

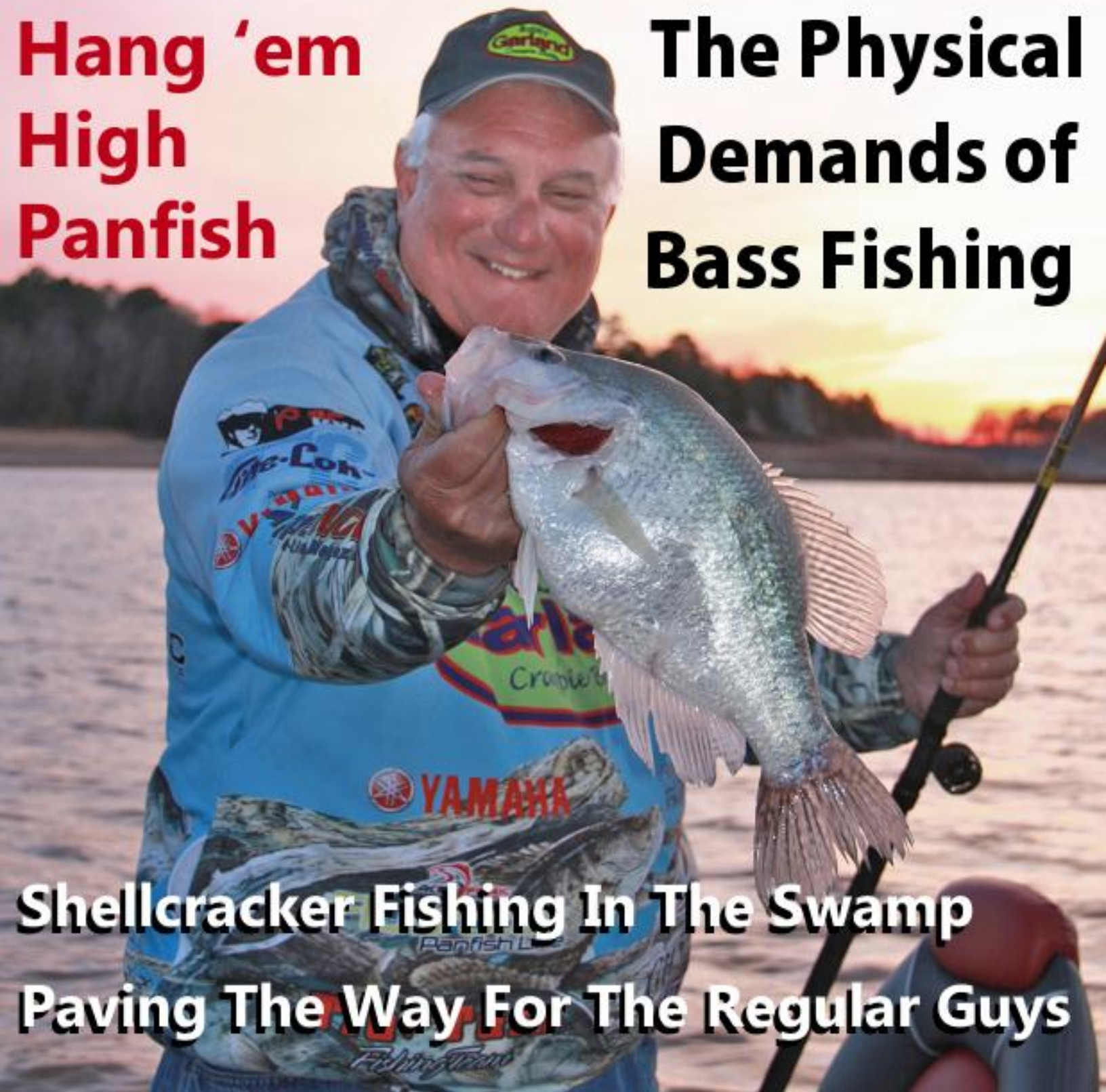
February/ March 2015  
Pre-Spring Fishing



# ODU MAGAZINE™

**Hang 'em  
High  
Panfish**

**The Physical  
Demands of  
Bass Fishing**



**Shellcracker Fishing In The Swamp  
Paving The Way For The Regular Guys**









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What a winter. And for most of us we look into March and we still see a good chance of more winter to come.

The Bassmaster Classic was a cold one, anglers had to deal with frigid temps in all AMs, frozen equipment and ice covered coves that anglers could only skip lures on top of the skim ice. They managed. The best memory about this year's Bassmaster Classic was from the winner of the event Casey Ashley, when he sang the United States National Anthem on the morning of day three. [Video LINK](#).

A large portion of the country experienced one of the coldest Februarys on record and we are here to remind you that ice fishing is almost over (sorry Ice Heads) and open water casting and fishing will be here soon, or is here already for some. Southern bass and crappie tournaments are on their way already and in some states they are landing very large bass. Florida's TrophyCatch program has already yielded 13 Hall of Fame catches, and these fish are all over 13 pounds.

This edition of ODU Magazine will take you from warm weather fishing to ice fishing and hit many topics in between. We touch on all these species in this edition: Shellcrackers, Crappie, Burbot, Walleye, Largemouth Bass, Sea Trout, Redfish, Striped Bass, Northern Pike, Bluegills and Brown Trout. This is one of our most diverse pieces to date. Enjoy the read and feel free to share with your friends. Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Pinterest](#) and [Google Plus](#).

And please, enjoy the outdoors.

**Larry Thornhill and  
William Schwarz**

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**Thank You All!**

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## A Fishing Look Forward

**By Bob Jensen**

About this time in years past, I've done a look back: Kind of a review of things pertaining to fishing that happened in the past fishing season. This year we're going to take a look forward at the fishing seasons, open water and ice, to come. Here we go.

Ice-fishing got off to an early start this year, then warmer than ordinary weather invaded ice-fishing country, and that slowed things down a bit. With the return of cold weather and solid ice again in most areas, ice anglers are looking forward to getting back out there. In many areas there are some outstanding year classes for walleyes and perch: The numbers of mid-sized walleyes and larger than average perch is very good in a lot of areas.

Keep in mind though, that fish become conditioned to lures and lure presentations. It doesn't hurt to try the baits that have led to success in past years, but if they're not working, it often will help to try

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something they haven't seen much of. Northland Fishing Tackle has developed a number of ice-fishing baits in new UV colors, and these UV colors truly do help in many situations. It's important to remember that if what you're doing isn't working, do something else.

Equipment is another area of continued improvement. More and more, the fish can't hide from us. About mid-summer this past year I was introduced to Raymarine. I knew that Raymarine was the leader in deep water sonar. Most boats that go out on the ocean and the Great Lakes and places like that insist on Raymarine. When I learned more about their sonar that was appropriate for the type of fishing we do here in the Midwest I had to give it a try. What an eye-opener! These units draw a picture of the underwater world that is as good as it gets. And, although these units do a lot of different things, they're very easy to use, and for someone like me, easy is a good deal. Anglers will be seeing a lot more Raymarine equipment in stores and in boats in coming years. It's true that we still have to make the fish bite, but if we know that we're putting our bait where the fish are, we're increasing our chances of getting bit.

Outboard motors are improving also. Better fuel economy, more reliability, and less noise can be expected from new motors. But here's something you might not expect: A motor that actually automatically trims itself into the proper trim level. With most outboards the driver needs to adjust the trim level of the motor manually, and inexperienced drivers often have trouble getting proper trim. The newly introduced Evinrude E-TEC G2 trims itself to run at the exact proper trim level. It has several other very unique features, but the automatic trim feature impresses me.

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In many areas of the Midwest, and in North America in general, fishing continues to get better. The chance to catch a truly big fish is as good as many anglers have experienced in their lifetime. There are some trouble spots, and we need to continue to take care of our fish populations and the quality of our waters, but as anglers, we have a lot to look forward to in the upcoming year.

2014 was an outstanding year for fishing for many of us, and if we allow it, 2015 can be even better. Take advantage of the wonderful equipment and fishing opportunities we have.

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# THE BAHAMAS IS A GREAT WINTER VACATION AND FISHING SPOT

By Bill Vanderford



As the morning sun began to caress the windblown sand along the deserted beach, its warming rays were often refracted by hundreds of white objects that became more visible with each degree of sun angle. For expert shells seekers, this expanding spectacle would be like a treasure hunter finding an ancient Spanish galleon overflowing with gold!

Though many varieties of shells are found in the Turks and Caicos Islands, several species of conch shells are the most dominant. In

fact, conch has always been an important part of life and survival in this tropical paradise. These huge sea snails are used as an ingredient in hundreds of delectable food dishes that are served in these islands. In modern times, however, conch has become important in jewelry-making, art work and as an exported food.

The Turks and Caicos Islands are located at the far southeast corner of the Bahamas archipelago. These gems of the Atlantic Ocean are approximately 575 miles from Miami, Florida, and are comprised of over 40 Islands and uninhabited cays, including 8 major islands. To the south, the Caicos Bank is a shallow, pale, turquoise sea that is partly composed of swamp and tidal flats that are filled with an abundant resource of conch, lobster and numerous species of fish.



The most inhabited of all the islands and certainly the most visited is Providenciales, also known as "Provo". With more than 6,000 permanent residents, it's a wonderfully friendly place to visit.

Numerous and diverse lodging possibilities are available with varying levels of service and amenities. Many are situated on the beautiful, expansive, white sands and tranquil, turquoise waters of famous Grace Bay, which is within easy sight of the waters breaking over the protective coral reef.



Provo is also known as one of the premier destinations in the Caribbean for snorkeling, scuba diving, eco kayaking and fantastic bonefishing! A number of guides can direct you to the best local bonefishing, diving and snorkeling and deep sea fishing from Provo.

Also, interesting and educational ecotours utilizing sea kayaks can be fun. During these sojourns, ecological beach combing is usually followed by an interesting stop at Little Water Cay, which is known to locals as “Iguana Island.” This small, unpopulated, arid spit of sand and vegetation is the home to more than 3,000 rare and endangered rock iguanas that are exclusive to the Turks and Caicos Islands.



From Provo, the full breadth of the Turks & Caicos Islands is open to enjoy and explore, including dozens of small uninhabited cays and sister islands, many of which are tropical wilderness land. Also known for its favorable year-round climate, the average Provo temperature is a balmy, breezy 78°F. Therefore, regardless of the season, these islands that dangle at the tip of the Bahamas chain like a shiny gold and turquoise pendant in the sun, are a joy to behold that will conjure up memories luring visitors to surely return!

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).



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# Casting for Crappie

By Brad Wiegmann

When it comes to catching crappie there are several techniques you can use. Of course spider rigging is popular along with long lining. However, just casting for crappie would be the number one way with crappie anglers.



Now there is more to casting for crappie than flipping the bail and rearing back and casting a lure. An angler has to be casting to where the crappie are and what they would bite to catch them. It doesn't matter if you are on the bank fishing or in a boat casting can be a great way to catch them.

For crappie anglers the best time to cast for crappie is in the springtime when crappie are up shallow spawning. Crappie will get up on the bank searching for spawning area and will make nest around cover or structure. Making target specific casts to cover and structure is the best way to catch crappie.

"Casting is a great way to catch crappie especially in the spring when the crappie are up shallow. Anyone can cast a live minnow or lure during that season and catch a lot of big crappie," said B'n'M' crappie pro staffer Brad Taylor.

It's not just Brad Taylor using a spinning rod and reel when casting for crappie. His daughter, Allie Bre, one of his favorite fishing partners also loves to cast and catch crappie. "It's a great time to take out your children and let them cast out a live minnow or lure by themselves without having to help them cast and they can honestly catch a fish by themselves," said Taylor.

One of Taylor's favorite crappie fishing spots is the







renowned Grenada Lake in Mississippi. “Early in the year, I like to fish the grass on Grenada Lake since there is no structure to speak of here. I will fish with a live minnow or Southern Pro Lit’l Hustler 1 ½-inch tube rigged on a 1/32- or 1/16-ounce jig head,” said Taylor.

For live minnows, Taylor uses a #2 Eagle Claw 214EL light wire hook and #4 split shot. “Since the water is muddy on Grenada Lake, I can rig up with 8 pound test fishing line when fishing with live minnows or even tubes,” said Taylor. Taylor likes to rig it with a cork and keep the tube lure just above where the crappie are located. “Most the time on Grenada, I’m in about three feet of water catching them,” said Taylor.

Casting can be challenging for the novice angler, however, a spinning reel can help eliminate some of the problems associated with casting especially live minnows or lightweight lures. Spinning reels have a fixed spool that doesn’t rotate. Instead the fishing line flows off the spool by being pulled from the weight of the lure.

WaveSpin spinning reels ([www.wavespinreel.com](http://www.wavespinreel.com)) not only let line off when casting, but they are guaranteed to not tangle. Seriously, they are guaranteed to not tangle, but they also feature the patented WaveSpin Spool design that increases casting distance. The revolutionary spool features a row of teeth all slanted in one direction with gaps between the teeth reducing friction at the same time eliminating tangles; in addition to having aluminum spools, all metal gears, over-sized line roller, infinite anti-reverse and an exclusive 10 disc drag system.





Spinning reels can also be converted from either a right or left hand retrieve. All of the WaveSpin Reels can be converted quickly and ready to use in less than a minute. WaveSpin Reels ZTR, DHxL and DHZ models feature a comfortable grip handle and the WaveSpin Legend 250 model a super soft EVA handle grip.

Two anglers that don't have any problems casting spinning rods and reels are B'n'M's pro staff manager Kent Driscoll and B'n'M' pro staffer/Grenada Lake fishing guide John Harrison ([www.crappie101.com](http://www.crappie101.com)) who fish together in crappie tournaments. Both like to cast spinning rods and reels especially to stake beds. Stake beds are man-made structure commonly constructed from wood or PVC pipe to attract crappie.

"When fishing stake beds, we approach them going into the wind because we can control the boat better and lets us keep our distanced from the stake bed," said

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Harrison.

"We use live minnows, live minnows rigged on a jig with a soft plastic body or a 1/16-ounce jig. Normally, we will just cast past the stake bed and twitch it, pause, twitch, pause retrieve back through the stake bed," said Driscoll.

When it comes to crappie rods Taylor, Driscoll, and Harrison like using the B'n'M' Poles Sam's Super-Sensitive 7-Foot Crappie Rod ([www.bnmpoles.com](http://www.bnmpoles.com)) or Buck's Graphite Crappie Spinning rod. Both are lightweight graphite rods design just for casting live minnows or casting lures.

Spinning reels and rods make casting live minnows and lures so easy any angler can do it. They make catching crappie fun, but make casting and catching crappie is even more fun.



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# DAN'S FISH 'N' TALES®

## The Most Important Fishing Tackle

By Dan Galusha

Thinking of all the equipment and tackle used in fishing there are three pieces that are the most important – rod, reel and line. This is because they are the direct link to all of the fishing. No matter if an angler is fishing from shore or boat, or using live or artificial bait, something has to exist to make a presentation to the fish.

