projects around the world, visit [www.structurespot.com](http://www.structurespot.com) and visit our website at [www.fishiding.com](http://www.fishiding.com) for an array of habitat products and options to help improve your local fish habitat.



# The Art Of Finding Fish

By Capt.  
Mike Gerry

In this busy world we all live in, time on the water becomes tougher for the working class fisherman; they go to a lake for a day of fun and don't know where to start to find some fish. I believe although not by any means a perfect science, there are some keys to finding fish when you hit the lake.

The most important thing you can do is understand the seasonal patterns like what should the fish be doing for this time

of the year? Bass are seasonal freaks. They move like clockwork as we go from one season to another, and they change in groups; whatever their buddies are doing they do! In addition, I believe that big fish hang with each other just like we all find friends of similar age. The important point is that fall, summer, winter, and spring moves the fish to certain patterns and knowing those patterns shortens your day from searching for fish to catching fish.

Next is the water color, no doubt in my mind the more stained the water is the shallower the bass are. The bass do not like the sun and if the water is clear they react by moving deeper. It may be a subtle change like from a four feet to a seven feet move, but water color will trump many beliefs as to where they are located.

Although more prevalent in other lakes than Guntersville, water levels also move the fish sometimes several times a day. As so many lakes are backed up by dams and constant water level change to produce power is a normal part of most river systems, this equally affects the depth of where the bass are staging. High water pushes them shallow; lower water pushes them deeper.

Bringing all the factors together, although complex in nature, can make your day more productive even though it is not an exact science. It does, however eliminate water and can turn a day of fishing into a day of catching!



About the author: Captain Mike Gerry. Living in the North Alabama Area since the 70's and fishing Lake Guntersville for over 35 years. I have many published fishing articles worldwide in magazines, newspapers and on-line magazines. I offer the most comprehensive information for Lake Guntersville, fishing tips, reports, and featured articles. I challenge you to utilize my Professional Guide Service and compare the knowledge, friendliness and good time on the water to anyone. Captain Mike Gerry can be reached at his website for Fish Lake Guntersville Guide Service at [www.fishlakeguntersvilleguideservice.com](http://www.fishlakeguntersvilleguideservice.com) or by phone at (256) 759-2270. Email [bassguide@comcast.net](mailto:bassguide@comcast.net)



# Early Season Walleyes On Jigs

By Bob Jenson

When the ice leaves the lakes in walleye country, anglers start to get anxious. They know that the walleye bite can be very good early in the year. This year the ice left much earlier than usual, and the walleye bite started much earlier than usual. Anglers have been chasing and catching walleyes more than in years past. Many of those anglers have a jig tied onto their line. Walleyes will eat a variety of baits this time of year, but if you want to put the odds in your favor for walleye success, a jig on your line will do so. Following are some ideas for catching walleyes on jigs in the next few weeks.

Early in the year, a casting presentation will be best. There are exceptions, but in

most places the walleyes will be in water less than ten feet in depth, and in shallow water it works best to cast.

Just as casting usually works best for early season shallow water walleyes, a slow retrieve is also usually more productive. A dragging retrieve will usually out-produce a hopping retrieve. If you're going to be dragging, a stand-up jig will be more effective than a traditional round-



head jig. A stand-up Fire-Ball jig in the eighth ounce size tipped with a three inch minnow is perfect much of the time. Fathead minnows are good, but sometimes the walleyes show a very definite preference to shiners. Shiners can be harder to keep alive, so an aerated container like Frabill's 1404 is an important part of your equipment: It does an outstanding job of keeping fragile minnows lively.

Put the jig hook in the minnow's mouth and out the back of its head. By hooking the minnow this way, it will stay on the hook longer and still be appealing to the walleyes.

Cast the jig into an area that you suspect holds walleyes. Let it sink to the bottom, then begin a dragging retrieve. The stand-up design of the jig will keep the minnow visible to the walleyes. Even if the fish are more interested in spawning than eating, a jig/minnow combo dragged slowly by will be hard to resist.

Tie your jig to six or eight pound test Trilene XT or Sensation. Six pound test is really good, but eight pound is better if you're fishing around lots of rocks and potential snags.

Keep moving until you find an area that is holding walleyes. Usually if you can find a little current mixed with a sand or rubble bottom, there will be at least a few walleyes around, and some of them will be willing to eat your jig.



Keep a few of the smaller ones to eat, put the big ones back. If you have the option, try different bodies of water. Some lakes or rivers will turn on sooner than others. If you can move around a bit, you'll be able to extend the fishing action. And, as soon as the spawn has been completed for a few days, the action will start over. You'll probably have to move to a different area, and another presentation might be more effective, but for now, keep in mind that jigs are great for catching walleyes.

To see all the newest episodes of Fishing the Midwest television, visit [www.fishingthemidwest.com](http://www.fishingthemidwest.com) Join us at [Facebook.com/fishingthemidwest](https://www.facebook.com/fishingthemidwest).





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# Angling Ethics, Common Sense Linked

**By Bob  
Wattendorf**

Angling ethics is about common sense and courtesy. It contributes to every angler's safety, success and enjoyment, as well as the future of our sport.

Conservation agencies, including the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), fishing guides, tourism destinations, marinas, tackle shops, anglers and boaters all play a role in making fishing more fun and satisfying for everyone. Most share an abiding love for aquatic resources and the role conservation stewardship plays in keeping our natural resources pristine.



The following list is a good reminder for all anglers, no matter where you fish.

An ethical angler:

- Promotes, through example and mentoring, an ethical use of aquatic resources.



➤ Values and respects the aquatic environment and all living things.

➤ Treats other anglers, boaters and property owners with courtesy and respect, including removing boat trailers promptly from active launching areas, watching wakes around other boaters, and not crowding other anglers.

➤ Avoids spilling and never dumps pollutants, such as gas or oil.



➤ Properly disposes of trash, including worn lines, leaders and hooks.

➤ Recycles whenever possible and keeps fishing sites litter-free.

➤ Purchases required fishing licenses and permits. (Exempt anglers often buy a license anyway, to contribute to conservation. All fishing license dollars go to the FWC – and increase matching federal funds for Sport Fish Restoration. See [www.MyFWC.com/License](http://www.MyFWC.com/License).)

➤ Learns and obeys angling and boating regulations and can identify local fish to adhere to the rules.

➤ Keeps no more fish than needed for consumption.

➤ Carefully handles and releases all fish that are unwanted or illegal to keep, minimizing harm to the fish. (Details follow).

➤ Takes measures to prevent spread of exotic plants and animals and does not use diseased or nonnative baits.

➤ Participates in conservation efforts such as river cleanups, vegetation transplanting, tagging studies and creel surveys.

➤ Practices safe angling and boating by following the laws and using common sense to prevent injury to himself/herself, others or property.

➤ Protects the environment from boat damage, including prop-scouring of vegetation, wake damage to shorelines, power-loading problems at ramps, or striking animals such as manatees or sturgeons.

