

Illinois
Department of
Natural Resources
Division of Fisheries

HANDBOOK OF ICE FISHING

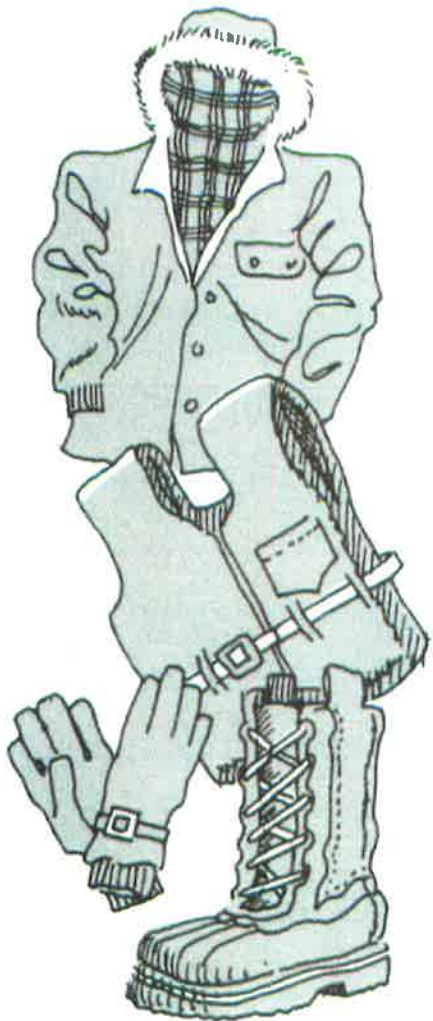


ICE FISHING

This handbook is intended to be a brief introduction to the sport of ice fishing. Although ice fishing shares some of the same characteristics with open-water fishing, ice fishing has its own unique fishing equipment and fishing technique requirements. Ice fishing is a fun way to avoid winter's "cabin-fever." It is hoped that once you have reviewed this handbook, you will give ice fishing a try.

CLOTHING

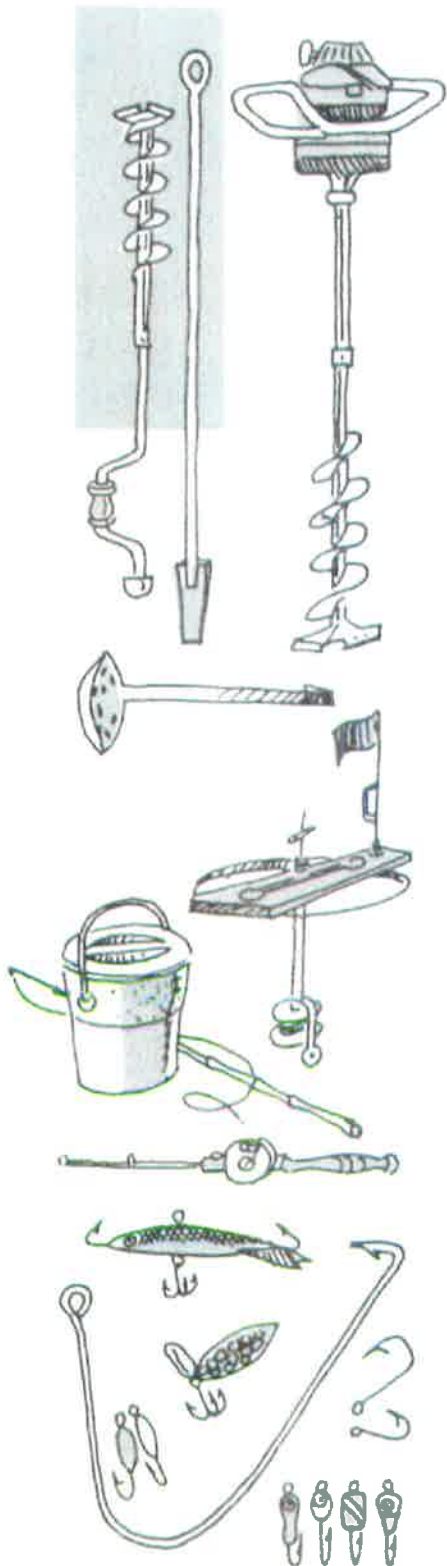
The important fact is not the amount, but rather the choice of clothing being worn. Several thin layers of loose clothing will allow you to adjust to the weather. Heavy, bulky clothing is not recommended. The following are suggestions for your comfort:



1. A parka with a hood, preferably insulated with natural or waterfowl down or artificial fiber-filled.
2. Insulated coveralls with a warm shirt and pants and thermal underwear.
3. One pair of light socks worn under one pair of medium-heavy wool socks.
4. Gloves or mittens, preferably waterproof.
5. Insulated, waterproof boots or rubber boots with felt liner.
6. Wool cap or face mask, perhaps both if weather dictates.
7. Optional items would include ice spikes for your boots (to prevent slipping); electrical battery-powered socks and hand warmer(s); and sunglasses.

EQUIPMENT

With the exception of ultra light spinning tackle, most open-water fishing equipment will not be suitable for ice fishing. Think small and light when considering tackle. Some important equipment items include:



1. Ice auger or chisel. Sharp tools are the key to keep from exhausting yourself when cutting ice holes. You can purchase either manual or power ice augers. Most have replaceable blades. Using an ice chisel to chop through the ice is much more strenuous, although it can be done, if necessary.