Other than a stick or cane pole, there are four basic types of rod/reel combinations – spinning, spincasting, casting and fly. With all four the same basic rules apply in making the proper selection for a reel, rod and line.

### REEL

The reel is the component which should be considered for the most investment. This is the part of the combination that can give a person the most problems if it is not made with higher quality. Look for the best that budget will allow.

Low quality casting reels can have poor spool tolerance, which provides irregular revolutions and casting, along with a space in which line can become snagged. The pawl/worm gear area can be a problem in wearing out and catching, and a poor anti-backlash system can be a big problem. Handles can also wear out quicker, as can many other parts; gearing and so on.

Spinning reels have some of the same problems as casting with gears and handles, along with bail springs, easily bent/broken bails, and spools that don't wind line evenly.

The most problems seem to be with spincasting. They have all sorts of pickup-pin, spooling and gear problems. The design may be simple, and they are easiest to use, but they can cause the most problems in a unit that is cheaply made.

As for fly reels, there isn't too much that can be found to be wrong other than spool tolerance, weak handle connection and possible gearing. There can also be burrs found on some of the spools in the cheaper models.

While the reel is the target for the highest percentage of investment, there are ways to save. For example, in the casting models, the low profile, lighter weight reels are a very popular item in all brands,



*Not only is the Power Fish'N Reel great for disabled anglers, but it is also a great way to fish Rat-L-Traps such as here when the author caught this 6 ½ pound bass on a Diamond Dust colored Trap.*





*A low-profile Garcia Revo S (top) with 8 bearing and 6.4:1 gear ratio, and the slightly cheaper, but similar designed Pflueger Purist (bottom) that also has 8 bearings, but with a 7.1:1 gear ratio.*

and while I primarily use the Garcia Revo S, which is the bottom of the Revo series, there is also a Pflueger Purist, which is very close in design and quality, with a smaller price tag. An angler can also stay with the older round style reels, such as the Garcia C3 and C4 series, with which I have had great luck throughout the years, and still use them. In the spinning and spincast definitely go with the highest dollar models possible. I use four spinning – 3 Pflueger Supreme ultralights and 1 Mitchell 300; and in spincasting the good old Zebco 33. Again, no matter what brand is selected, go with the best that budget allows.

## ROD

If you are going to skimp on anything in the combination then the rod is the component to select. There are a lot of rods on the market that will do the trick, but still have good quality. The prime consideration is quality of materials, and how they will hold up over the years. Breakage can happen to any price range, as can damaged guides from fishing line wear and other problems. However, if the handles and wrapping look bad; guides are cracked or out of alignment, and the reel seat does not work well, then this is a rod to ignore.

I've used a lot of different rods over the years from high priced Skyline of several years ago to low end no-name brands. Two rods, that are no longer made, have been with me for a long time – the 6-foot South Bend Intruder and Fenwick Venture. In fact, I never go on a fishing trip without taking my Venture, now teamed with a Revo reel. It has probably caught more of my award fish than any of the other rods in my arsenal. Thinking of my rods, the only ones that are currently being manufactured are the spinning models - Shakespeare 7' Agility, Berkley 10' C-Series and Fenwick 6'8" River Runner. My others are Tactix and older style Pro Lightning rods. So, as you can see; the rods are a give and take sort of component. Select them for the quality, length and action that you desire.

## LINE

The line is the direct and final link to the bait and fish. That is why it is important to purchase a good quality line, and not something from the "bargain basement". It should not only be good for abrasion and casting, but provide superior knot strength. The brands that I use are Stren and Berkley, who both have many different styles.

In casting I use braided and monofilament of different types. Pound test and abrasion resistance depends on the style of fishing and cover being fished. For example, heavier braided and mono with



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Len Andrews, Hall of Fame entrant, with a Florida largemouth bass.



P. Gabrielse holds aunker bass, showing the fish with weight visible on a scale.



more abrasion resistance is good for flipping/pitching heavy cover; limper line in a lower test is good for crankbaits in open water; a medium 12 and 14 pound test with good abrasion resistance is good for spinnerbaits in and around cover; and a 14 to 20 pound test is good for casting jigs and soft plastic lures.

Spinning is a tossup between monofilament and Nanofil. I prefer the new Nanofil that is primarily designed for this sort of reel, and works great. I also use 10 to 15 pound braided line for some of my crappie fishing in heavy brush so that I can pull light wire hooks loose from any snags.

On the spincasting end of things, monofilament is about all I would use, and then no more than 12 pound test of the limper variety like Trilene XL or Stren Magna Thin.

## SPECIAL SELECTION

Too often we forget our anglers who have disabilities. There are people with upper body disabilities such as stroke and accident victims, wounded veterans, amputees, and the elderly with arthritis that can enjoy the sport of fishing with proper fishing tackle. For this purpose I suggest the following rig – Power Fish’N Pro Reel with a 7’ Shakespeare Agility rod, and monofilament line up to 10 pound test, or 8 to 12 pound test Nanofil.

The reel is a self-contained, battery operated Shakespeare spinning reel, with a trigger cast. This makes it possible to open the bail one handed, cast, and push a button near the reel seat shank to retrieve the line. It also has the ability of being retrieved with the conventional handle. You find more details on the

Power Fish’N website at [www.powerfishn.com](http://www.powerfishn.com).

*This nice crappie was caught on one of my favorite spinning outfits – a Pflueger Supreme ultralight with 7’ Shakespeare Agility rod and 8 pound test Nanofil line, while using a Natural Science Road Runner head with a 2” Power Minnow.*

As for the rod, I prefer the 7’ Agility for the two-piece portability, as well as its action and length for handling fish when using this sort of reel. A lot of the retrieve depends on using the rod to pump the fish in as the reel winds up slack.

The reason for the line selected is simply because it needs something that can cast well and provide fewer problems. Any spinning reel can be a “pain” when it comes to birds nests, but using the right line can reduce the occurrence of such problems.

Whether just starting into the sport or a novice angler, if you are in the market for a new rod and reel combo, take some of these tips with you on the shopping trip.

If you have any questions on this or another fishing subject, contact me through the Dan’s Fish ‘N’ Tales® website at [www.dansfishntales.com](http://www.dansfishntales.com). This site also provides a link to the ODU Magazine website, the Dan’s Fish ‘N’ Tales® You Tube channel and Facebook page, which can also be accessed to hit the “like” button at [www.facebook.com/dansfishntales](http://www.facebook.com/dansfishntales).

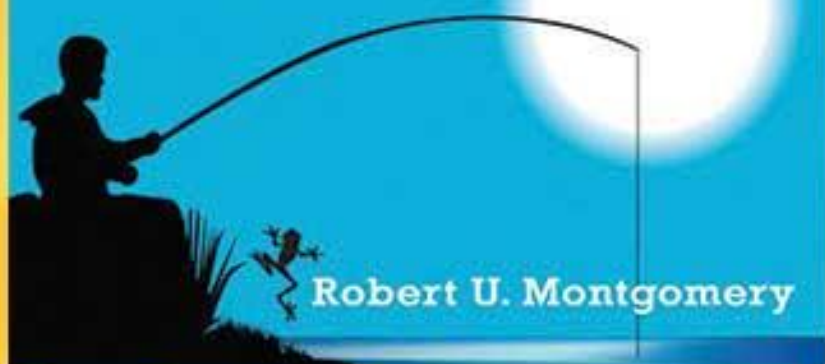
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# Shellcracker Fishing In The Swamp, It's A Family Tradition

By Ron Presley





Growing up in the swamp of Santee Cooper has made quite a fisherman out of Matt Outlaw. Matt grew up fishing with his dad, Whitey Outlaw, learning to fish the Santee Cooper Swamp safely and successfully.

Whitey is probably best known as a pro crappie angler, but his love of fishing extends to all species. “If they bend my pole I like to catch em’,” says Whitey. He passed on his passion and his knowledge of fishing to his son Matt.

Fishing is fishing and Matt likes it all too, but over the years he has developed a special love for the swamp and the shellcrackers (red eared sunfish) that reside there. “I especially like to fish up in Sparkleberry Swamp. Up there you don’t have as much pressure on you or the fish. You can go up there and fish all day and never hear a boat or see a boat. You have the whole world to yourself. On the main lake you may fish a place, find a bed, and have a good day, but the next day there will be 20 boats on it. I will take the swamp any day.”

Learning what he has over the years, Matt has a warning for newbies in the swamp. “If someone came here to fish the swamp the first time they should do their research to develop a good sense of direction. I would be extremely careful because it is easy to go deep in the swamp and get lost. There are miles and miles of swamp and you can literally lose your way in there for days.”

Given that warning, it would be a good idea to let someone know where you will be fishing by leaving a float plan with your next of kin. “Lots of people have GPS these days, but you don’t get very good satellite reception in there, so I wouldn’t count on it,” advises Matt.

“It is not like you can just go in there and think the open lake is in a particular direction. Once you get in the swamp there are hedgerows and shallow water that you have to work your way around by

*There is open water on the edges, but once anglers get back in the swamp they need to have local knowledge.*





*Shellcrackers like the one Matt is holding here are common in the Sparkleberry Swamp.*

cutting in and out of the hedgerows. After a turn or two, you can be lost and have no idea where the open lake is. I was fortunate enough to grow up here and I know the runs like the back of my hand. I know where I'm going. You get someone that doesn't know where they are going and it could be downright dangerous."

Santee Cooper is full of big shellcrackers. It is

common to catch them from a pound up to 3 pounds. Matt's biggest shellcracker was about 3 3/4 pounds. "There have been shellcrackers caught up to around 5 pounds," comments Matt. "Shellcrackers are real fighting fish, that's why I like to catch them. In the past we used those 12-foot B'n'M Bream Buster Rods but they are not quite stiff enough for the really big shellcrackers."

Now the duo uses Whitey's signature rod called the B'n'M Double Duty. Matt and Whitey had discussions about what they wanted in a fishing pole designed specifically for the bigger bream and the giant shellcrackers they run across in the swamp. "We talked about it and thought about how we wanted a pole to perform for the bigger fish. The main thing was to have enough backbone to lift the really big ones out."

One of the keys to successful shellcracker fishing on the beds is to get them in fast. "If you get one of them big shellcrackers that don't wanna' come in, they will spook off the others," says Matt. "They just pull around out there stirring things up. With the Double Duty you can

## Shellcracker Tips for the Swamp

Matt and Whitey agree that there are few things any shellcracker angler should remember to improve their catch.

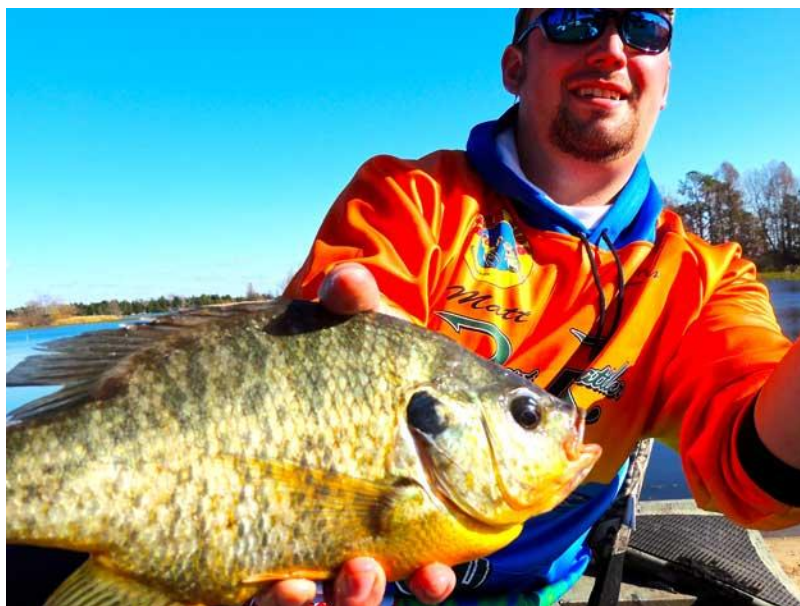
1. Expect to smell the fish. Always move into the wind. When you pick up the smell fish toward it to find the beds.
2. Use good bait. Red worms, earthworms or swamp blue bait works best.
3. Move when needed. Don't spend a lot of time where you're not getting bites. Keep moving and looking.
4. Don't forget to fish shallow too. You will find big shellcracker beds in a foot of water.
5. Use a good pole like the new B'n'M Double Duty. It has a lot of backbone to pluck the big fish out without disturbing the others.
6. Get the fish out of the bed as quick as you can because once they go to swimming in the bed it runs other fish off.
7. Use strong hooks. The light wire hooks will straighten and pull out on the big shellcrackers.
8. Check the thick cover too. Shellcrackers will bed in open water, but also in real thick trees, saw grass and stick-ups. They can and do bed anywhere.



just snatch em' out of the water and put em' in the boat."

"We wanted a pole capable of pulling a big shellcracker up out of the water without leaving anything but a ring in the water," added Whitey. "It's important not to spook the other fish."

The fishing rig for shellcrackers is simple. It is made up of a little toothpick cork, a split shot and a #4, sometimes a #2 gold hook. With no reel on the Double Duty the line is run through the tip guide and knotted to a tiedown on the bank. "The line is about a foot longer than the 10-foot pole so I can flip it around from bed to bed," says Matt.



*Shellcrackers are distinguished from bluegill by the red making around their gill flap.*

We like to use red worms, blue worms, or sometimes crickets. With shellcrackers we would rather use worms, we feel like they eat the worms better than crickets."



Some of the locals use what they call blue bait. It is a small worm with a blue color to it. "You have to go into some swampy areas and dig," says Matt. "You gotta' get back in there with the cottonmouths to get em'. It is a lot easier to just go to the store and buy a cup of red worms."

Shellcrackers start bedding in the swamp on the first full moon in April. The bream will follow about a month later. "The shellcrackers will bed on the new moon as well as they will on a full moon," explains Matt.

Both Matt and Whitey point to their nose as important for finding the shellcracker beds. "The first tool you use to find them with is your nose. Shell cracker beds smell strong and fishy. You can smell it a hundred yards away. Your nose is your

*Santee Cooper shellcrackers are a hard fighting fish that grow as large as 5 pounds.*



best friend.”

Matt advises anglers to determine the direction of the wind to plan the search for the beds. “I like to just paddle along, sometimes with my feet dangling in the water and my nose into the wind.”

Shellcrackers will often bed in a big open bay. Sometimes the whole bay will be full of beds. They will be around any kind of stickup, trees, stumps or grass mats. “It doesn’t take much to hold them. I particularly like Tupelo Trees when I see em’. The bream, on the other hand, will be a little bit tighter. Shellcrackers will take a whole area and use it for the spawn. They are not so structure oriented as the bream.”