➤ Conserves energy and water, knowing both affect local fish and wildlife.

“Releasing larger bass is one of the best contributions anglers can make toward the future of Florida’s bass fishing,” says Tom Champeau, director of the Division of Freshwater Fisheries Management.



Even though it's the right thing to do, it's nice to have an extra incentive. Hence the TrophyCatch program, which rewards anglers for releasing trophy bass with prizes donated by the fishing industry. Just registering enrolls anglers into a drawing for a Phoenix bass boat powered by Mercury.

Bass caught on live baits or artificial worms often swallow a hook, thus reducing their chances for survival. Biologists recommend setting the hook immediately after a strike, which increases the chance of hooking the fish in the mouth. Land the fish quickly without exhausting it.

Barbless hooks contribute to easier and quicker releases. If you don't have a barbless hook, simply pinch down the barbs with fishing pliers. Remember: Smaller hooks do less harm than larger ones; single hooks are better than trebles; and circle hooks are best of all.



Don't use rough or knotted landing nets that cause abrasions as a fish thrashes about and scrapes its mucus, that slimy coating that serves as a primary defense against disease.



When releasing bass, be gentle. Grip it by the lower jaw and, if possible, keep it in the water when removing a hook.

“Don’t drop or throw a fish back,” advises Champeau. “Instead, lower it gently into the water so it can swim away.”

If a fish is taken from the water to measure or photograph, avoid touching its eyes and gills. Support a heavy fish’s body with your other hand if you must lift it out of the water. One of the most crucial rules is to avoid keeping the fish out of water for more than 30 seconds at a time (approximately as long as you hold your breath). So have your camera, scales and measuring tape ready to go.

You can place the fish back in a livewell or dip it over the side to let it breathe if you need to reset for another photo. The livewell should be aerated, at nearly the same temperature as the lake water and, if desired, you can use uniodized salt to stimulate slime production (0.5 pounds salt per 10 gallons of water). Never place fish in chlorinated tap water.

Commercial de-hookers, long-nose pliers or hemostats reduce stress. If the fish is hooked too deeply, simply cut the line and leave the hook. The fish’s digestive juices will erode the hook.

Let’s keep Florida the Fishing Capital of the World by recycling our catches. Also, let the FWC help you boast about your catch by sharing your photos and claiming your rewards at [www.TrophyCatchFlorida.com](http://www.TrophyCatchFlorida.com).

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# The Deep Adjustment For Walleyes

By Jason Mitchell



We often find walleyes at late ice in shallow water. We often find walleyes at some point each spring in shallow water. Walleyes typically spawn in shallow water and there are all kinds of reasons for fish to be shallow early in the season. Warmer water, the right bottom composition for spawning and enough memories from catching fish shallow in the past makes looking deep early in the season hard for many anglers. Yes there are going to be many patterns happening in less than seven feet of water on many fisheries early in the season and these shallow locations are a great starting point especially when water temperatures start to climb and the weather is stable but across the board on many fisheries, deep fish are often overlooked and sometimes easy to catch. There is a point at late ice when there is a lot going on in shallow water and of course at some point during the spring, the activity picks up in shallow water but what throws some

anglers off is that there seems to be that in between time when deeper breaks and structure holds most of the biters.

If there are good numbers of nice fish in deep water early in the season or near ice out, what happens between the shallow late ice patterns and the shallow spring patterns? Do fish move back and forth? Every fishery is different and each ecosystem seems to produce unique patterns but there definitely seems like on many fisheries, either the fish do shift back and forth or there are certain populations of fish that are on a different, deeper program.

I have talked about transition fish before and one thing I often notice about fish that are on the move and making huge movements is the color of the fish. Transition fish often get paler in color while fish that have been set up on one location for a while often seem to get more darker and vibrant colors. Obviously fish color is relative to the water but when fish get pale, it seems to be from being on the big move. I am speculating that environmental stressors and the stress of covering massive amounts of ground stresses the fish just enough to cause the

fish to lose some color like how a fish that is stressed in a live well can lose some of its luster for color in a few hours.

The bottom line is that walleyes in particular can really move especially early in the season between when the ice goes out and the spawn begins. I have watched fish on underwater cameras and they just rolled through about as fast as a person walks. Their fins are down and when they get in migration mode, they are about impossible to catch. You feel like you are invisible with your lure.

The question I still have is what would make walleyes reposition from say the back end of a shallow bay on a nice gravel shoal at late ice to a massive main lake deep water point shortly after ice out? What would possess fish to make that journey when a week later after the water temperature stabilizes and climbs, most of the fish are on the shallow shoreline patterns where we think they should be? It could also be entirely possible that we are dealing with two different populations of fish as well. Biologists often point out that Mother Nature is good at spreading the risk. With both shallow and deep fish, spawning attempts are staggered in different parts of the lake with primary and secondary patterns happening at once. There might however be some time of biological advantage however for a walleye to just drop back into deep water at ice out momentarily. The reason I believe this is just because there are so many baitfish clouds over deep water at this time. Depending on the fishery, could be schools of shad, smelt or some other baitfish but we see this so often. Now the walleyes might be set up on these locations eating these baitfish but there might be more to it. The big question I have is why are the baitfish over deep water? I would think that there would be more for baitfish to eat in shallow water. The only explanation I can find is that the deeper water might be more stable at this time. I don't have all of the answers but I do know this, don't ever be afraid to look deep on spots early in the season when there isn't any activity up shallow.

Activity is the barometer I use. If I am still catching pike, drum, white bass or other fish in shallow water, I usually find walleyes somewhere nearby and I don't make drastic moves. Other species can calm your nerves and help you slow the day down. Often, successful fishing is knowing when to slow down and just waiting for the opportunities to play out. Many times, we are more successful by not worrying about fish on other patterns and just focusing on the fish or spot in