*Whitey is shown here paddling along looking for shellcracker beds.*

When they are on the beds the shellcrackers make for a great family outing. “If you catch one in a spot you are gonna’ catch another in the same spot, says Matt. “New anglers should understand that they



*When a fish is hooked it should be pulled up and out of the beds as quickly as possible.*

can be out there a half a day and not catch a fish, but when you find them you can set there and have the most fun you ever had fishing in your life. During those bedding times, every time the bait hits the water they will smoke it.”

Every year when the first moon in April rolls around Matt and Whitey will be found enjoying some shellcracker fishing. It is an old-time type of fishing that takes adults back to their childhood while creating fishing memories for the kids. For the Outlaw clan it’s a family tradition.





# Paving The Way For The Regular Guys

The B.A.S.S. Nation provides a path for young adults like Bryan Kerchal to become bass pros

By Tyler Wade

Bryan Kerchal was once just a boy who loved to fish. He fished so much that his mother worried that he didn't eat.

Kerchal fished nearly every day by himself, from the age of 7 until he was 18. He went to college, only to discover after one semester that it was not for him. He had seen Rick Clunn on the cover of Bassmaster Magazine with a Bassmaster Classic trophy.

That life, he thought, was for him.

However, Kerchal lived in Connecticut. He didn't fish with other people, had no experience outside of his own time on the water and the issues of Bassmaster that he read. He didn't know any pros, didn't have any sponsors, and was a thousand miles from the nearest Bassmaster tournament.

That's when the B.A.S.S. Nation saved him.

In 1991, at age 20, Kerchal joined his first bass club, the Housatonic Valley Bassmasters. It was the first time he had met others who enjoyed bass fishing as much as he did.





Kerchal learned volumes in his first few months with the club. In his first B.A.S.S. Nation Eastern Divisional one year after he joined, he was the top angler from his state of Connecticut.

In the B.A.S.S. Nation, each state winner advances to the B.A.S.S. Nation Championship. From there, the winner of each division qualifies for the Bassmaster Classic.

And the young angler who had only joined a bass club one year prior won his division and was set to share the stage with the man who had inspired him — Rick Clunn.

Kerchal's skills didn't hold up against the pros in the sport that year, but the following year, 1994, after re-qualifying, they did.

At the tender age of 24, a man who had only a dream and time on the water held the Bassmaster Classic trophy, thanks to a path provided to him by the B.A.S.S. Nation.

Kerchal's story is unique in that he is the only B.A.S.S. Nation representative to have ever won the Bassmaster Classic. But it's not unique in the sense that the B.A.S.S. Nation paved the way to success in professional bass fishing for a blue-collar worker.



# 2015 Photo Contest





Just ask Mike Iaconelli, Brandon Palaniuk and Davy Hite. These top pros all came from the B.A.S.S. Nation. For Palaniuk, a B.A.S.S. Nation Championship win in 2010 qualified him for the Bassmaster Elite Series. For Iaconelli and Hite, their experience in the B.A.S.S. Nation provided the springboard to their careers, and both of them have also won Bassmaster Classics.

The B.A.S.S. Nation is a network of locally organized clubs whose members participate in and support a range of activities, including tournaments, conservation initiatives and youth programs. The local clubs are organized in 47 U.S. states and 10 countries (Australia, Canada, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Namibia, Portugal, South Africa, Spain and Zimbabwe), which are part of six geographic divisions (North, South, Central, East, West and Mid-Atlantic).

The first B.A.S.S. chapters were formed in 1968 to combat water pollution at the local level. In 1972, these individual chapters were organized into state Federations, now known as Nations. B.A.S.S. founder Ray Scott called B.A.S.S. Nation members the “minutemen” of the organization. Through the years, he called on members to support causes ranging from legislation to a famous 1970 lawsuit against 250 companies that B.A.S.S. alleged were polluting water in violation of the Federal Refuse Acts of 1899.



Each Nation has a group of officers, including a president, conservation director and youth director, who work closely with the B.A.S.S. Nation staff to promote B.A.S.S. initiatives at the local, state and division levels. Past efforts have included the grass-roots “Don’t Kill Your Catch” initiative — the forerunner to



the modern catch-and-release ethic — coordinating and supporting High School and Junior Bassmaster clubs, conducting educational events such as CastingKids exhibitions and organizing local tournaments. These leaders and their members contribute countless hours to the health and growth of the B.A.S.S. Nation.



Bryan Kerchal was one of the anglers who benefited from the B.A.S.S. Nation's six qualifications to the Bassmaster Classic each year. It is a highly competitive system that begins at the club level with local and state events. Anglers can qualify for a 12-member state team, which represents its state Nation at one of six annual Old Milwaukee

B.A.S.S. Nation Divisional tournaments. Each Nation's top-finishing angler at the divisional qualifies for a berth in the Old Milwaukee B.A.S.S. Nation Championship. And the top angler of each of the six divisions at the championship advances to the Classic, as Kerchal did.

In November 2014, Paul Mueller of Connecticut bested the competition on Louisiana's Ouachita River, leading the six-angler contingent who will compete in the 2015 GEICO Bassmaster Classic.

Mueller and the other five anglers who advanced also receive automatic qualification into the 2015 Bass Pro Shops Bassmaster Central, Northern and/or Southern Opens presented by Allstate. The Old Milwaukee B.A.S.S. Nation Championship overall winner also earns an invitation to compete in the prestigious Bassmaster Elite Series, which Mueller has accepted.

Now, Mueller — who, like Kerchal, is from Connecticut — gets to make a go of it at the top level of competitive bass fishing. Mueller is leaving his work as a guide on Candlewood Lake to make his mark in the sport, thanks to a path paved by the B.A.S.S. Nation.

To learn more about the B.A.S.S. Nation, visit [www.bassmaster.com/nation](http://www.bassmaster.com/nation), or contact Jon Stewart, director of the program, at [jstewart@bassmaster.com](mailto:jstewart@bassmaster.com).



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# Big Baits, Big Fish

By Captain Mike Gerry

As our winter slowly moves on it is a time of year where size matters; at no time during the fishing year is the size of your bait more important than now! If your wanting to catch big quality bass, fish with big baits, like 7 inch swim baits,  $\frac{3}{4}$  oz. jigs with large trailers that give the jig a bulky look; even  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 oz. spinner baits with large willow leaf blades will produce that big bite.

The thing many fishermen do not realize is that slow lethargic large bass pick their prey and the bigger the better as their feeding is very selective and large presentations entice that big fish. I know you all have heard that saying that this time of year (winter) you're fishing for a few bites; I believe this is true so if the bites are limited than the presentation of large bait becomes even more important. Size does matter; bass are selective, they want slow moving baits, easy prey and that large presentation as they can lead you to that 30 pound sack we all hunt in winter fishing.

Some of the baits I like with large profiles are; Punisher  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 oz. Spinner baits as they have big willow leaf blades that get to the bottom easily and becomes a great large profile bait to slow roll on the bottom this time of year. I also like Tight-Line  $\frac{3}{4}$  oz. football jig you combine that big jig with a Missile Bait D-bomb trailer or Drop Craw or big Missile Craw will produce big bites with this jig as it really entices those big females. Don't under estimate the power of a big swim bait, some of those very expensive large swim baits worked slowly along the bottom can become your best friend; these baits can be very expensive but winter time proves their worth.

Big baits produce big fish and you'll have a big time on the water; you just have to get on the water to prove it!

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# You Know What Bugs Me???

By Scott Brauer

Entomology is not a dirty word and it should excite you not put you to sleep. For those who don't use it often, 'entomology' creates a big impression... Give it a try at your next house party. At the heart of it, it's just the study of bugs; fortunately for most of us, the study does not have to be very intense... Wipe your brow and say "pew". Truth is having a working knowledge of aquatic born Larvae and Nymphs is essential to produce better quality fish. Understanding how your prey feeds is a big leap forward for most fishermen. Although all of these aquatic insects are not readily available for fish in the wintertime they are still seen below the surface of the ice as a quality food source. Most are available at some point though the ice season in many of the lakes, rivers and back cuts we fish. First let's talk classification.



Larvae: Many classes of aquatic insects, such as caddisflies, midges, crane flies, dobsonflies, alderflies, and many more, are known as "larvae" rather than "nymphs" in their juvenile stages. They have mostly soft bodies rather than hard exoskeletons.

Nymphs: The juvenile, underwater stages of mayflies, stoneflies, dragonflies, water boatmen and damselflies and other aquatic insects whose juvenile stages are covered by hard exoskeletons.

## Aquatic Larvae:

Midges: Midges are from the family Chironomidae, sometimes called "true flies" because like common houseflies they have two wings shorter than the body, and they don't have tails. As the name implies, most midges are small, 3/4 inch or smaller. The midge life cycle has four distinct phases: egg, larva, pupa, and adult. Adult midges lay their eggs over the water, and the larvae emerge and thrive in many water types. These Larvae especially thrive in slow water with a silty, muddy bottom covered with debris and aquatic vegetation. Fully developed midge larvae are small and can range from 3/4 inch down to 1/8 inch or smaller. Bloodworms the largest species are mostly found in lakes and other backwaters. They come in a variety of colors, but cream, brown, black, olive, and red are the most common.



Dobsonflies: Dobsonflies and their predatory larvae, Hellgrammites, are among the largest in our waterways. The family of dobsonflies is small, containing only two species. The larvae of both of are prominent in freshwater environments. They undergo complete metamorphosis, with the



larvae being aquatic and the adults and pupae terrestrial in all habitats. The larvae of all species are elongate, wormlike, and are flatish (not a word...I made that up). The body is soft and fleshy with several protruding gills along the abdomen. The most notable feature however is the head which has thick, hard skin and a pair of prominent biting chewing mouthparts. The larvae are commonly called "hellgrammites". Larvae of most species live in silty pool areas of where they spend most of their lives as burrowers. They are active predators, taking whatever prey they can catch and consume, and are among the most important predators in lakes and streams.



**Caddisfly:** Most anglers consider caddisflies to be a very important food source, and having an imitation in your pocket is necessary. They are an intermittent food source during the times when it seems like nothing else is working. Their larvae are among the most common insect inhabitants of freshwater habitats, particularly in streams and weeds. The larvae can be found throughout a diversity of habitats. However, most are found in back

cuts adjacent to flowing water.

**Aquatic Moth Larvae:** In North America, there are 75 families of aquatic moths. Most aquatic moths are herbivores. Some species eat plant foliage, while others eat (and burrow into) into stems or roots of plants. Their larvae feed on algae and diatoms found on rock surfaces. Aquatic moth larvae can be found in still, slow, or rapidly flowing water-bodies. They tend to live along the river substrate on rocks or among vegetation. Aquatic moths undergo "complete metamorphosis", which involves passing through four complete life stages. These are the egg, the larvae, the pupa, and the adult stages. Larvae living in different habitats have different ways of breathing. Those that live in slow flowing water may not have breathing gills, while those that live in fast flowing waters require gills in order to breathe.

**Aquatic Nymphs:**

**Mayflies:** Mayflies are the most important insects for anglers to understand, because they are common in our waters. Their behavior varies so widely between families and sometimes even species that it's useful to know and imitate the habits of each. The particular attraction to this awesome creature is the way it swims. It undulates its entire body to move in the water and this drives most fish crazy.



**Stoneflies:** Though less prolific than mayflies and caddisflies, stoneflies make up for in size what they lack in numbers. These large nymphs are welcome food year-round. The larvae of plecopterans, or stoneflies, are one of the most common residents of stony, fast-moving, lotic environments; most commonly cool, small streams and on rocky points. They are therefore highly flattened and have long, filamentous, inarticulate gills.

**Damselflies:** Damselflies mirror the closely related dragonflies. Their nymphs differ in the way they look, move, and respire, but they share the same alpha predator status in the world of aquatic insects. Damselflies are at times important food items to fish in both their larva and adult stages. They are most often found in ponds, lakes, or slow-moving streams.





Freshwater Shrimp

Scuds: Scuds are crustaceans, much like crawfish but smaller. Scuds are generally about the size of some mayfly and caddis larva, most often about one-eighth to three-eighths of an inch in length. Both organisms are found in rivers and still water, but appear in back waters and in bowl lakes quite often. Scud, sometimes called freshwater shrimp, are a primary food source for many panfish. They grow quickly and can survive in a variety of habitats, but they are most prolific in and around weeds. Unlike most aquatic insects, they never "hatch" into a dry form.

they never "hatch" into a dry form.



Water Boatmen

Water boatmen: Are the "true bugs," along with water scorpions, giant water bugs, and backswimmers. They are present in many streams but are more important as a food source in lakes and spring ponds. The nymphs and adults look similar. The adults cannot breathe water, but carry small air bubbles with them for respiration. Water Beetles undergo a complete metamorphosis, but adults and larvae nymphs both exist in the same habitat. Adults resemble other beetles. The larvae are elongated with a hard head, a large, filamentous gill protruding from the end of the abdomen, and a fleshy body.



Phewww we made it!

So with all of these present in our waters it is very understandable why the bite and hot bait, changes from one part of a lake to another. As we all know, the bite changes during different times of the ice season and it may have been caused by a new hatch or lively food source showing up below us. One thing is for sure though...if you have more "bug" options in your pocket you will out produce the others that don't. One reason I put an imitation by the picture of the real one is to show that if you have not yet bought into the plastics revolution, being able to match the food source that is just below the ice may be just the thing you need....Give plastics a shake... or a jig... or a roll... or a swim.

Good Luck and I'll see you out there.....**Scott**



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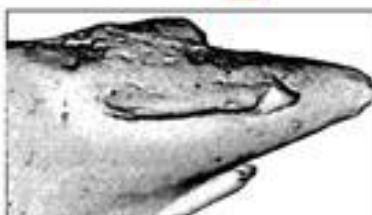
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## *Hunting for Big Spring Crappie*

*By Brian Koshenina*



If you're like me you can't wait for opener. This is just simply "the best time of year", But what to do in the mean time? There's open water, the suns out, the lakes are slowly warming and you are all ready to go? Personally, I like catching big Crappie and here's how I do it.....

First of all, not every lake in your area has a healthy population of Crappie let alone big Crappie. I suggest you do your homework first before you head out. I have a lake that is fairly close to me that has been producing larger size

Crappie year after year and you will often find me there come spring. If you are not as fortunate as I, the first place I would head is your local bait shop. They hear where Crappie are biting every day and they often over hear stories of big Crappie caught. You can always stop in or give them a call, they're always glad to help. If you want even more information, your state wildlife agency should have

information that can be useful. I use the Minnesota DNR "Lake finder". You can get information on just about any lake in your state. From lake maps, fish populations, lake access to gill net numbers, it's on the site. They have recently come out with a mobile app for your phone that allows you to get the same information from the site, anywhere, as long as you have a good signal. This comes in very handy.

Once you have picked out the lake it's time to be efficient. You need to eliminate the areas of the lake you know won't hold fish this time of year. Crappies seek warm water in the spring to spawn, so look for the section of the lake that gets the most sun. Bays, shallow humps, shallow flats with structure and anywhere you find shallow water next to drop offs. This will eliminate about half of the lake. Watch for temperature changes on your electronics and also pay attention to structure variations in shallow water. A couple of seasons ago I was having a hard time finding a good spot that held Crappie. I was watching my Humminbird and noticed a depression





from 4 feet to 6 feet back to 4ft, surrounded by cabbage on a big shallow flat. I marked this spot and waited a few minutes, just encase they were spooky. On my first cast I landed a 17" and after several cast had a limit of Crappie in no time. What this taught me was that, any variation on the bottom, any standing structure, or areas between weeds were spots to target in shallow water.

Boat control is critical in the spring. Most Crappie will be schooled up in small areas so you need to be as stealthy as possible. I usually set my trolling motor no further than 2 on the foot control. I literally

"Creep" up to my marked spots often circling them as I cast. I recommend that you stay at least twenty feet away and make long cast to your spot. Keeping your distance will allow them to stay in a school rather than have them scatter and become less likely to bite.

I go against the rule of using long, light weight rods when I fish for Crappies. I use a medium 7 foot rod with a fast tip. I know it gets intense when you catch a large Crappie on a light weight rod but in the spring but larger fish bite also. When I am slow trolling, searching for Crappies, I will often catch very large Bass and I do not need to snap a light weight rod fighting a 6 pound Large Mouth. I also go against

the grain and use 6 pound mono. I know about the sensitivity factor, light weight rod and line equals more sensitivity and more fish caught but I'm not after the small ones. When I catch large Crappie, I often find that they hit the presentation with authority and not with a light pull. This is when you need to count on your rod and line and there is no room for a chance of losing a potential trophy to a rod snap or a line break.

My lure selection is simple. I use a 1/16 ounce gumball jig, (chartreuse) usually works best tipped with either a Berkley Gulp 3" Black shad or a 2" Mister Twister. I use the Gulp when they are "Up Biting" and a Mister twister when they are chasing the lure. Throwing a small split shot on your line helps get the bait to them faster and makes it less likely that a Blue Gill will bite it first. The presentation I use is what I call "Aggressive" bobber fishing. It sounds "Old Fashioned" but it works! I cast out to the desired spot where I know the Crappie's are holding. If I do not get a bite within 5-7 seconds I reel in and cast out again. Most of the time you are casting into shallow water(Less than 10 feet) so the action can be fast and furious. Using plastics saves time when you fish this way. There is no time to waste losing bait off your hook. You can catch multiple fish on one plastic which keeps you casting when you're on a hot bite.



Take advantage of the time you have before the fishing opener and use these tips. It can make your spring Crappie fishing more successful and the spring much more enjoyable.

1. Sources; Berkley Fishing [www.berkley-fishing.com/Berkley-Gulp!®/Berkley-Gulp,default](http://www.berkley-fishing.com/Berkley-Gulp!®/Berkley-Gulp,default), Mister Twister [www.mistertwister.com/](http://www.mistertwister.com/), State of Minnesota DNR Lakefinder <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/lakefind/index.html>

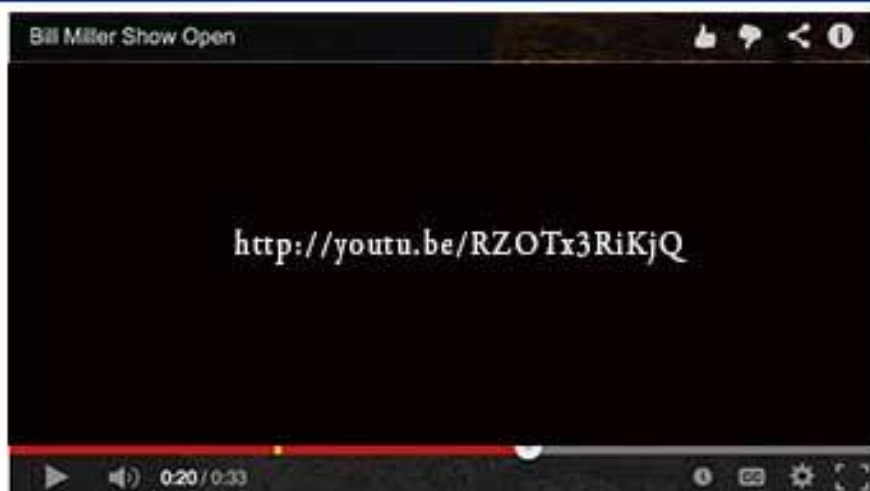
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# North Carolina Winter Coastal Fishing

By Lou Mintzer

W.C. Lanier, a friend of mine, invited me to come down and try the Wilmington trout, reds and striped bass fishing and I finally got there December 3rd.

I was looking forward to winter redfish fishing. Redfish are my favorite inshore target species; as a matter of fact, my New Year's resolutions included a goal to catch them in every state they live over the next year or two. Only six states to go.

Lanier had arranged for two days of very different fishing with two guides: Captain Wayne Crisco and Captain Jot Owens. Both guides are lifelong residents of the Wilmington area and are have great reputations.

My uncle, Joe Baker, Salisbury, N.C., was my fishing partner on this trip.





On Thursday morning we met Captain Wayne Crisco, [www.lastresortcharters.com](http://www.lastresortcharters.com), at the Scott Hills Marina just off of Highway 17 North. We left the dock around 9:30 and only went about a half mile north in Topsail Creek and started throwing Berkley Gulp plastic shrimp on small jigheads toward the grass on the edge of the small islands. We threw as far as we could and reeled the baits as slow as possible.

We were joined by WC Lanier and his fishing buddy, Dexter Johnson, in Dexter's new boat. They fished beside us most of the day.

The catching was fast and furious. Almost every cast got hit by a small but hungry speckled trout. Crisco said he was letting us get warmed up and we would go to his honey-hole soon. He told us that the numbers of juvenile trout was huge this year and that next year should be great for keepers.



After 40-50 short trout we headed to the Harbour Village Marina, in Hampstead. We went between the marina's two main lanes of slips and anchored half-way from the old concrete retaining wall.

Crisco had brought live shrimp along just for this spot. "There are keeper size trout and some reds in here," said the captain. He set up the rods with #6 treble hooks, big corks and the live shrimp. He cast the lines as close to the wall as he could and within minutes, Joe's cork disappeared. "Just reel, reel, reel," Crisco yelled, "keep the line tight!" We had our first keeper in the boat. The light Penn spinning rods made it exciting.

We caught lots of trout, landed several black drum, but only one was a keeper. Finally, the redfish started to hit. We caught four reds, one was big enough to fillet, 22 ½ inches. I had one hit really hard and fast but before I could move him he got around a piling and broke off. It felt twice as big as the others!

We had seven nice trout, one redfish and one black drum in the livewell when Dexter yelled that we should move to the other side of the marina and try to get some of the fish they were marking on their fish finder. But like magic, the biting stopped. We wanted to go back to our hot spot but another boat had moved in and there was not enough room for both boats.

We moved on to Old Point Creek. We threw live shrimp and various lures but only caught short fish.

A pair of bald eagles soared over head, what a rare sight to see, making the day even better.

We finally headed back to the marina and went to Dexter Johnson's man cave to clean the fish and relax.

“What a great day,” exclaimed Joe, “I can take redfish and black drum off my fishing bucket list!”

Friday morning we were up before dawn to meet Captain Jot Owens, [www.CaptainJot.com](http://www.CaptainJot.com), at the public access on the Cape Fear River in downtown Wilmington. Owens is known for his ability to find big flounder, however, this day our target was redfish and stripers.

We headed west up the river to a likely spot and started throwing various colored swimbaits on Penn light spinning tackle for striped bass and redfish. Capt. Jot hooked a small striper within minutes. We drifted along throwing toward the weeds along the bank. About 30 minutes passed and Joe hooked a decent striper.

The Cape Fear River striped bass fishery is closed indefinitely to hopefully rebuild the striper population. One old dam has been removed and other measures are being considered to promote natural spawning.

Another 20- 30 minutes later Joe hooked another striper. Nobody even saw a redfish.



We moved from spot to spot but no strikes. We went into the Brunswick River but no better luck there. Next was the North Cape Fear but again no fish hit our lures.

We motored back toward the city and switched to jigs in deep water along the main channel. Fish showed on the screen but did not like our baits.

We finally quit around 1:30 and headed back to the dock. We talked with several anglers and nobody had a good day. That's fishing!

All things considered we had two good days of fishing and a new experience. The guides were great and really worked

hard. I plan to return in March to try again.

Lou Mintzer is a free lance writer from Mooresville, N.C. Check out his blog, click here: [www.Lou-TimeForFishing.blogspot.com](http://www.Lou-TimeForFishing.blogspot.com).



# Stocking Your Frog Box for 2015

By Glenn Walker

As you look forward to the warmer months of 2015, many of you have begun or will soon begin the process of getting your tackle ready for the new fishing season. When you get to that case, filled with your topwater frogs, there are several varieties of frogs that one can employ during the course of a season of frog fishing for bass.

My go to Snag Proof Frog that I'll have rigged up to begin each day is the Bobby's Perfect Frog. The Bobby's Perfect has the needed weight for me to make long casts, while still having a compact profile allowing for bass to engulf the bait with ease.

If I'm making casts into sparse vegetation or walking the bait back to the boat through open water, I'll use the Ish's Phat Frog, because it walks-the-dog right out of the package. The Phat Frog is also a good choice if you are skipping your bait underneath boat docks or overhanging trees as it has a flat belly and will skip easier.



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The sister to the Phat Frog is the Poppin' Phattie and with the same design its walking ability is spot on, but with its two concave pockets, it will spit water when given a twitch with a rod tip. The Poppin' Phattie is a good choice when bass are feeding on baitfish or bluegills in sparse vegetation, as the splashing from the popper will attract a big bass's attention.

Now if the bass become finicky, whether it's because of a cold front or pressure from other anglers, I'll down size my presentation and go to the Pro Series Tournament Frog. This ¼ oz bait offers a bass a tasty morsel that is a slimmed down approach to the frog choices I outlined above.

As the season moves along and the vegetation becomes increasingly matted, the bass will seek cover from the heat and hide under these dense mats. To attract their attention a wide-bodied bait is needed; the profile of the Bobby's Perfect Frog displaces plenty of water, so this bait was used to create

the Guntersville Frog, by adding rattles in its legs. This combo makes the Guntersville Frog a great option for these scenarios.

I FISH.  
I FISH BECAUSE MY FATHER FISHED.  
I FISH FOR THE STILLNESS OF THE WATER,  
THE THICK MORNING FOG,  
THE SOFT SPLASH IN THE DISTANCE  
AS THE QUARRY LET'S ME KNOW HE'S OUT THERE.  
I FISH FOR THE CHALLENGE OF OUTSMARTING A WORTHY OPPONENT.  
I FISH TO LEAVE THE REST OF THE WORLD BEHIND.  
I FISH TO PIT MYSELF AGAINST NATURE, THE FISH, AND THE ELEMENTS.  
I FISH FOR THE THRILL OF THE STRIKE,  
FOR THE TUG ON THE LINE AS THE FISH TAKES MY LURE.  
I FISH FOR THE SATISFACTION.  
I FISH BECAUSE I RESPECT THE FISH.  
I FISH BECAUSE IT IS IN MY DNA.



As for colors, I like to have a variety of colors, but not go overboard; here is a look at my top five Snag Proof Frog colors.

1. White or Da Man
2. Black or Papa Midnight
3. Sexy Shad or Sexy Ish
4. Brown Bullfrog
5. Fred's Frog

Glenn has been fishing tournaments for over ten years, spreading his passion and knowledge of the sport via articles and videos. For more information check out

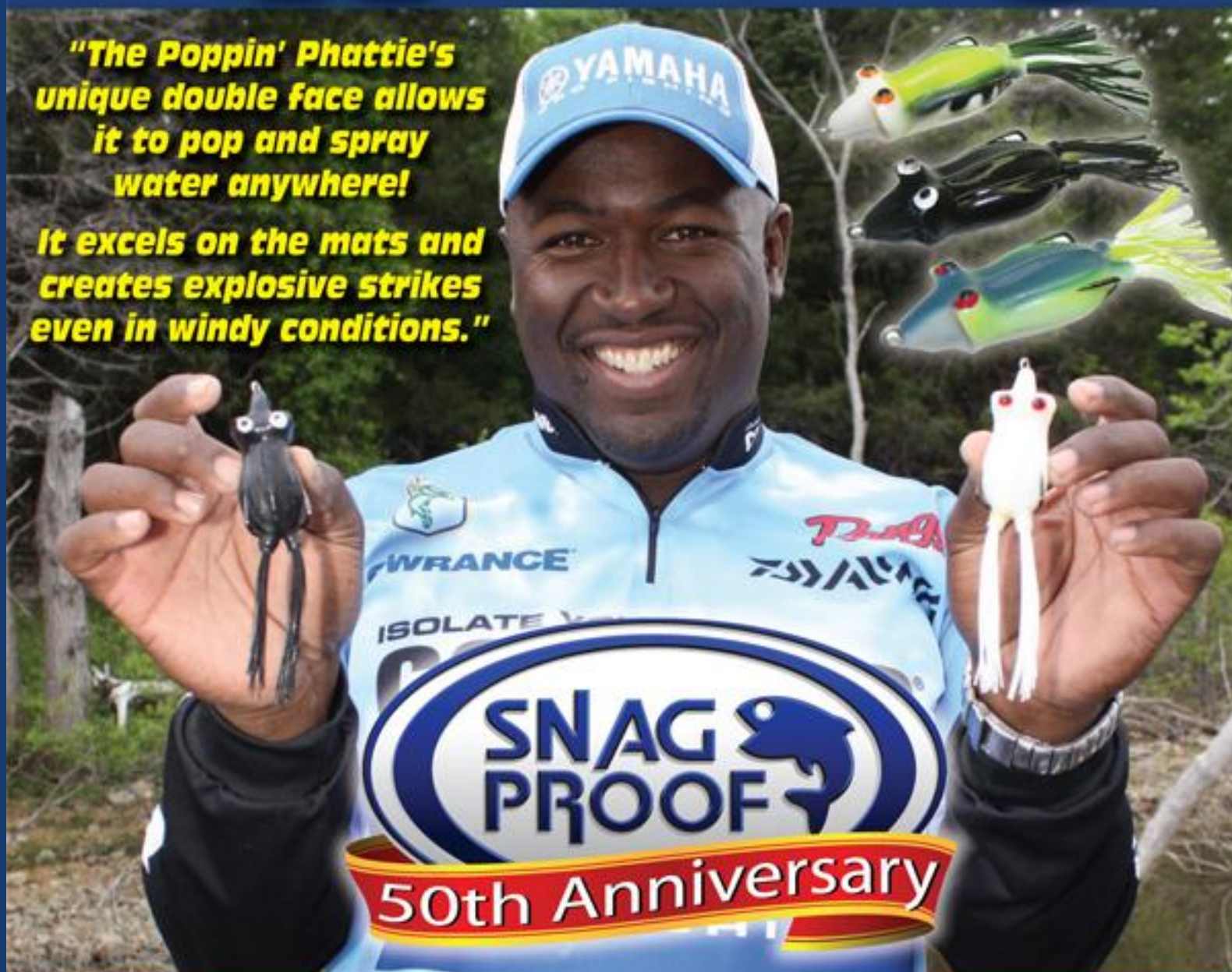
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*Slow troll setup with Driftmaster Stalkers. Dannenmueller says, "Having fully adjustable holders puts the pole handles in easy reach and allows perfect adjustment of each pole tip." Darl Black photo.*

Metabolisms are slow for both fish and fishermen where air and water temperatures remain frigid in early February. Northern lakes are frozen. Middle state lake conditions are determined by temperatures but are usually still cold. There may be some thin ice in coves. Southern waters are open and warming.