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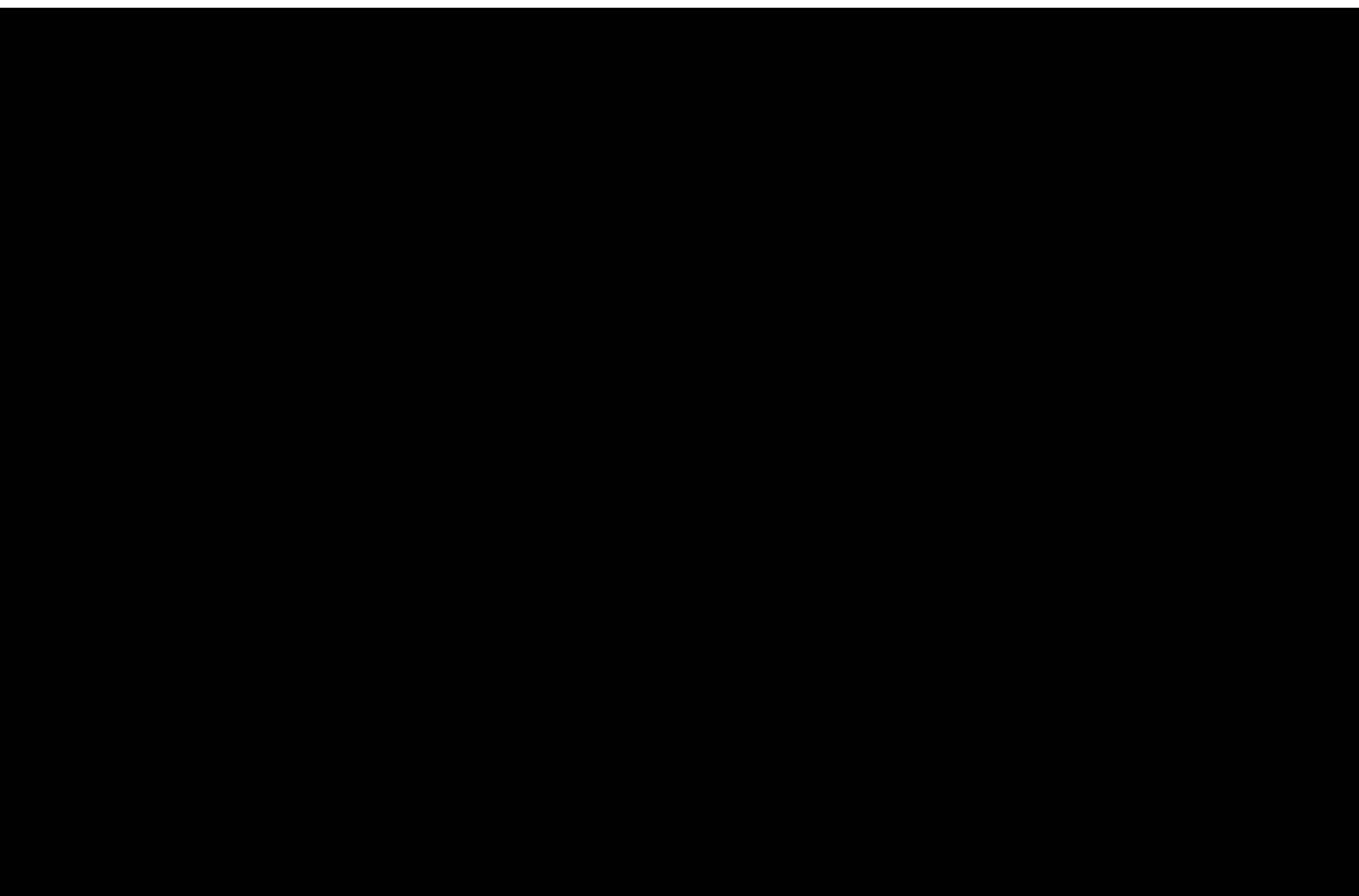


front of you. If there is nothing happening however as in Nada, no bites, no other species biting, no nothing, after a good honest effort, there is a time for adjustments and the deep adjustment is hard to make at times but often very productive.

The best part about deeper fish is that this activity will show up on your electronics. The baitfish clouds and everything else will show up. Now deep is relative but on many lakes and reservoirs, we have found fish anywhere from twenty to fifty feet of water when they make this deep shift. On Lake Sakakawea in north central North Dakota where I spent a lot of time fishing when I was growing up, we often found sauger in really deep water at ice out, anywhere from thirty to sixty feet of water. I am still amazed at how many walleyes we caught at times from those depths. We see the same deep patterns save us on Devils Lake at times. Particularly during adverse weather when fishing is tough, we can often salvage a day sitting over deep fish.

Much of fishing is knowing when to hold and when to fold. There is something to be said for patience and there is also beating the dead horse. Right away in the season, don't be afraid to slide out over much deeper water and fish structure and spots that are far away from shallow water locations when the horse is dead.

Editors Note: The author, Jason Mitchell hosts the popular outdoor program, Jason Mitchell Outdoors ([www.jasonmitchelloutdoors.com](http://www.jasonmitchelloutdoors.com)) which airs on FSN North at 9:00 am Sunday mornings. Before television, Mitchell earned a renowned reputation as a top walleye fishing guide on Devils Lake, North Dakota.





# Targeting Drops

By Captain Mike Gerry

Every year as we move to the late winter early pre-spawn bass will move up and down; one day you will find them in 4 feet of water or less the next they will be gone. I know this is frustrating, because I feel it myself, you think you have got the pattern mastered then you can't find a bite. The difference is something changes like the barometric pressure and a high pressure moves in. Sometimes it is the number of fisherman on the lake increases so it pushes the fish back to the drops.



The important decision to remember is that when the fish feel threatened in the late winter the first thing they do is move to the drops next to the flats where you might have caught them the day before. The key is finding the adjacent drops near these flats that they move to in the pre spawn. I believe they will stage in 10 to 20 feet of water and you can catch them with your favorite crank bait, or Carolina rig and or a  $\frac{3}{4}$  oz. jig working slowly down the drops. It's also important to note that not all drops are created equal; meaning that not every drop holds staging fish; some days they like a sharp drop, the next it may be gradual! The good news is you should know quickly if you are on the correct drop or not, fan your bait out along that drop at 180 degrees and you should quickly know if they are there.

Another key is finding spawning flats, areas of the lake you know the bass will spawn in and then back off to the drops around the spawning beds. These areas have a couple of important



concepts that make me believe the bass are there. Bass move close as a matter of fact to the areas they will spawn in year after year during this time frame. They also move in groups so when you find one you will find many.

Fish Lake Guntersville Guide Service,

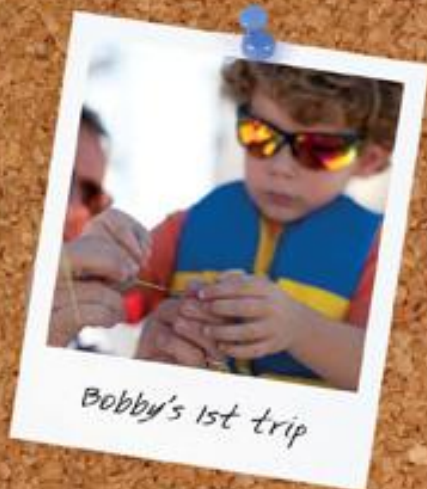
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# Five Reasons To Buy A Boat This Winter

By Ted Takasaki  
and Scott  
Richardson

During this time of year, there's an outdoors boat show to go to almost every weekend. With tons of new boats to drool over, the guys will kick the tires while their wives check the bank accounts to see if there's money to buy a new one. If they already own a



Riding out across the water produces feelings of well-being, whether you're fishing, watching wildlife, relaxing, or a combination of these activities. Ted Takasaki, Hall of Fame fisherman, is shown running his Lund to the next promising spot. In this article, he and Scott Richardson offer their prescription for a satisfying boat buying – and boating – experience.

boat, they will ponder whether to give in to their bout of “big boat-itis” and step up in size.

Boats aren't just a luxury item. Although they depreciate in monetary value over the years, boats often pay a great return on the investment in other ways.