### **Madness of the Method**

Any type of trolling to lethargic crappie doesn't sound like a good idea. Alabama businessman and Bobby Garland pro staff fisherman, Dan Dannenmueller, says there are very good reasons why slow trolling is perfect for late winter and early spring crappie.

"Slow trolling has many advantages," says Dannenmueller. "Boat speed is one reason this is a good year-round technique. In warm water the boat can move along quickly. This time of year when it's cold the boat can be made to move at super slow speeds or stopped. For example, the boat can be stopped over a brush pile but when fish quit biting you can move along at 0.1 or 0.2 miles per hour to the next cover. Fish can be caught between structures but the real targets are specific covers. It's called slow trolling but it is a way to present baits slow or stopped.

"Another advantage is multiple baits. My partner and I will use eight long poles with double hook rigs on each one. So that is 16 baits that can be concentrated into a brush pile or moved through the water on a drop-off. Odds are good for a bite when fish are around."

He says other advantages include covering a wide swath of water, using a variety of baits and fishing different depths simultaneously. It works in most waters.

### **Choosing the Spot**

Knowing crappie movements is important. Dannenmueller says, "Cold water crappie, in general, are deep water fish. But their depth depends upon the body of water. It could be 60 feet in some lakes but here



# **Late Winter Slow Troll Crappie**

*By Tim Huffman*



in Alabama in a lake with average depth of 8 to 10 feet with deeper holes, it's much less. The fish are likely to be on a ledge that drops into a hole or channel that's 20 feet deep."

A few days of sunny weather can bring fish up to shallower areas. It only takes a tiny temperature change for shad to move up to the top of a ledge or out on a flat. Crappie will follow the food source. This happens more each week until the spawn.

"Cover is important and there will always be some crappie around good cover. However, I want to see shad. If shad are in a brush pile crappie are likely to be there in big numbers. When shad move to a ledge or flat a percentage of the crappie will move with them. Fish that are following shad are usually active feeders."

Dannenmueller says today's electronics are fantastic. Investing in better electronics is a way a weekend fisherman can change his level of fishing in a hurry.

"I'm a Garmin fan and use model 1040 units. The Side View allows a large area to be seen at once so it takes less time to find drop-offs, cover and shad schools. The Garmin has superior definition and separation so individual limbs, fish and other items are easier to identify. Good electronics, at any level, improves success when slow trolling."

### Catching Fish

"I'll be using 14-foot BnM poles placed in Driftmaster rodholders. Having poles easy to reach is important for both comfort and to get to bites in a hurry," says Dannenmueller.

"Once you have an area found and get the rigs



*The cold water bite may be light but the fish are often large and plentiful.*



*Cold weather is a tough time for tying knots. Having pre-tied rigs that attach to a small clip on the main line makes changing rigs quicker and easier. Tim Huffman photo*

baited, it's time to fish. My favorite structure is a drop-off with several pieces of cover along it. This lets you fish for a while in one area without pulling in poles and motoring. Moving takes time and effort."

He starts along the drop with baits near bottom in 16 feet of water. His speed is 0.2 mph as he moves toward the first piece of cover. He is facing the wind. As soon as he gets off the trolling motor the boat slows to a stop right on the brush pile. All the baits are in perfect position.

"Bites are not typically aggressive in cold water. In March they will be more aggressive. Sometimes it's nothing more than a line moving slightly to the side or the tension comes off the rod tip. You have to pay very close attention or you'll miss the bite. In the winter the fish are just holding in a spot and will reach out and get the bait. The fish don't run off so the bite is subtle."

He likes to pre-tie rigs and uses a clip to attach them to the main line. A typical rig consist of a Mr. Crappie Tru-Turn hook on top, down 18 inches to an inline egg sinker and on down to a Mo-Glo or Road Runner jighead. He uses a variety of Bobby Garland bodies depending upon conditions. A Baby Shad SwimR, Minnow MindR

and the new Ittsy Bitsy are his favorites.

"Each bait gives a very different look," says Dannenmueller. "The Baby Shad SwimR has a swim tail and shad body. It takes very little movement to create a swimming action. It also has a slot for scent so it holds scent for a lot longer than most bodies. The scent is a critical element when fishing a jig without a minnow. The Minnow Mind'R is another good body when tipping with minnows. The Itty Bit is a new, miniature version of the SwimR. It's perfect when fish are very slow and sluggish."

His favorite winter colors include Glacier, Ice Out and Blue Ice. Water color is clearer in the winter so these colors are more natural giving a realistic look. His favorite scent is Mo-Glo Slab Jam.



“Once you fish for a while on each trip you’ll learn which baits fish prefer. You can adjust size and colors to match. Don’t be afraid to experiment with different baits because crappie will surprise us and do the unexpected.”



*C A Bobby Garland 1.25-inch Itty Bit Swim'R rigged on a 1/32 or 1/64 head is a great cold water bait.*

A tip for giving them something different? “That’s easy. Bobby Garland came out with rattle just for crappie fishing. Any medium to large plastic body allows the rattle to be inserted. The rattle isn’t magic but

sometimes the sound is just enough of a difference to trigger a fish into paying more attention and biting.”

He says choosing the right spot is important. Use seasonal movements and electronics to make your choices. If a spot produces you can go to other similar locations and depths with equal result. If the depths you are fishing aren’t working, be sure to change until you find the right combination of depth, structure and baits.

### **Warming Trend Tactics**

In the middle states, temperatures are warming by the end of February and through March. As water warms changes take place so you need to change, too. First, fish start migrating slowly toward spawning sites. This will take place over a period of time but the fish will need to be intercepted somewhere between their winter home and their spawning areas.

Number two is shallow water. Crappie will spend short times going into very shallow water after a day or two of warmer weather, southern winds and sunshine. Some fishermen confuse these movements with spawning activity but they are actually feeding sprees. It only takes a degree or two of warmer water for shad to move from 12 feet to 2 feet of water. Crappie will follow the food. These are usually short-lived periods but provide fast action.

A third change is bait presentation. In general, a water temperature of 70-degrees is when bait speeds can be increased and crappie will chase baits. Boat speeds and casting tactics can be varied with good results. Baits should include action tail jigs.

### **Final Comments**

Dannenmueller says slow trolling in late winter can be an outstanding way to catch big fish. S-l-o-w, methodical presentation of both minnows and jigs can produce good numbers of quality crappie. Only when water warms should you become more aggressive with bait presentations.

Dan Dannenmueller is sponsored by Bobby Garland, Ranger Boats, Yamaha Motors, BnM Poles, Johnson Fishing and others. He won the Crappie Masters Angler Team of the Year in 2011 and 2012. You can find Dan on facebook: Crappie Country Fishing Team and his web magazine [www.CrappieNow.com](http://www.CrappieNow.com).

# Understanding the February to March Patterns

By Captain Mike Gerry

Now that we have arrived into the February time frame finding fish is all about understanding what takes place as the fish migrate toward the spawn. The first thing one must understand is that this time of year the bass become a by-product of their biological clock; in other words their body clocks are telling them the spawn is near and they must prepare themselves to spawn. This natural agenda has the bass on the move looking for spawning grounds as the days warm moving forward.

What you will find is that the deeper water near the spawning grounds becomes areas of staging for the largemouth bass. In other words they congregate outside the spawning grounds where there is a proximity to the bedding flats and move up and back on a continual bases around the staging areas. The interesting point in this time frame is that the sunny days drive the fish into these spawning grounds for some brief period during the day; the muddy red bottom areas of the lake warm quickly on the sunny days and become feeding areas for the bass. It also needs to be pointed out that many different weeds produce the same results like milfoil, primrose, stump and wooded areas or lily pad stems all warm when the sun is out; the reason for this is some areas of the lake have hard bottom ground and these hard bottom areas are where the bass like to spawn.

It is important to remember that the staging is not a large movement by the fish, it comes in small numbers and to find the fish in this scenario one must use search baits as his main presentation to get the big females to bite. Certainly as time moves on through the pre-spawn the numbers of fish moving around the bedding areas increase, but in the early stages like this February time of year is a small nucleus of fish making catching vs. fishing sometimes tough. Understanding these concepts is a big part of pre-spawn fishing, using it to your advantage is another!

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## BOOTS! One Families Travels In BOGS

*By William Schwarz*

This past fall and early winter season called for a good choice in footwear. Post deer hunting season hikes in rain soaked woods and trails, setting up and tending coyote blinds in wet corn fields, everyday domestic walks to the bus stop, shopping, Cub Scout outings and family trips all make a footwear choice hard. I wanted to keep it to one pair of boots as well for the

family. It's cold in New England and a warm, comfortable pair of boots that are 100% water proof is a must. Finding a pair of boots that fit this bill could be another challenge.

Let's start with the conclusion that my entire family came to about the boots we chose, BOGS. These boots were the best boots each of us has ever had and each of us chose boots styles based on our individual needs. BOGS boots rock and I recommend these to families and hunters, without reservation.

A month before the boots arrived at our doorstep, I honestly had never heard of BOGS. I did the basic internet search for great boots, water proof boots, winter boots, kid's boots etc. I live in Maine and it was obvious to me that Google new that as well, since LL Bean kept popping up on every single search. Yes, other boot brands jumped up at me, and I knew of them all. Not BOGS. BOGS were well known already (I just never heard of them) and judging from the reviews I read, they were a good choice. Actually, they were a great choice!

Step back one year and the boots my kids had were seasonal. What I mean is they only lasted a season. Some were comfortable. Some were water proof. Never both! At the end of last winter all the winter boots were tossed and we all jumped into our older boots or bought new spring/summer treads. What a waste. Some of these boots were \$50 or more and my hunting/hiking boots were a bit more than all of them.

So what did we get?

I ended up getting a pair of BOGS Eagle Cap Mossy Oak Men's Hunting Hiker Boots. Great boots to wear on all surfaces, including trails, roads, woods etc. I had no issues. The boots always kept my feet warm. In the field the treads were perfect and show little wear at this time. One test I did was for every single snow storm I wore my BOGS to snow blow the walk ways



and drive ways. Sometimes I was outside for hours. Again I never had an issue with these boots. Comfort was a concern when they arrived. They looked to me as if they would have no give for my feet. Wrong again! After a very short break-in period, I was able to walk with these anywhere. The last extreme test I did was with the kids and their boots and the pair I had. So we stood in a very chilly brook (the brook was 37 degrees Fahrenheit). We stood in the brook for over fifteen minutes playing eye-spy to pass the time. We all had simple cotton socks on and our feet stayed warm and 100% dry the whole time.



My son got a pair BOGS Classic Graffiti Kids' Insulated Boots

in green. That boy has worn these boots to shovel in deep snow, go sledding for hours, during every outside school recess this winter, on hikes and for family errands. Not only are they comfortable, warm and 100% waterproof, but they are very simple to put on with the Easy-on pull handles. As for how they wore. These boots will be easily handed down to my oldest daughter for next year, because these boots still look like new.

My oldest daughter got a pair of boots, that when you first look at them they appeared to be cloth right down to the soles. That might be true of these BOGS Summit Solid Knit Boots, but they are comfortable, warm and 100% waterproof and very simple to put on with the Easy-on pull handles. These boots are constructed of 3mm Bogs Neo-Tech insulation, lined with Bogs Max-Wick™ to absorb and evaporate moisture and DuraFresh bio-technology that activates to fight unwanted odors and are dual-density, contoured EVA footbed with DuraFresh. What does that all mean? They used great materials to build a great boot!

My wife went traditional and pragmatic for her pair and told me well in advance that her boots most likely would be 100% waterproof like most rubber pac boots, but would hurt her feet almost immediate. I was worried, because she is usually right. She got the Plimsoll Prince of Wales High Women's Insulated Boots and they were a welcomed addition to her boot collection. As you wear these boots, you know they are not your grandmother's old green pacs, or you new improved pacs you see on the market today. These BOGS boots passed the test of comfort, warmth and 100% waterproof with ease. I see my wife wearing these for years to come.



So this spring when you are looking for rain boots, or fall when you are looking for new hunting boots do a Google search for BOGS. These boots will not break the bank, and are an extreme value for what you get. ODU recommends BOGS.



# RAPALA'S NEW SHADOW RAPS SHIMMY SEDUCTIVELY WHILE SUSPENDING

## Dynamic Jerkbaits Mimic Minnow's Last Moments to Trigger Big Bites



At day's end, a shadow doesn't die, it slowly fades away. So it is with Rapala's new suspending jerkbaits, the Shadow Rap® and Shadow Rap® Deep. Combining a horizontal struggle with a vertical fade, the lure perfectly mimics a minnow's final, quivering moments before its end of days — triggering unforgettable strikes as

predator fish move in for an easy meal.

"The Shadow Rap does something I've never seen another bait do — I call it the 'death quiver,'" said three-time Bassmaster Classic qualifier and 2014 Forrest Wood Cup Champion Randall Tharp. "When you pause it on slack line, it shimmies from side to side as it's suspending there. So even when it's sitting still, it looks just barely alive."

Tharp and fellow Rapala® pros Michael Iaconelli, Brandon Palaniuk, Ott DeFoe and Jacob Wheeler will all be armed with Shadow Raps later this month at the 2015 Bassmaster Classic on South Carolina's Lake Hartwell. The baits will be unveiled there to the public for the first time, but the Rapala pros have had them for months. And they are impressed. Big time.



"It could win the Bassmaster Classic," said Palaniuk, the 2013 Classic runner-up. "You can bet that the Rapala Shadow Rap is going to be in my boat."



Wheeler, a FLW Forrest Wood Cup champion and runner-up, is equally enthusiastic about the Shadow Rap heading into his first Classic.

Hartwell," said Wheeler. "That bait does stuff that not another bait out there in the market does."

While most jerkbaits follow a forward trajectory with each twitch of the rod tip, the Shadow Rap's action stands out. "Not only will it dart side to side, but with a certain jerk, you can make it spin around almost 180 degrees," Tharp explained. "But it also moves vertically too — it will dive



down, then move up.” So a Shadow Rap will trigger bites on its initial kick and its snap back to life, as well as on its slow-fading fall.

“It’s perfect — it’s exactly what I want,” said Iaconelli, the 2003 Classic Champ. “I want that bait to have these little tiny movements — little tiny flashes and rolls. Then, on the pause, I want it to be just barely lurking out — just barely going down.”

Featuring a minnow body profile, flat sides and metallic finish with textured scales, the Shadow Rap is designed to target bass and other gamefish in two-to-four feet of water. The Shadow Rap Deep targets fish in four-to-eight feet. Both models come armed with three No. 6 VMC Black Nickel Round Bend Hooks and are available in 14 color patterns: Albino Shiner, Blue Back Herring, Blue Ghost, Bone, Bud, Carbon, Clown, Ghost, Ghost Shiner, Moss Back Shiner, Olive Green, Purplodescent, Silver and Yellow Perch. Each measures 4 3/8 inches and weighs 7/16 of an ounce.

“The Shadow Rap’s going to be a player for me — both the regular Shadow Rap and the Shadow Rap Deep,” Iaconelli said. “These lures are great at imitating what those fish are feeding on.”

The Rapala Shadow Rap and Shadow Rap Deep are available at sporting goods retailers nationwide. For more information visit [www.Rapala.com](http://www.Rapala.com) or connect with the brand at [www.Facebook.com/RapalaUSA](https://www.Facebook.com/RapalaUSA).

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# Angling Virginia TV

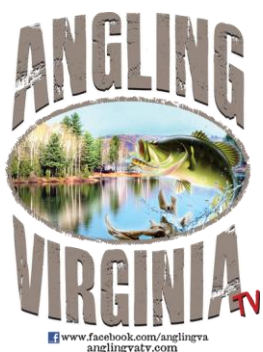
By Ken Presley



Old man winter has securely settled in here in the state and a new year has begun; however, we here at Angling Virginia TV have not slowed down at all. We are smack in the middle of the trade show season, and now embarking on our 2nd season of Angling Virginia. The Angling Virginia TV Season #1 aired in 2014 on the Richmond's FOX 35, as well as Roanoke's FOX 21/27. The show created a lot of buzz and built up a fan base with a great deal of positive momentum. Shane and I

are using that momentum from the AVA Fans and steam-rolling into season #2. In Season #1, we traveled across the state of Virginia, meeting up top local anglers on their home bodies of water, and showing the great fisheries this state has to offer. We made it to some wonderful destinations such as, Smith Mountain Lake, Shenandoah River, and Lake Anna. This was just a few and now the filming and production of Season #2 is before us.

AVA Season #2 calendar is already filling up with exciting and new destinations on tap. This season we look to travel to the James River. We plan on tackling the James River various locations, which will exemplify its beauty and unique characteristics. The upper part of the James River will give us the opportunity to catch Muskie and Smallmouth Bass. We are also looking at fishing the middle section of the James River. This is similar to the upper section; however, much bigger, with more tributaries and the fishing might be a little harder to figure out. Lastly, we will be fishing the lower James River, where we will be downstream from our state's capital. We will be traveling to smaller lakes, such as Claytor Lake, Philpott Lake and others, where we will be dissecting them with local anglers and teaching our viewers about these areas and how to approach these bodies of water, or your home body of water the next time you go fishing. We are also planning on fishing one body of water and trying to capture the Largemouth Bass, as they go through their migration of Pre-Spawn, Spawn, and Post-Spawn. We will be demonstrating how the bass move in these different seasonal patterns and how they act and react to anglers and baits, and maybe catching a few along the way. These are just a few areas we are planning on visiting. There are many more, where we plan to take advantage of our wonderful Virginia State Parks. We try to utilize these great facilities whenever we





can. Cozy cabins, cool hiking trails, and easy water access, makes for a wonderful visitation. Speaking of state parks, we will also be utilizing a very nice day park along the Potomac River. Have the opportunity to fish the Potomac River, with two well-known local anglers of the Potomac



River. I'm hoping we can catch a few fish, and also, capture the beauty of the river as it meanders around our Nation's Capital, seeing sites such as the Washington Monument, Jefferson Memorial, and

Reagan National Airport, where the planes come in and take off so low, they grab your attention every time.



Again, this is our second season and we will be airing 13 new episodes, in the Richmond viewing area on FOX 35. Look for these new episodes to start up on the first weekend in July 2015 and continue on until the end of September 2015. Official day and time is to be determined, however, we invite you to follow us on Facebook at:

<https://www.facebook.com/anglingVA>.

This way you will be able to keep up with the most recent Angling Virginia information, news and contests. We also invite you to check out our website at [www.AnglingVATV.com](http://www.AnglingVATV.com). Here you can watch the previous episodes from Season #1. See the action from the Shenandoah River, James River, Smith Mountain Lake, Lake Anna, Rappahannock River, and Occoquan Reservoir. Angling Virginia would like to thank ALL our Sponsors on a successful season #1 and looking forward to Season #2.



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As spring approaches and the fishing continues to get better the thought that enters my mind every year is will my body hold up allowing me to fish every day. Eight hours on the water day in and out requires me to try to strengthen parts of my body every year to hold up under the physical and mental stress.

## The Physical Demands of Bass Fishing

*By Captain Mike Gerry*

Being well into my 60's in age forces me to pick my body parts that I feel needs some

conditioning to continue a daily fishing routine. I suggest you all do the same, but picking what needs a little strength and conditioning requires you to understand what body parts need the work. Most folks don't realize that your hands, arms and shoulders probably take most the brunt of being on the water every day. Sure you have to be able to keep your legs strong but the real pain falls on your hands, arms and shoulders.

My routine of strengthening is very simple, I take and work my hands with those hand conditioning spring loaded exercise grippers; these grip strengtheners are very simple to use and is something you can use while sitting and watching TV and purchase very cheaply. If you spend a little time analyzing what this little spring loaded gripper affects you will realize that it works everything in your hands, arms and shoulders, if you push your limits enough to strain yourself. I work both hands in sets of a hundred and do it 10 to 15 times with each hand on a daily bases. Those grippers will strain you from your hands to your shoulders giving those areas quite the workout and after you have done nearly 1500 with each hand on a daily bases you really feel the results.

Although fishing is a recreational sport that is suppose to require just a little time to create some fun; the results you get can many times depend on physical ability to enjoy your time on the water. If your hands and forearms are cramping up on you after a few hours of fishing it certainly can take the fun out of a planned fun day of fishing. Very little money, a little time and some commitment to conditioning and you can vastly improve your chance at having a great day on the water.

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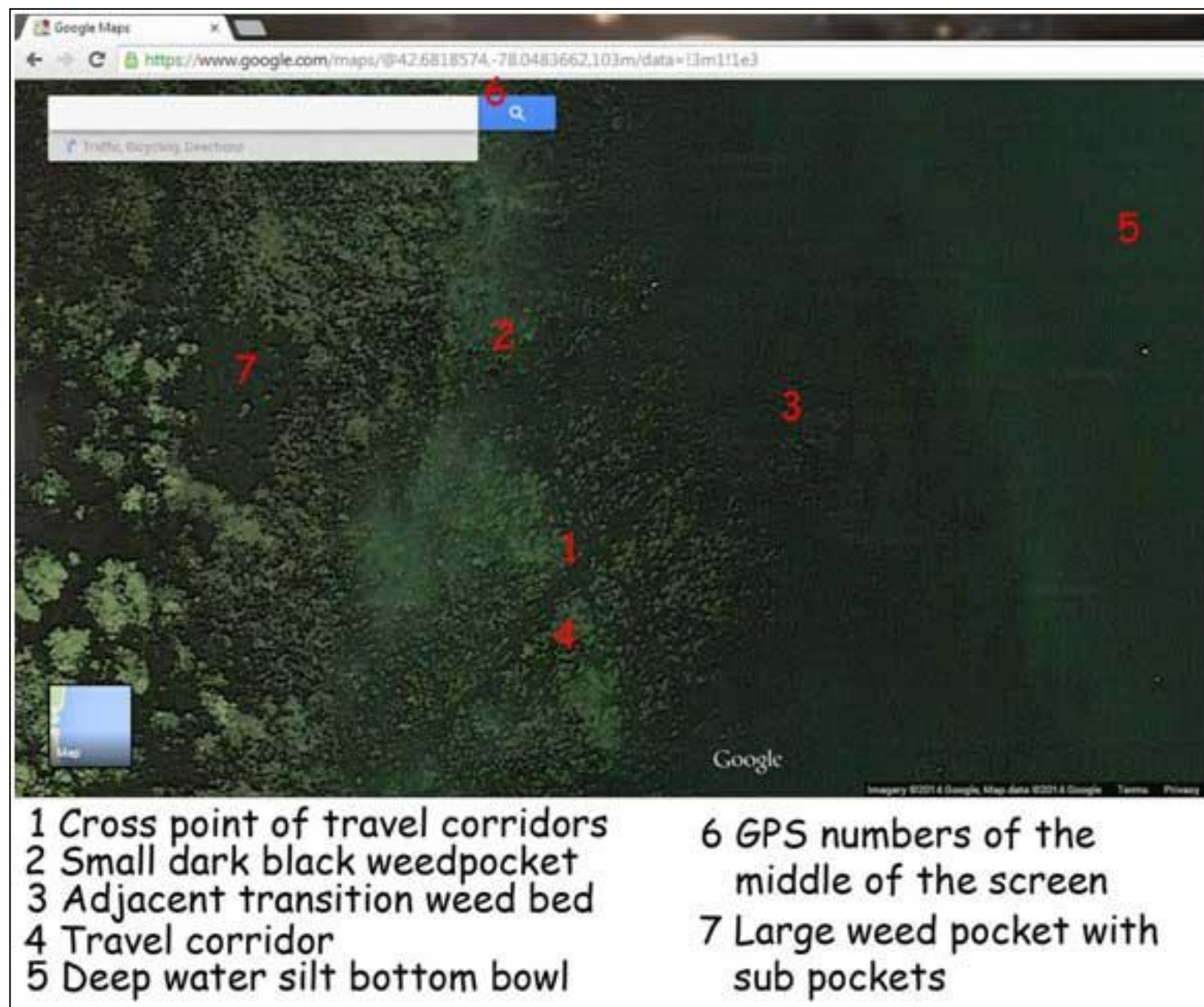
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# Cyber Warfare On Fish

By Scott Brauer



One of the most asked questions I get at seminars is where do I start on a lake??? Truth is sometimes the search begins before leaving home. With a simple Google image search of the lake you are fishing that day and a little preplanning, you may be able to make your most productive moves on a lake from your easy chair. Check out the zoomed in image of the lake below and create a cyber-attack plan for your next outing.

Using Google images to “catch” fish is not that hard. Fish are creatures of habit and we can take advantage of that by understanding how and where they move. One way to do that, is drill out an area

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and to do some old fashion leg work. Searching the old way wastes valuable time on the ice and the way I explain below can be done before your creepers hit the ice.

Open Google and search for your lake. Then turn on satellite and zoom all the way in on the areas of the lake that you are fishing. Follow my logic using the map above and then mark the areas of interest to start that day.

### **1 Crosspoint of travel corridors**

Finding a spot like this on a lake can be gold. Hot holes are no accident and if we recognize what makes them occur it is easier to be the one on the 'Hotness'. What I marked with 1 is an area that at least four travel routes converge. This area will be productive because with all of the routes coming together new fish will be swimming by all day. If you spook fish by pulling one through a school it is not as big of a deal in a travel corridor. The "new" fish that are always moving in travel corridors do see their buddy heading up to spend some quality time with you, so the hot hole

remains hot!

### **2 Small dark black weedpocket**

Large panfish fish like cover so in many cases the biggest fish we flop for the year come out of thick vegetation. Trophy panfish wait outside of small pockets like this to use as attack and retreat feeding spots. They eat well and can make it back to safety with the flip of a tail.

### **3 Adjacent transition weed bed**

This one is more subtle so look again at the map. This is a small patch of weeds just off the large bed. This location can act like a staging area between cover, food and the deep bowl where they will spend much of their day cruising. It also works just the opposite at the end of the day and fish will stop by and see if a food source is present prior to heading back to the weeds for the evening bite. This is a great place to target crappies up high in the water table.

### **4 Travel corridor**

Understanding that fish travel on natural paths through the weeds is essential for a few reasons. First, if you set up on a travel corridor you have fresh fish coming by during the active times of the bite. Second, if there is a feed pocket at the end of a corridor fish the feed pocket and set tipups or tipdowns on the



travel routes, because apex predators that we target with those tools like to sit on corridors and attack from cover.

### **5 Deep water silt bottom bowl**

This is an area that we can fish during the slower hours of the bite. Walleyes, Northerns, Perch and Crappies often cruise these open areas looking for food all day long. Silt bottoms hold a variety of aquatic insects and year of young fish that the predators can chase down and eat. The problem is the fish are always on the move so fishing these areas can be frustrating. Try chumming if it is legal in your state to keep fish below you. Another trick is to put down some artificial structure to hold fish in the area longer. I use Reel Weeds from LaDredge Outdoors and create a bed where there is no structure present, you will be surprised how Reel Weeds will attract and hold fish. Again if it is legal in your state I will also crush waxies and minnows right into the Reel Weeds and that often starts a feeding frenzy.

### **6 GPS numbers of the middle of the screen**

Placing your cursor directly on the area of the map that you want, left click on it. This pinpoints the GPS# and places it in the web address. Write those numbers down and if will give you a spot to start looking that day. The beauty of using Google images is that they update pictures so much more often than lake maps. You are seeing real time weed images usually no older than 18 months.



### **7 Large weed pockets with sub pockets**

Weed pockets with surrounding sub pockets are great areas to drill out and hole hop. If you have cover and holes in the cover you will most likely have fish. As long as the weeds are still alive this area can be one where you set up for the day with the family and as long as you keep moving and fishing different holes in the weeds you can produce big numbers and have a blast with kids doing it. The travel corridors will funnel new fish in and this area and for me would be a must check to see if it is holding fish. The sheer size of it is easy to find and is worthy of some time.

So if you are not a “techno geek” no big deal, ask your grandkids to help you with this technology, chances are they can. If you are, you can also track your route live time on your smart phone and see right where you are on a lake as well. Either way making a plan before you hit the ice and putting it into play when you get there, can maximize your efficiency on the ice and put more fish in your bucket which may be the pot at the end of the rainbow! Go gettem...

I'll see you out there! Scott

# Which Boat Is Best For You?

By Bob Jensen

It's Boat Show and Sportshow season across North America. It's also the season when many anglers and boaters are looking for a different boat for the upcoming fishing and boating season. There are lots of options available. If you're going to be looking for a new-to-you boat to go fishing in, here are some things to keep in mind.

The first thing, and probably the primary thing to consider is how you want to steer your boat, with a steering wheel or with the tiller handle. With the steering wheel you'll sit behind the steering wheel and drive the boat like you would a car. With tiller steering, you'll sit in the back of the boat and hang on to a handle extending from the engine. The steering and speed control are in that handle. If you've never run a tiller boat before, there is a bit of a learning curve, but you'll catch on quickly.