Here are five great reasons to sign on the dotted line.

## 1) Boats Build Strong Family Bonds

Jason Oakes, Marketing Director of Lund Boats, grew up in Minnesota, a state that seems to have more boats than people. He fondly remembers the 14-foot aluminum boat his dad had. The 10-horsepower motor would strain to push his family around the water in search of sunfish and crappies.

As he grew up, Oakes developed a passion for the outdoors lifestyle. All he wanted as he grew up was to own a boat along with a cabin on a lake. Today, he has both. A Lund 2010 Explorer with a 200 HP outboard powers him, his two sons and his daughter in search of fish. When they board the boat, all cell phones, Internet, and text messages are left at the dock. They spend quality time together talking and listening



to one another, all while laughing, sharing good times and building priceless memories.

“Being unplugged from the digital age,” he says, “is fantastic.”

## 2) Fishing Boats are Educational Classrooms

Years ago, in the days before sonar and underwater cameras, a fellow named Buck Perry spent time with his father in a boat while chasing fish.

Perry had a unique quality which separated him from other anglers of the time. He was constantly analyzing why he caught fish where he did and why he didn't catch fish in other places.

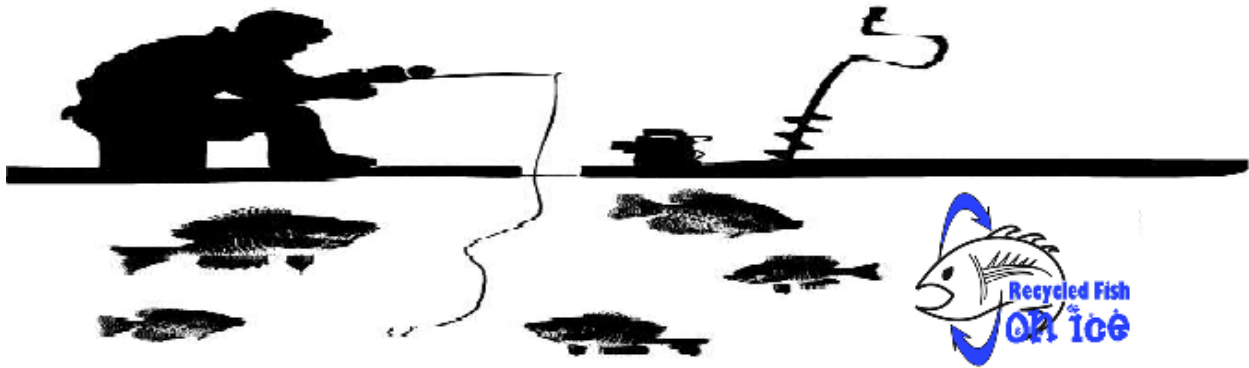
Over time, Perry pioneered theories of structure fishing, which we take for granted today. He realized that fish move in predictable pathways along changes in the bottom contours of a body of water. He noticed how fish moved from deep-water sanctuaries to feed in shallow water on points and bars before moving back down deep again. How far they moved toward shallow water on any given day depended upon factors such as water clarity and weather.

When sonar technology from World War II was adapted for use on fishing boats, Perry's theories were confirmed and broadened. We know now that other factors affect fish location, such as the availability and type of cover, such as docks, weeds, and wood.

Transition areas, where bottom content changes from soft to hard, and structure, also attract fish. GPS technology, coupled with sonar, have further proven Perry's wisdom.

Today's electronics with side-finding technology are so incredible that kids can now see various types of cover out away from the boat. Aqua Vu underwater cameras allow viewing the fish up close and personal in their own world. What more practical classroom can there be to teach young anglers how living creatures relate to their world? They can watch how fish react to different lures, live bait, and different actions. They can learn how to identify different species.

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And not all the action is just below the surface. Given the opportunity to view it once, who among us hasn't had the image of an eagle soaring above the water, diving to the surface, and grabbing a fish in its talons etched in our mind's eye forever? A field guide to bird species can offer hours of lessons on bird identification just by driving your boat along the shoreline. No school

classroom can offer that kind of practical biology lesson and the need to respect all life.

### 3) Boats can teach Conservation

Those advanced sonar units we spoke off make it easier for us to locate fish. That's why it's important to teach kids the importance of taking some fish for a meal and releasing the rest. Anglers can impact fish populations if they don't obey conservation laws and practice selective harvest.

"Even from a fishing standpoint," says Oakes, "I like to keep a fish now and then for a meal but seldom do I have fish in the freezer. I take what I need and that's it."

Teaching kids the importance of supporting efforts to protect natural resources will insure we have stewards of the environment for decades to come. They can see how fishing and boat licenses contribute to state and federal natural resource agencies.



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#### 4) Boats can Lead People to Healthier Lifestyles

Owning a boat can be one prescription for solving one of the worst health crises facing America today. The Centers for Disease Control reports that more than one third of American adults are obese and another third is overweight.

More than one-third of American children are overweight or obese. Childhood obesity has more than tripled in the past 30 years. A sedentary lifestyle contributes to both physical and mental health problems.

Having a boat available often gets us up and moving. We burn calories as we go. Today's boat companies also offer models that can be used for more active sports, such as water skiing or tubing. If we like, the fish we catch provide a healthy meal as well.

#### 5) Boats are Great Stress Relievers

We've all heard this one: a bad day on the water beats a good day at work anytime. Nothing lowers the stress level better than spending a day catching fish. Couple that with this fact: America has been dubbed the "no vacation nation." More than half of Americans leave vacation days unused. A boat in the driveway will give you a reason to tell the boss you'll see him in a week. Go home, load up the family, hook up the trailer and head to the water.

Boats can bring benefits far beyond just getting on the water. But be smart about the purchase. Budget how much you can spend. Decide whether you want an aluminum hull or fiberglass. Each has its advantages. Then decide what size outboard you need. Each boat is rated for a maximum sized motor for best performance. Having the largest motor a boat can handle often helps get the best money out of the boat when and if you want to sell or trade up later.

Also, be sure to leave some money in the budget for electronics. A good sonar is critical. A unit with GPS is a good idea, especially if you plan to fish big water and visit unfamiliar places.

A boat can change your life for the better and even add years to it while improving your relationship with your kids. Isn't that worth the price?



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# WRITE R SPOT LIGHT

**Year in Review 2012**

**Lawrence Gunther**

Founder - Blind Fishing Boat  
Author/Speaker - Feel the Bite!

President - Blue Fish Canada

## **Show Exhibits / Seminars:**

This year my show seminars focused on how fish use their different senses. Six outdoor shows featured my exhibits for a total of 14 days (131 hours). The exhibits included various watercraft and the latest in both blind technologies and fishing innovations. A big hit were the over 750 autographed cards I brailed with the names of kids who visited my booth. The cards featured

information on how the braille system works, and details on the 2012 Family fishing week.

## **Tournaments:**

I competed in a total of 19 competitive events in 2012 earning 7 top five finishes including one first and two big fish. I finished 15 out of 30 in the Ottawa Valley South Bass Masters series,



and 7th out of 38 in the Ottawa Regional Walleye League. My competitive fishing season ended with a 7th place finish out of 52 teams competing in the Ranger/Stratos Invitational Bass Tournament, not bad considering we were up against many of the region's best Bass fishers.

### **Fish Captures:**

Water levels were the lowest in years resulting in fish staying deep. This worked to my advantage as I prefer verticle techniques over sight fishing (LOL). It also meant I

caught all manner of fish species in unorthodox ways such as Lake Trout and Musky on light dropshot tackle, catfish and drumb on jigs, and some extraordinarily large panfish bottom bouncing spinner rigs. Suspending jerkbaits seem to out shine spinnerbaits this year and accounted for many of my largest Bass.



### **Blind Fishing Boat:**

I gave the key note address again at the 24th "Blind Anglers International Tournament", and organized a 5-day technology training program for the blind at the CNIB Lake Joseph Centre. I've been actively sea-trialing various versions of a new talking compass about to come on to the market, and even managed to orchestrate what could very likely be the world's first treasure hunt for 28 blind participants using talking GPS.

Plans for next year include organizing a blind kayak fishing tournament. As well, my continued volunteer commitment as a director with the CNIB Lake Joseph Centre, a 48-room rehabilitation facility for the blind located on the shores of beautiful Lake Joseph in central Ontario, will hopefully soon result in the Centre acquiring a dedicated fishing boat.



### **Feel the Bite!:**

I think I set a record this year on the number of articles published under my Feel the Bite! Tag-line. In addition to contributing twice-



weekly to

Lindy's on-line audio fishing report service, I'm also writing for Gary Yamamoto's Inside Magazine, ODU (Outdoor Unlimited) Magazine, National Pro Staff.com, and Ontario Fishing Network. There are also the numerous "how to" and adventure reports I post on my blogs "Blind Fishing Boat" and "Feel the Bite!" at [www.LawrenceGunther.com](http://www.LawrenceGunther.com).

### **Ranger / Evinrude:**

With support from Ranger Boats, BRP Evinrude and the good folks at Orleans Boat World I spent the year competing aboard a 619 Ranger Fisherman powered with a 225hp Evinrude E-TEC. All my guest pilots / fishing partners couldn't say enough great things about this rig. This year's weather was also one of the windiest on record; providing ample opportunity for the Ranger's rough water handling and tracking characteristics to shine. The Fisherman's performance haul saved our butts during the B1 Berkley Bass Tournament on the St. Lawrence River when 30 boats out of 150 competitors broke down due to severe weather. As always, the E-TEC performed flawlessly and its quiet operation made communications with my guest pilots painless. The Minn Kota Terrova's I-Pilot continues to awe my guests with its quiet



power and “spot-lock” anchorless holding feature. The new Scotty high performance electric down riggers are amazingly fast meaning more line time in the water. Configuring the two Lowrance HD sounders to both show water depth readings from the transom and below the Terrova at the bow made it possible to accurately track the ledges and drop-offs that we had little trouble finding thanks to Navionic’s highly detailed maps.

### **SCUBA Certified:**

To better understand how fish live I put in over 60 hours of training to certify in SCUBA. Nothing is more freaky than suspending 90-feet down and having no idea whether I’m rising or still sinking – never mind knowing which way is up. Feeling my way along the bottoms of lakes and

rivers is giving me a new perspective of how fish associate to cover. My next goal is to acquire two-way radio SCUBA masks to compensate for the sensory deprivation.

### **On Ice:**

Ice fishing conditions in eastern Ontario were excellent. I focused most of my energies on Walleye, pike and pan fish with good results. A Rapala gas auger, a frabill flip-over shelter and a Lowrance sounder with the audio bite alarm made all the difference.



# 2013 SURF FISHING

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|------------|--------------------------------|
| January 16 | Satellite Beach                |
| February 6 | Sebastian Inlet / Barefoot Bay |
| January 30 | Vero Beach                     |
| March 20   | Vero Beach                     |
| TBA        | Daytona Beach Sun Glow Pier    |
| TBA        | Flagler Beach Pier             |
| TBA        | Ft. Pierce                     |
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THE  
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NEWSLETTER



DECEMBER 2012

## The Conservation Angler

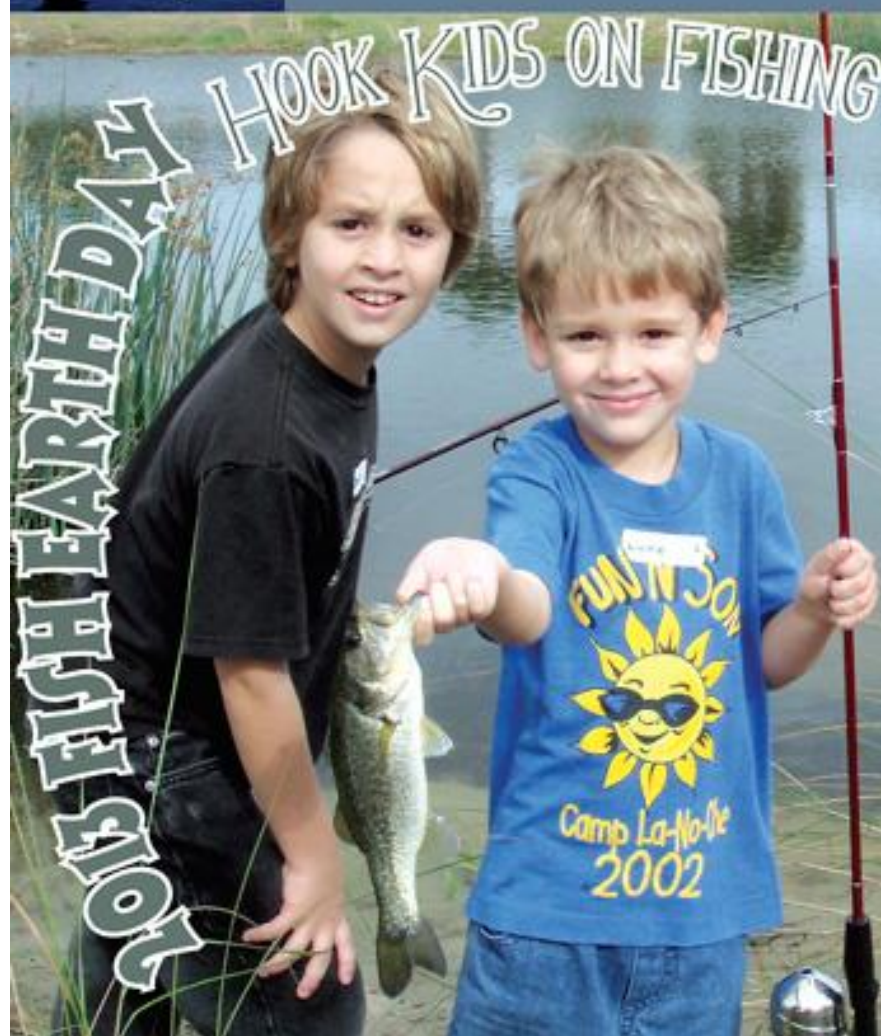
Award-winning writer and angler, Paul MacInnis, is at the helm as the editor of Anglers for Conservation's new publication, The Conservation Angler. Paul's unique passion for the outdoors has long fueled his



dedication to family first, then recreational fishing, conservation and education.