The advantage of the steering wheel is you're probably going to be familiar with the steering. You'll also have a windshield, so you'll be more protected from the elements and spray when you run from spot to spot. If you're traveling long distances by water, the steering wheel is much less tiring than the tiller steering, although there are tiller-assist kits that really reduce fatigue from tiller steering.

The advantage of tiller steering is that it really opens up the boat. The steering console is gone, so there's lots of room to move around.

Boat control is also better with the tiller when you're employing some techniques, especially if you'll be backtrolling for walleyes. Some of the electric motors that go on the bow do an outstanding job for boat control, but if you want the ultimate in boat control while backtrolling, a tiller boat provides that. Back in the day, almost all of the walleye guides and tournament guys fished out of tiller boats that were eighteen feet long and had a fifty horsepower motor. Now, because they're fishing bigger water much of the time, console boats with steering wheels are the deal, although there are some twenty foot tiller boats with big outboards on the back of them out there.





Keep in mind also if you'll be pulling skiers or tubers. This can be done with a tiller boat, but it's easier done with a console boat.

Consider how much you'll be on big water. If most of your fishing is done on big bodies of water and you'll be running several miles or longer on a regular basis, a wheel boat will probably be better.

If you like to fish the smaller lakes and rivers that aren't affected by the wind so much and you won't be running long distances, a tiller boat might be perfect for you.

Tiller boats usually require less horsepower, so the cost to get into a tiller boat is usually less. Also, with a tiller boat you can fish from the back, so you don't need an electric motor or depth-finder on the bow, and you won't need a kicker motor either. You can put a transom mount electric motor back by the outboard for the slowest presentations if you want.

I ran a Larson FX 1750 tiller boat last year. It had an Evinrude E-TEC 90 HO for power. This rig did an outstanding job for me. I fished some lakes that were large, but mostly smaller lakes. I didn't miss the steering wheel all that much, although there were a couple of times when a wheel boat probably would have been better.

If you're thinking about a new-to-you boat this year, keep these ideas in mind. If you do, you're on the way to a boat that will do a good job most of the time.

To see the newest episodes of Fishing the Midwest television, go to [www.fishingthemidwest.com](http://www.fishingthemidwest.com). If you do Facebook, check us out for a variety of fishing related things.

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**Final Ice**







# Hang 'em High Panfish

Find near-surface 'forage bands' for more mid-winter crappies, 'gills & more

By Jack Torrance



Northern, Minnesota ice fishing guide Brian “Bro” Brosdahl says it took him years to figure out what happened to the panfish on some of his local lakes during mid-winter.

“There was a time when I’d drill a hundred holes and never see one fish on the screen. But then I figured it out—fish were sliding to the sides high in the water column, just off the transducer cone, whenever I’d crash into their living room.”

Still, he wasn’t quite sure why the fish were so high in the water column.

“It wasn’t an oxygen issue like you see in shallow natural lakes with a lot of snow cover. The fish were not going hypoxic. I knew it had to be food-related.”

Thanks to an underwater camera, the pieces fell into place.

“Even though the optics weren’t as good in those days, I could see feeding fish off to the sides of my holes. Since, I’ve discovered that zooplankton, bloodworms, insects of all kinds will come up high in the water column in

mid-winter, especially when we have a lot of snow. And some are pretty giant ‘forage bands.’ In darker waters, insect life can push up high all winter. These organisms need light. And the fish follow.”

These days, Bro has an Aqua-Vu Micro forever on the ready, typically slung around his neck in the new Pro Viewing case. “This is where the Micro works really well. Drop the camera down the hole, look sideways and go to the fish.”



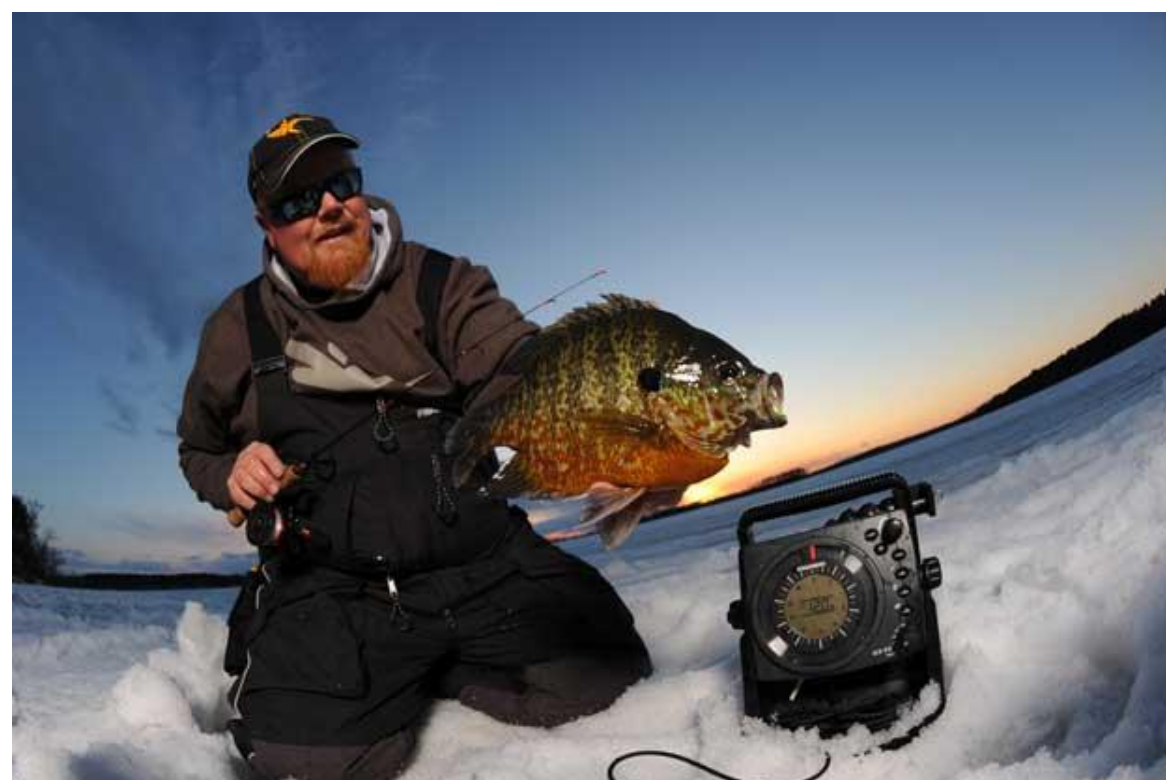


In stained waters, Bro will swing the transducer of his Humminbird ICE-55 or 688ci Ice Combo side to side to reveal any fish pushed off to the side when drilling. “Or you can hang your transducer on a dowel and angle it down the hole and see fish that way, too.”

Bro adds that it’s not just bluegills and crappies that will push up high into the water column.

“I’ve found perch just a few feet below the ice over 20 feet of water, which were hard to see on electronics. You’d drill a hole and they’d cruise, avoiding the hole at all costs. That’s when you have to slush up your hole and use plastics like the Northland Impulse Bloodworm or Mayfly,” says Bro.

He says that while the perch will rise high to feed, they’re “like vampires,” and repel from any unnatural light.



“This is where a lot of guys go wrong. Leave the slush in your hole! Keeps the light penetration to a minimum. All that housekeeping is hurting you,” says Bro.

To get through the slush, Bro uses his Humminbird transducer to punch a hole big enough for his jig.

“Back in my old ice tournament days guys would follow me and





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poach my holes. So I'd leave the slush in to deter them, but in the process noticed I caught a lot more fish. That's when I started my 'jousting' technique. I'd pull my jig up to the rod tip and shove the rod into the slush and down the hole, and then open the bail. I had one of these tailpipers behind me one day and I hear this loud 'snap' and he broke his rod trying to do the same thing. His eyes were on me like a hawk, doing everything I was doing. I got a good chuckle out of that!"

Although tungsten jigs have become the new standard for icing panfish, Bro says good ol' fashioned lead is a better choice when fish are just below the ice.

"Rate of fall is everything.

Tungsten's great for deep water but when fish are really high in the water column – or in shallow or pressured waters – you can spook fish with fast-falling tungsten.

Instead, I'm looking for a good hook and jig head shape like the



flat-bottomed lead Gill Getter or Hexi Fly because it has that slow rate of fall. Both have a big, super-sharp Mustad fly hook built or easy threading plastics and sticking in panfish mouths."

He adds that a simple unweighted jig head-style hook – even a Kahle hook – threaded with a plastic, maggot or waxy can be a great way to catch fish right below the ice, too.

"The other real sleeper tactic is suspending a tethered crappie minnow 3 to 4 feet below the ice. It's a great way to filter through smaller 'gills and catch the bulls. And it's a no-brainer for crappies."

Bro advises a slow sweeping hookset with a light-action rod when hanging panfish high.

"There's no forcing the panfish up. You've gotta let them do their thing and get your hand underneath 'em at the hole, especially when using ultra-light 2-pound mono. You've got some stretch, but they can pressure snap it if you don't take your time."

Locations

Bro says drilling a lot of holes is great for finding spots, but over-drilling when fish are up high is a no-no. He recommends zig-zagging holes or pre-drilling to come back and fish hours later.

“Lately, I’ve switched from gas-powered augers to a Milwaukee M18 FUEL ½-inch power drill attached to a 6-inch Nils USA Arctic Trekker blade. It’s lightweight, has a ton of torque, and cuts like a dream. It’s also segmented so you can remove portions of the blade you don’t need for early or late ice.”

Typically, Bro scouts for spots where structure comes up high in the water column, even better if there’s a mud-bottomed basin nearby.

“Find something like a sunken island or underwater point near a muddy basin and it’s a one-two punch. Chances are there’ll be some kind of forage bands nearby—and panfish.”

Another common location for high-riding pannies and their food source can be picked out from the ice surface itself.

“Pressure ridges, too. But be super-cautious. Definitely keep your distance with any kind of vehicle and have ice picks, a life jacket, rope and a fishing buddy. But, whenever you see some kind of ice formation, chances are there’s something similar underneath. Forage will often collect around the underwater ice formations where sunlight penetration is better. Again, the panfish aren’t typically far away. Predators, too.”

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# For the Love of Burbot

By Brett McComas –  
HSM Outdoors

Ferocious, aggressive and awkwardly flexible, eelpout are remarkable predators that have become one of my favorite species to target through the ice. These Ultimate Fighters swing with heavy fists. Once they realize they've been hooked, hold on, things are about to escalate quickly!



The fight was what first got me hooked on this misunderstood water dragon. Hooking into just a small-to-medium (schmedium) sized pout you'd swear that you were pulling up a 27"+ walleye. The combination of their hefty guts and the rockstar-esque head banging is sure to put a smile on even the burliest of beards. That being said, I don't just do it for the fight; I do it for the love of burbot.



With a single whisker under its chin, just like I had up until my mid-twenties, I can't see myself connecting with any other species of fish on a more personal level. They proudly rock a beer-belly for Pete's sake. If I could share bunk beds with one, I would. Swapping stories until we fell asleep, both dreaming of that next bacon cheeseburger... Even our sleep schedules would conveniently line up as they are



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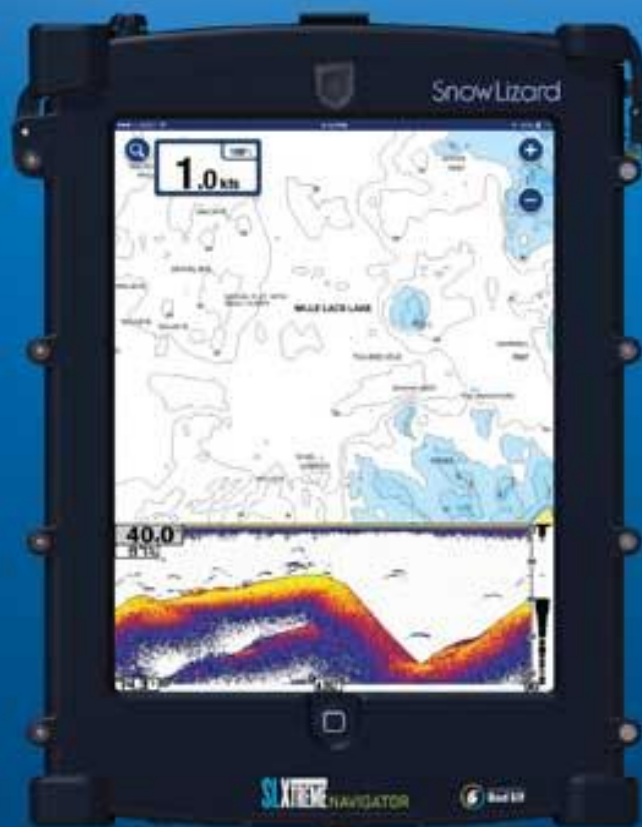
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the Night Owls of the fish community.

Never eat right before going to bed? Eelpout disregard the advice from all of those fancy nutrition magazines, regularly opting for the late night snack run instead. While you can catch the occasional pout during the day, the prime bite occurs after dark and well into the night. During daylight hours I seek out deeper water in the 30-50 foot range at the bottom of the break near the deepest holes in the lake. As the evening progresses, I will gradually work my way into shallower water until I'm fishing on top of the hump/flat that levels off in 10-20 feet of water. Focus on fishing the very edge of the top of the flat before it breaks off into deeper water. Hard, gravel bottomed humps are king, especially in late February and March when eelpout spawn on bigger bodies of water. Don't overlook deep weed edges at the bottom of steep break lines during those midwinter months.



I prefer using jigging spoons that are at least 5/8 oz all the way up to 1 1/8 oz depending on how deep we are fishing. You want it to be heavy enough to allow you to pound the lake bottom, stirring things up and calling those nosy burbots in from a distance. My go-to jigging spoon is called the Trout-N-Pout made by Big Nasty Tackle. It has a relatively compact profile for its weight, providing the perfect balance of bottom pounding ability with the necessary flutter/wobble for enticing the picky biters. Green Glow and Glow Blue are tough colors to beat. Local pout expert Jason Rylander put it best, "I have been playing with larger profile baits and having real nice success. Again glow is key, but these fish are not afraid to go after a big offering". These particular spoons also have built in rattles for added attraction.





Tip them with a matching pair of shiner heads and you're in business, the business of burbot, which is an outstanding business to be in.

Keep tight to bottom, burbot primarily feed near bottom. I like to “pound bottom” several times to stir things up, promptly afterwards I will lift my spoon up 6-10” off of bottom and dance it in place, making the 2-3 shiners heads do a tantalizing dance as they disperse scent and vibration into the water. The majority of the time your rod will load up with dead weight as you go to lift your presentation off of bottom. That being said, don’t neglect to keep a close eye on your flasher. Some

of your bigger bites from the night could very well come through as a large, active blob on the Vexilar that will quickly pounce on a glob of goodness slowly raised up and placed in front of their face. After they bite, sit back and enjoy the ride.