Paul and his two daughters, Anna and Lily frequently volunteer as Hook Kids on Fishing program instructors. This is one of Paul's favorite photos with his daughter Lily.

To receive this monthly newsletter pertaining to upcoming events, news stories and updates, email [info@anglersforconservation.org](mailto:info@anglersforconservation.org).



In April 2012, the *Anglers for Conservation* worked together with government, businesses, non-profits, sport fishing organizations and individual partners to coordinate a **FISH EARTH DAY** in over a dozen Florida fishing communities. During these free events, over 2370 Florida youths, plus their parents/guardians, were introduced to conservation-minded, recreational fishing. With our partners, we conducted **Hook Kids on Fishing** programs in Apopka, Fort Pierce, Hobe Sound, Key West, Merritt Island, Orlando, Palm Bay, Punta Gorda, Satellite Beach, Sebastian, St. Marks, Tarpon Springs, and Titusville.

It's time now to become part of the **Second Annual 2013 FISH EARTH DAY**. The *Anglers for Conservation* will be celebrating **FISH EARTH DAY** throughout the month of April. For more information on how to become involved, please contact *Captain Rodney Smith* online at [rodney@anglersforconservation.org](mailto:rodney@anglersforconservation.org), or by phone at 321.750.3374.





## **Kayak Adventures:**

With support from Jenda Paddle Sports I was fortunate to be recruited to Hobie Cat's Fishing Team. I've always been a paddler going all the way back to 1977 when, at the age of 13, a group of Venturers (one above Scouts) and myself paddled two 25-foot warrior canoes from Port Credit on Lake Ontario, down the St. Lawrence River, along the eastern seaboard, and over to Prince Edward Island, a trip that covered over 1,200 miles (2,100 km). I really wanted to try the Mirage drive offered by Hobie Cat, and I'm pleased to say it lives up to all the hype and more. Not only does the peddle drive system allow me to fish more effectively by freeing up my hands, but in combination with the hand controlled rudder, I'm able to effect far greater control over my course headings. In fact, it works so well I'll be organizing, with support from local Lions clubs and Jenda, a blind kayak fishing tournament on the Ottawa River this coming spring for elite blind anglers using Hobie Cats outfitted with Mirage Drives.



## **Media:**

News Talk 1010, Renegade Bass, 580 CFRA, and Angelo Viola's show are some of the radio programs I interviewed on this year. NBC Sports Outdoors began in January to air a TV episode of "the Best and Worst of Tred Barta" that I featured in alongside Tred fishing for Sails in Guatemala. AMI TV (Accessible Media Inc.) also began airing the episode of "Accessibility in Action" that featured me fishing in my Blind Fishing Boat.

## **“Honouring Great Canadians”:**

Being included in Canada’s Governor General’s new exhibit, “From Far and Wide – Honouring Great Canadians” was quite the surprise. The exhibit is located directly across from Canada’s Parliament buildings, and features 32 Canadians with photos and descriptions of why we received our various medals of honour.

## **Blue Fish Canada:**

I launched the “Blue Fish Canada” charity in 2012 to protect Canada’s fishing heritage. Our mission is to conserve native marine ecosystems and to promote sustainable fishing practices. All proceeds raised from the distribution of my documentary go to Blue fish Canada.

## **Wrap up:**

I will always be pushing the envelope to make fishing more accessible to the blind, and I enjoy the pressure and challenge of fishing competitively; however, the need to preserve Canada’s marine ecosystems and promote sustainable fishing are issues I want to focus on more. It’s why I pursued and earned a Masters degree in environmental studies. Ensuring fishing is an activity that everyone can enjoy for years to come can only be guaranteed if native fish stocks are able to flourish. Stay tuned

## **Thank You:**

A super big thanks to all those who have volunteered their time to participate in blind fishing adventures, to my sponsors, friends and, of course, my family. I know that without all your support all of what I’ve documented in this report would not have been possible. My hope is that, on balance, I’m able to give back far more.

## **Contact:**

If you know someone who’s wrestling with vision loss, a number which is expected to double

from 14 million Americans and Canadians in the next 20 years, offer them a seat in your boat. After all, nine fish out of ten are felt on the line way before they are ever seen. Just stay away from bobbers – no one has invented one that beeps yet. Shoot me an email if you have questions, or visit my website

[www.LawrenceGunter.com](http://www.LawrenceGunter.com) for tons of how-to tips for both sighted and blind fishers alike.







**LAST  
ICE**





# Bluegill Secrets Revealed

By Garrett Svir



It's 5 am and you're up brewing coffee. Lake map in hand you make last minute decisions before heading out to load gear. Mother Nature's icy grip has taken hold as you head out to temperatures well below freezing. Armed with an assortment of jigs and plastics you make your way out into the frozen tundra. Big bluegills can do crazy things to a person.

They can consume your thoughts. If this sounds like a normal weekend to you, then you just may have what it takes to ice a bluegill over 10" this winter. Big bluegills can be tough customers. The best eye sight in the business coupled with an uncanny way of tasting a bait before committing can make them very difficult at times. When it comes to winter bluegills it seems like 10 % of anglers are hooking 90% of the fish. So what are their secrets? I decided to pick the brains of two of the best in the business... Dave Genz and Dave Young.

Dave Genz is considered the founding father of modern ice fishing. The winter fishing system that he developed has forever changed the way that anglers ice fish. Instead of dragging a small house out onto the ice to stay comfortable, we can now stay out of the elements and remain mobile with the advent of his Fish Trap. His inventions were born out of necessity on his quest to catch more and bigger bluegills.

Genz fishes more by feel than by line watching. It is something that he refers to as cadence. "It's just like fishing with a crank bait, you want the fish to feel it in their lateral line" says Genz. He has learned to feel his jig pounding in the water. When he can no longer feel the jig pounding he sets the hook knowing that a fish has inhaled his offering. He prefers clear line in 2 pound test over the high visibility stuff. Genz expressed that sometimes a person has to cut the bluegills a little slack. He informed me that when the bite gets tough and you find yourself missing fish to briefly drop the rod tip and immediately set the hook. This is something that he learned by years of bobber fishing. "Sometimes you have to let them take it" explains Genz. When he started using Vexilar 25 years ago he used to write articles about how to catch sniffers, those picky fish that would not bite. He wrote about finesse presentations and dropper rigs. He has now changed his school of thought regarding this and opts to drill more holes and search out active bitters. "I want to make that first drop down a new hole" he explains. He firmly believes that those first drops down a new hole produce his biggest bluegills of the season. "At the end of the day that strategy will produce more fish" says Genz. You want to have the mindset that a small percentage of the fish in a particular body of water are bitters, and that it's the anglers job to search out those bitters. When asked about structure he expressed that his favorite spots for bluegills are deep weed edges. He prefers to search these areas over deep basins because he can usually find less

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pressured fish. “Deep basin areas can be good early before the crowd develops” he explains. Once the crowds hit an area, it is beneficial to strike off to find less pressured fish.

You may remember Dave Young from the television reality series Ice Men that aired on the Versus Channel. Young is considered an authority on tight line fishing for finicky bluegills. Spending 35 years on the hard water, Young has also seen it all. He knows how to get it done in tough conditions. Young has spent countless hours showing others the art of tight lining. When he is teaching someone to tight line, he does not let his students use a flasher. He believes that this can be a distraction for anglers new to this style of fishing. “An angler must first learn to watch their line and detect subtle strikes” he explains. This also forces new anglers to fish the entire water column and they will often catch fish that come in quickly from outside the cone angle of the flasher. The amount of concentration that Young employs is unmatched. He jokes of bringing Advil with him on tournament day because he gets headaches from concentrating too much on his line. If you watch Young with a jigging rod it almost looks like he is jigging in a circle. When questioned Young stated, “A jigging style is like a finger print and is unique to every angler.” You can still believe that I am going to add circle jigging to my bag of tricks this winter. “I am watching my line as far down into the water as I can see it” tells Young. This allows him to see even the slightest irregularities in his jigging sequence. He’s watching the small kinks in his line that appear while jigging. If he notices the kinks in his line straighten out, he sets the hook. He is also looking for his line to go slack. This alerts him that a fish has grabbed his bait and swam up in the water column. His line of choice is 2 pound test Stren in high visibility yellow. He likes the way yellow shows up against snow



and ice. He developed an ice rod for HT and pairs it with a small plastic reel called a Schoolie. On tournament day, 28 rigged rods will make it onto the ice. This allows Young to switch presentations quickly without taking the time to re-tie. Throughout the interview he stressed the importance of versatility. “Sometimes I work fish from the top down and other times I work them from the bottom up” he explained.

The play book is open. The best in the business have revealed tactics to help you ice more bluegills this winter. I hope that some of those bluegills make it back down the hole. I recently learned of an organization called Recycled Fish. They are encouraging anglers to release their largest bluegills to keep big fish genetics in our favorite lakes and ensure big fish in the future. Become more than a sportsman, become a steward of our lakes and take the sportsman’s stewardship pledge at <http://www.recycledfish.org>. *Photography: Kim Svir*





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# Bug Brained Perch at Late Ice

By Jason Mitchell

There is no silver bullet with late ice perch regarding location but make no mistake, some of the most impressive catches and fishing for the whole calendar year take place in march. Late ice is prime time for jumbo but the tactics and patterns can run the gamut.

On so many lakes, perch move relatively shallow and become more aggressive as the ice rots. Large sand flats or gently sloping flats that have chara and sand grass often hold fish during late ice particularly if these locations are near the mouths of bays and other shallow water that where these fish will eventually spawn.

These shallow flat patterns are classic on lakes like Leech Lake or Winnie in Northern Minnesota. In the Dakota dish bowl lakes, perch often push up into bays but the transitions where sand or gravel turns to mud is often the key. We have caught perch at late ice in three feet of water on Leech Lake in March and fifty three feet of water at late ice on Devils Lake however so not all fish are shallow. Each lake, each fishery has its own personality. So fish position themselves in relation to where they will eventually spawn but forage is still the trump card that still influences where fish are found.

While there are so many solid shallow water bites for perch at late ice on many different fisheries, don't lock into the mindset that shallow patterns are the only patterns worth exploring. Late ice can often see a lot of invertebrate activity with bug larvae and blood worms and when fish are keying on bugs, you will typically notice a couple of things... first is that the fish get pink jaws and pink scales on the bellies from making contact with the bottom. The other thing that typically occurs with bug relating fish is that they are often deeper.

Reason being is that on some lakes, much of the invertebrate activity is happening over a soft bottom and on many lakes, that soft bottom occurs off the shoreline past the transition. Most lakes have a firmer or harder bottom closer to shore and as you push towards the basin, the bottom gets soft... soft bottoms are typically near the basin and thus deeper. Deep is relative. On Devils Lake, deep is more than thirty feet, on some of the Glacial Lakes in South Dakota or Nebraska, deep is twelve feet.



The author Jason Mitchell with a giant perch caught over a soft bottom transition using a Northland Tackle Blood Worm.

Bug patterns typically require more finesse but not always. When the fish are off, horizontal jigs like a Northland Tackle Hexi-Fly tipped with a wax worm or minnow head is a top lure. Another deadly jig for water up to about fifteen feet is a Northland Tackle blood worm which is a small jig tipped with a long eel shaped soft plastic tail. If you can get a Bloodworm down to the fish at a decent speed, these jigs are incredibly effective. With small horizontal jigs, use a rod that has a light enough tip to load slightly from the weight of these small jigs. One of the most effective rods for this style of presentation is the Jason Mitchell Elite Series Meat Stick.

Typically when fish are keying on invertebrates, the perch will go for a more subtle shake or pound that just causes the jig to shimmy and dance but there are situations where small spoons like a Forage Minnow really shines. On a high lift/ fall, if fish come up off the bottom and accelerate up to the lure fast... you are dealing with more aggressive fish and spoons shine. The reason being is further away and are typically drop back down through the fish.



Another top lure option is to weight advantages with a dropper. Take your favorite attach a small chain dropper removing the treble hook. dropper out of a short six to being is that the short chain dropper is very flexible and subtle which imparts a real deadly action on the hook and the fish can suck in the hook easier than when using a mono dropper which is actually stiffer than the chain.

combine the calling and spoon to subtleness of a Buckshot Rattle spoon and below the spoon after You can also tie your own eight inch piece of chain dropper best. Reason

One really effective tactic that can work really well in deeper water when using either spoons or spoons with droppers is to free fall the spoon fast enough to get the lure to swing out to the side of the hole and let the lure hit the mud. Then slowly drag the spoon across the bottom back towards the center of the hole. For perch that are tipping up sucking up invertebrates out of the mud, this technique will catch fish when nothing else works.

With bug patterns that take place in deeper water on transitions that are following lake basins,





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Prime locations are any indent or finger that makes this transition irregular and prime locations remain basins and flats that are either within bays that have a softer basin or adjacent next to larger shallow flats that have some protection and weed growth.

Does this deeper bug pattern happen on every lake? Absolutely not but it happens enough and is often overlooked. Same fish, different body of water and you might find fish keying on crayfish, shiners or some other type of minnow. Typically when fish are relating to minnows or crayfish, you are going to find shallower patterns and much more aggressive feeding behavior over sands or low lying weeds on big flats. A general rule of thumb is that shallower fish (less than ten feet of water) are typically more aggressive and these fish are often orientating more to crayfish and minnows. Deeper fish are typically less aggressive and orientating towards bug hatches and invertebrates.