Never leave a man behind. It used to be very common to see the random burbot lying slaughtered on the ice, frozen and wasted. This is an illegal act, one of which is very ignorant and frowned upon with any species and eelpout are no different. They provide exceptional table fare! Boiled or deep fried, burbot are known as the “poor man’s lobster” for a reason. If you aren't going to take the time to clean what you catch, let it go for another person to enjoy the epic battle that ‘pout offer. I realize there is no limit on burbot, but let's practice selective harvest. Keep the males if possible and let those big ladies swim.

Respect the ‘pout. You're sure to gain a new found appreciation for these leopard printed hand bags with shoulders after hooking up with one!







# Alone Or In Groups, The Frozen St. Lawrence Offers Both

**By Lawrence Gunther**

**Alone Or In Groups,  
The Frozen St.  
Lawrence Offers Both**

**By Lawrence Gunther  
Feel the Bite!**

Think about how much water spills over Niagara Falls. Add in a couple dozen more rivers and that will give you an idea of the volume of water flowing down the St. Lawrence River. Now, ask yourself if you would ever consider ice fishing on the Niagara? The answers probably no, but guide Todd Beckstead has made it his business to safely take ice anglers out on to the frozen St. Lawrence.

Whether you prefer your water soft or hard, there's no

shortage of opportunity to catch all manner of species on the St. Lawrence River. How the day unfolds can be just as interesting, including opportunities for fishing together with your friends for jumbo Perch, spreading out to jig over fast moving deep water for monster Walleye, and everything in between. Known for its excellent Largemouth, Smallmouth, Pike, Walleye, Musky, catfish and Carp, the St. Lawrence River from the Thousand Islands on east to Montreal has been producing record sizes and numbers of fish for decades.

We caught up with Todd Beckstead exchanging news with the owners at "Bite Me Bait and Tackle" in Morrisburg. While the store may be a relative new-comer, this well stocked fishing store offers a surprisingly wide range of equipment and bait. Todd is intimately connected to the pulse of the St. Lawrence, and while his passion may be fishing, his three-part guiding philosophy is founded on ensuring clients are safe and secure, everyone is having a good time, and fish are being caught.

The bulk of our day was spent fishing for jumbo Yellow Perch. This is the type of fishing that actually gets better the closer you fish together. With four of us comfortably arranged in a Frabill Thermal

# Feel The BITE!

Headquarters 4-6 person pop-up shelter and four good-sized holes drilled, it wasn't long before Todd had called over the first Perch of the day.

Fish whisperer is one term that could easily be applied to Todd. Nothing humans can hear above the ice, but made startlingly evident time-and-time-again as Todd dropped down a large five cm long rattle bait to attract the Perch. Within seconds no fewer than six Perch would be clustered around the bait five-meters below

taking turns launching attacks on this unknown potential food source. Having triggered their feeding instinct, Todd would quickly retrieve the bait resulting in the Perch dispersing to seek alternatives. The rest of us would simply twitch and hold still small offerings of two cm long minnows or live maggots on size 12 1/32 oz. jigs. Within seconds of the dinner bell's ringing coming to an end, double and often triple headers would result.

Thanks to countless Zebra Mussels the water of the St. Lawrence is almost crystal clear making it easy to witness directly the different ways Perch strike. Some Perch choose just to watch, while others cautiously taste the minnow or maggot to satisfy their curiosity. And then there are those who rush in to slam your bait. Twitching is usually all that's needed to trigger the strike, but occasionally letting the bait rest on bottom does the job.

Sonar and colour video displays are not essential kit. Use shorter rods and seating that keeps you

positioned erect so you can easily observe what's taking place through the hole at your feet. The dark interior of the Frabill and the natural light that was penetrating the surrounding 20 cm of solid ice made viewing the scene below almost magical. The way our four 10" holes were positioned, it also made it possible to observe the action taking place





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Marauding Pike weighing upwards of 10 kilos can quickly send Perch fleeing for the shelter of nearby weeds. That's when you hope the large 20 cm long Sucker minnows rigged on tip-ups come into play. Placed well away from our Frabill shelter, the tip-ups provided a welcome break from sitting hunched over holes.

My BlueTipz Bluetooth wireless strike indicator worked flawlessly in alerting me to incursions from Pike. A small light-weight transmitter clipped to the flag of my Frabill XX tip-up instantly triggers an app on my smartphone to notify me that the flag is up. The warning will sound for a minute before turning off and automatically re-setting.

Perch seem to roam ceaselessly. Whether to stay warm or two seek out schools of silver shiners and Big Eye that make up their regional diet, one need not wait long for perch to appear below. Prolonged spells of extreme cold will slow down their metabolism and activity levels; conversely, a stretch of milder weather will trigger intense action.





Twice I was sent scrambling. The first time my sucker was relatively unharmed but Pikeless. A bleeding wound to the Sucker's back resulted in a scent trail. Less than 30 minutes later I was back running for my tip-up and hand-lining around 30 meters of line. Two good runs later I lost the brute at the hole. We did manage to make visual contact with the Northern just as she spat the sucker though, and Todd estimated its size at between three to four kilos. Good fun never-the-less and what I like to think of as a quick-and-easy hook release at the hole. More importantly however, is the lack of a visual photographic record that would have otherwise prevented me from expanding on this particular epic battle in future.

A second quick release scenario I managed to execute in broad view of my fishing companions was a sizeable catfish that shook off and slid back down the hole. Todd came close to attempting a recapture by hand, but thought twice given the kitty's stingers that would have no doubt found flesh. I'm guessing



## The St. Lawrence River

The river was expanded when the St. Lawrence Seaway was developed in the 1960s that saw the installation of a series of dams and locks to facilitate the passage of large ocean-going ships. This deepening and broadening of the river has resulted in its now possessing dual personalities. There's the fast-flowing current along its deep channel that ranges from 10 to well over 50 meters in depth, and then there are the numerous broad flats hosting a mix of sandy bottoms and weed beds complete with shoals that extend from land for hundreds of meters. Throw in a network of submerged roadbeds and building foundations, and it all adds up to wide-ranging habitat supporting an even greater variety of aquatic life. While it's true many of the animals that call the St. Lawrence home are relatively new-comers, (invasives), thanks to tougher environmental regulations and a significant reduction in industrial activities along its shorelines, the native species are managing a comeback. The escalating quality of fishing has not gone unnoticed as made evident by the increasing number of local, national and international fishing competitions now staged annually along both its Canadian and U.S. banks.

that after the Pike incident, he was on to my ways and wanted to ensure that this time there was a photographic record.

Lots of Perch and a few monsters to boot. Good times were had by all as we hunkered down and enjoyed the warmth of the roomy insulated shelter made toasty with two small heaters in spite of the sunless, frosty and breezy conditions. However, 3: p.m. came and it was time to pack up and prepare for round two of this two-part day.

Everything went back into the trucks, and out came several tiny sleds, a couple buckets, minimal tackle, rods and a manual auger for round two. We headed out by foot beyond the bay and on to the recently frozen main channel

of the St. Lawrence to try our hand at intercepting a school or two of monster Walleye as they executed their evening patrol.

The ice was crystal clear making it possible to look straight through and see perfectly the depth and bottom structure below. After positioning ourselves using a series of complex geometric calculations, as well as the conveniently placed marker buoys, we drilled our holes in the 15 or so centimetres of clear ice.

We brought with us no shelters to protect ourselves from the 30-kph winds out of the east as erecting

and anchoring anything on the glare ice would have taken about as long to accomplish as we intended to stay. The evening bite here lasts about 90 minutes, and is attempted over 15 meters of water in a five kph current.

Offerings that are a minimum of ½ oz. in weight are essential to execute a vertical presentation. Multiple





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hooks and numerous smaller minnows are recommended to avoid having to reel up and re-bait during a very short window of opportunity. If they manage to get one of your minnows, you know you still got a few more down there to work with.

Fishing together in a single shelter is also not an option due to the current's effect on the lines and the size of fish being pursued. It's imperative to spread out to avoid tangles that could easily end everyone's chance to ice trophy Walleyes.

Keeping our back to the wind was the only way of preventing frostbite to our face and hands. Todd cautioned however, that the instant that contact was made with a fish we move to the up-stream side of the hole to allow the easterly current of the St. Lawrence to do the work of tiring the Walleye and to facilitate fish extraction through the ice. Walleye here can range upwards of eight kilos.

"Winds from the east, fish bite least", was our undoing that day. The minus 35 degree wind chill made things slightly uncomfortable and may have influenced our decision to head back to shore fishless slightly before 5:30 p.m. -- the end to our window of opportunity. After a day of non-stop fish captures, a punishingly cold fishless couple hours out in the open wasn't the end of the world. It does however; make me anxious to return to the River to finish what I started. Caution will be taken however, as the Fast moving water like the main channel of the St. Lawrence isn't somewhere I would want to venture without the expertise of a seasoned guide. Wouldn't want my fishing trip of a lifetime to turn into the last trip of my life.

To get a hold of Todd Beckstead to arrange your own adventure, try the following: Tel: 613-643-2067 or [toddbbeckstead@hotmail.com](mailto:toddbbeckstead@hotmail.com).

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# SHORELINE BROWNS AND 'BOWS

## **Surefire strategies for icing trout now**

The midwinter doldrums deter some anglers from hitting the ice, but fine fishing is close at hand for anyone within a short cast of a trout lake. Just ask veteran guide Bernie Keefe, of Granby, Colorado.

"Rainbows and browns reliably cruise shoreline shallows throughout the winter wherever oxygen levels allow," he explains. "Armed with an auger and a few basic jigging lures, you can catch them a short walk from the bank."

Near-shore boulders can be magnets for rainbow and brown trout.

Keefe's near-shore trout program hinges not so much on finding structural sweet spots such as breaklines or sunken islands as it does on covering water rich in rocks. "A boulder the size of a Volkswagen sticking out of the ice is a good sign," he says. "Bows and browns gravitate toward big rocks because they offer protection from larger predators like lake trout that are cruising a little farther offshore."

Where such boulders exist, Keefe drills a few holes around the perimeter and sets up shop in his Clam Runner flip-over shelter. "It's a large one-person portable that works great for these kind of missions," he notes. The reason? Keefe prefers to ply a pair of holes simultaneously, using the jig in one as an attractor and the other to close the deal. "Drill two holes 30 inches apart," he says. "Swim one jig in small circles to draw the trout's attention, while deadsticking the other. Switch off every few minutes to vary the presentation."

Gearing up, Keefe favors a 28-inch, medium-action Jason Mitchell Meat Stick rod paired with a large-arbor reel like a Clam Ice Spooler or Eagle Claw Inline Ice Reel. "The combination gives you power and sensitivity, with the perfect drop speed for triggering Large-arbor, fly-fishing-style reels like Clam's Ice Spooler Elite offer many benefits, including the ability to slowly drop small jigs in freespool mode.



trout," he explains. After tying a dainty jig like the 1/32-ounce Clam Duckbill Drop or Dingle Drop onto his 4- to 6-pound Berkley Trilene XL mainline, he sets the rod on a bucket, leaves the reel in freespool mode, and lets the lure descend toward bottom.

"Trout see it falling nice and slow, and move in to check it out," he says. "When you see a fish on sonar, don't panic and stop the bait. Any changes in the fall can spook the fish, especially on lakes with lots of fishing



pressure. Instead, let it fall a little farther and gently begin your jigging cadence."

Keefe prefers a subtle lift-drop that causes the jig to swim in a circle roughly 12 inches in diameter. Tipped with a small soft-plastic trailer like a Clam Maki, the tiny jig yields tantalizing action. If no fish rush in on the drop, Keefe stops the drop midway in the water column, deploys a second identical setup in the other hole and begins jigging that while giving the first jig a rest. "Fish often move in to look at the moving jig, and then hit the motionless one," he notes.

Lure color choices are straightforward. "This time of year, oranges, chartreuses and other bright colors work best," he says. "The fish aren't as aggressive as they were earlier in the winter, but they still like gaudy patterns."

Keefe favors horizontal-hanging lures for midwinter trout.

Hunkering by a productive rock is a top option from daybreak to 9 a.m. After that, Keefe adopts an ice trolling approach to search for scattered fish.

To work a promising shoreline, he often punches a string of holes along a section of the bank, sometimes covering as much as a quarter-mile of territory in one pass. "It's great if you're fishing with a buddy," he says. "Fish alternate holes spaced 10 feet apart, jigging one and deadsticking the other, with two lines apiece, so you cover 30 feet of water at a time."

On lakes with ample oxygen in three to 10 feet of water near shore, the pattern holds water all winter. "If the oxygen level starts to drop, trout move offshore," Keefe cautions. "But the good news is, they suspend over deep water and the same jigging patterns work just as well."



# Different Lure Actions For Different Fish

By Bob Jensen

A lot of factors can determine how many fish we'll catch through the ice. Color is important: So is lure size. How the bait is attached to your line can be a consideration. A small jig attached to your line with a big, bulky snap/swivel probably won't be as effective as that same jig tied directly to a low-vis monofilament or fluorocarbon.

A very important consideration any time you're ice-fishing, but especially when the fish are being finicky, is the action you're putting on the lure. Just as in open water fishing, how you move the lure will have a direct influence on how many fish you catch.

Different lures have different actions. Consider the difference in action of two really good walleye baits for ice fishing, the Northland Buck-Shot Rattle Spoon and their Puppet Minnow. The spoon has a very straight up and down motion. When you lift it up then let it fall, it flutters a little bit, but falls pretty much straight back to the bottom.

The Puppet Minnow has a different design that gives it a different action. When it's jigged, it falls back to the bottom in a semi-circle. It falls slower, which appeals to fish in some situations. It also covers a larger area as it falls. This action might appeal to fish that are out to the side of your hole that don't want to come in to eat the spoon that's being fished straight up and down. Both styles of baits are good, but there are times when the fish will show a preference.

By the same token, sometimes the fish will prefer these baits being worked fast, other times they'll prefer a slower presentation. Watch your sonar and see how they respond to different actions, then give them the action they want.





Perch and panfish can be very selective about lure action. Sometimes they want the lure moving quickly, much of the time they prefer a quiver, and there are times when they want it motionless.

We were on a lake in South Dakota a while back that had a reputation for producing lots of big perch. When we got there a weather front had gone through that had the perch very unaggressive. We could see them on the sonar, and we tried everything we could to get them to eat our baits, but they just didn't seem interested.

Finally, one of the anglers in our group sat down in the shelter, rested the elbow of his rod hand on his knee, and sat as still as he could. He jigged the bait softly every now and then, but when a perch came in and looked at this bait, he held the bait as still as possible. Eventually the perch ate the bait. Sometimes it would survey the bait for maybe twenty seconds before eating it. Pretty soon everyone in our group started employing the "elbow on the knee" technique, and we started catching more fish. We didn't catch every perch that looked at the bait, but we caught a lot more than we had been.

Whether you're fishing open water or through the ice, if you pay attention to the action you're putting on the bait, you're going to catch more fish.

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