Which pattern to pursue depends on the process of elimination. Check the traditional shallow sand locations and if the bite is on, enjoy. If the bite is not there however or sporadic, don't be afraid to look deeper at late ice against popular opinion because there are certain situations where these bug brained perch patterns not only produce solid fishing opportunities but big fish as well. Some of the heaviest female perch I have ever caught myself were caught at late ice over deeper soft basin transitions and this pattern should not be overlooked.

Editors Note: The author, Jason Mitchell hosts the popular outdoor program Jason Mitchell Outdoors which airs on Fox Sports North (9:00 am Sunday) and Fox Sports Midwest (8:30 am Saturday's) and is a member of the Ice Team Pro Staff. More information can be found online at: [www.jasonmitchelloutdoors.com](http://www.jasonmitchelloutdoors.com).



# Winter's Last Silver Flash

By Mitch Eegan

***Success rates look up when anglers recognize that the crappies are feeding up***

Winter's grip will soon relax. As the season's thick grey clouds thin, elevating rays of sun will slash through the bitter air and warm it to a more comfortable tone. The snowpack's about to melt; the warming environment is a trigger for once-lethargic crappie to roam towards shallow water from their dead-of-winter deepwater haunts.

But a departure from the depths doesn't always mean that fish head shoreward – they often go vertical. Unbeknownst to many is that crappies often elevate high in the water column to feast on tiny tidbits anywhere from only a few feet to mere inches under the decaying ice.

But while a few anglers catch limits of slabs before the ice gives way, others struggle to land any at all. The fish are feeding



Nearly impossible to match the rich crappie fishing scene in and around Grand Rapids, Minnesota. That was a deciding factor in guide Tom Neustrom's decision many moons ago to call the North Central Minnesota city home. Photo by Bill Lindner Photography.

veraciously, so it's not always about what to use, but more figuring out where to place your bait. And during late winter that might mean right beneath your feet.

**Seeing is believing**

By far, Tom Neustrom's favorite time to target big crappies is last ice. To pinpoint right where to lower his offering in the water column, the respected guide relies on electronics, both sonar and an underwater camera. Neustrom has the luxury of living in one of North America's crappie fishing hotbeds: Grand Rapids, Minnesota. So suffice to say he's never short on technique testing waters.

"The moment I'm done drilling, I'll drop the transducer into the hole and see right where the fish are, and then immediately drop down a tiny jig tipped with a squirming maggot into the strike zone," he says. About 10 feet down over water 23 to 28 feet deep is where he sees the majority of crappies, spying them on his Humminbird ICE 597ci.







But there are times when fish spook easily from directly under a freshly bored hole, running them out of sonar range. That's where an underwater camera comes into play.

Reaching into the pocket of his parka, Neustrom pulls out Aqua-Vu's new AV Micro Plus with DVR – a color underwater camera no larger than a smartphone with the capabilities of recording what's being seen on the screen with just a push of a button.

Rather than drilling a new hole and spooking the fish again, Neustrom drops a jig if he sees crappies off to the side. "More often than not, as long as I'm quiet, the crappies will either see or "feel" the presence of the jig through their lateral line, and will meander over to take

a look. But give it time, as it may take several minutes for the water to calm down and the fish to feel safe enough to swim back," he says.

### Power flush

Steve Knaisel runs "Pilgrim Village" – a popular tackle store situated between Lakes Cadillac and Mitchell in the town of Cadillac, MI. Both lakes are loaded with crappie. A recent discovery about the location of panfish in these clear-water lakes at season's end has Knaisel prepping the day before he even ventures out with rod in hand.

"It all started a few years ago, when my fishing buds and I were walking past a large hole left behind by a pike spearing angler – a hefty pine bow left in the hole to mark its location. As we went by, the surface erupted and water flew everywhere," states Knaisel. "We had spooked a school of crappies at the surface, eating whatever it was that was flowing in with the melt water, or possibly other aquatic forage that rose to the opening."

Dropping a line with a tiny teardrop jig tipped with a waxworm, the group of anglers proceeded to catch a limit of slivery-sided crappies from the enlarged hole, the jig never falling more than just a few inches under the lakes still-frozen surface before impact.

Nowadays, Knaisel punches a swath of holes through sometimes watery late ice with his Jiffy power auger. "The fish are literally so close to the surface that I'm sure their backs are rubbing up against the ice," he claims. "So I like to make all my commotion the night before to not spook fish when I'm trying to catch 'em in the morning." Pre-drilling holes also allows the water to start siphoning, bringing food with it, well before he get there. "It's kind of like chumming," he asserts.

The food sources, you ask? All winter long, tiny insects have been piling up in the snows on the ice, as well the once live bait spilt by other anglers and leftover pieces of their shanty snacks. The melting snow and ice flow into the holes and carry along the tidbits of food, and

the crappies are right there awaiting them to flow by. “Sometimes the water’s draining so rapidly it swirls as if flowing down a sink’s drain,” claims Knaisel.

### Reach out and touch someone

What’s the consensus of catching more crappies in this uber-shallow scenario? Most pros I ask suggest the longest rods available, so you can back from the hole and not disturb the fish.

Studying what’s offered on the market place, this outdoor writer’s found the perfect last ice lengthy rod, and that’s Frabill’s 54-inch Jiggler Long Rod Ultra-light (55 inches total counting the built in single-action reel) to be the perfect weapon. It was built with this type hole-hoping method in mind

Extremely light line (1- to 2-pound test) is best for deceiving panfish as it allows the most lifelike presentation to tiny jigs. The Jiggler rod was designed for such finesse, all the while protecting the line from damage by allowing the line to run through the blank, rather than through guides that can freeze up and fray.

Last ice crappies don’t stand a chance.

If you’re hankering for a basket of pan-fried crappies before the ice goes bad, aim high – literally inches below your feet. Spy ‘em with electronics and lower your offering right to their face. Or for something different, drill a bunch of holes and let the draining begin.

Closing comment: As good as the late ice bite can be, safety comes first. No life is worth a limit of crappies. Listen to the voice in the back of your head that questions ice conditions; wear a lifejacket, even if you think it looks ridiculous; carry easily accessed, handheld ice spikes (Frabill offers an affordable Ice Safety Kit); never fish alone; and always be sure someone on shore knows where you’re fishing.

Editor’s note: Mitch Eeagan is an outdoor writer who lives in the heart of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. He walks the outdoors walk, types its talk and lives primarily off his harvest.



Ingeniously, ice fishing trendsetter Brian “Bro” Brosdahl has united his Humminbird sonar with Aqua-Vu AV Micro Plus to combine the benefits of vertical recon with sideways eyes to the underside of the ice – nothing with fins goes unnoticed. Photo by Bill Lindner Photography