2. Skimmer. The skimmer (resembles a large soup ladle with holes) is needed to scoop ice slush or chips from the hole.

3. Ice rod. Ice rods range from a single, wooden rod with line winding pegs to a fiberglass or graphite rod with a micro reel. You can make your own ice rod from a discarded 18 to 24 inch long, top piece of an open water fiberglass or graphite rod. A four to six inch handle can be added by utilizing a half inch diameter doll rod. A reel or other line-holding device can be attached to the rod or handle with electrical tape. Generally, ice fishing rods are lighter, much shorter and more flexible than open-water rods. Choose lighter line test weights such as 2 and 4 pound test.

4. Tips-ups. These devices are equipped with reels and flags and are usually used for larger species of fish such as walleye or northern pike. When a tip-up's flag is released, it indicates a fish has taken the bait.

5. Terminal tackle. Terminal tackle and miscellaneous gear you should bring includes ice spoons, ice flies, small flasher blades, number 10, 12, or 14 plain hooks, slip bobbers, tiny lead head jigs, lead depth finder, pliers, hemostats or a small hook degorger,

styrofoam bucket (for bait), and a large plastic bucket (to carry tackle, rods, etc. and to deposit fish caught). An old towel or rag is handy in preventing mittens or gloves from becoming wet while removing a hooked fish.

6. Optional equipment. If you ice fish a great deal, you might consider using a sled or toboggan, and make or purchase an ice shelter along with lanterns, an electronic depth finder and safety equipment (to be discussed later).

ICE SAFETY

Extreme caution should be exercised any time you venture onto the ice. Most waters have different thicknesses of ice in various locations. Weather conditions can also affect the strength of the ice. Clear-blue, lake ice is the strongest; clear-blue, river ice is less strong; and cloudy opaque ice supports the least amount of weight. Slush ice can only support one half the weight of ice that is clear-blue. New ice is generally stronger than old ice.

Before going out onto the ice, walk along the shore in the area you plan to fish to check for open water areas, and areas of thin ice. Sometimes the ice will be thin near drain tiles, or in areas where a stream or ditch drains into the pond, creating current. If the ice appears safe, drill a test hole in the shallows near shore to check the thickness of the ice before walking out over deep water. At least 2 inches of ice are necessary to support one person, with at least 3 inches needed to support a group walking in single file. The ice may vary in thickness in different areas so if you are fishing early or late in the season when the ice is thin, extra caution must be used to prevent disaster.

It would be wise to have the following items in your possession and follow these general guidelines while on the ice:

1. Always travel with others when ice fishing.



2. Carry a 50-foot rope with attached throwing float.

3. Wear two spikes or screwdrivers attached to a cord and worn around your neck. Should you accidentally break through, they would provide you with a means to grip the ice and aid you in exiting the water more easily.

4. A Personal Flotation Device (PFD) not only provides flotation, but additional warmth. A PFD should be worn if you have any doubt about the thickness or strength of the ice.

5. A horn or whistle may help you attract attention should you require assistance.

Advise someone of where you are going and what time you intend on returning home.

HYPOTHERMIA

Hypothermia occurs when a person's body temperature drops below 90° Fahrenheit. It is caused by immersion in cold water or exposure to the cold air. Hypothermia affects people in many different ways. The best way to prevent hypothermia is to stay out of the water. However, if you break through the ice or see someone who has broken through the ice, you should try to get the victim out as quickly and safely as possible. Then execute the following steps:



1. Make sure the victim is able to breathe. If there is no pulse or respiration, begin CPR immediately.



2. Get the victim to shelter as quickly as possible.

3. Remove all wet clothing.

4. Wrap victim in blankets or a sleeping bag.



5. Place several sources of heat on the victim's chest, groin and neck areas.

6. Transport to a hospital as soon as possible.

7. DO NOT do any of the following:

a. Do Not give anything to drink, especially alcohol.

b. Do Not rub the victim's skin, especially with snow.

c. Do Not allow the victim to walk.



ETIQUETTE

Always clean up your area before you leave. While most anglers do not mind people around, do not crowd them, giving them breathing space.

ILLINOIS ICE FISHING REGULATIONS

A sport fishing license is required for ice fishing. The ice angler may use a maximum of three poles or tip-ups with no more than two hooks on each line. Holes cut in the ice are limited to 12-inch diameter or less. Shelter structures are limited to portable construction of metal or wood framework, covered with canvas, paper, plastic material or similar fabric. Each shelter shall have the name and address of the owner attached, and after March 1 the shelter must be removed when not in use, and not left unattended at anytime. All poles and tip-ups shall be constantly attended and kept under observation by the angler.

Ice fishing, while not for everyone, is a great way to catch fish and beat the winter doldrums. The fishing equipment and techniques discussed in this booklet should help get you started. For additional information, visit any of northern Illinois' frozen, inland lakes; talk to other ice fishermen or visit the local tackle shop and ask questions.

All you need is some fishing gear, some bait, a fishing license, warm clothes and a little beginner's luck.

Good luck and good ice fishing.

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Ice Fishing Safety

We cannot stress enough the importance of safety when ice fishing. To borrow the "be prepared" motto, when you're properly prepared for the experience, ice fishing is a fun outdoor activity. Below are some guidelines to help you "be prepared."

Ice Facts

- New ice is usually stronger than old ice. Four inches of clear, newly formed ice may support one person on foot, while a foot or more of old, partially thawed ice may not.
- Ice seldom freezes uniformly. It may be a foot thick in one location and only an inch or two just a few feet away.
- Ice formed over flowing water and currents is often dangerous. This is especially true near streams, bridges and culverts. Also, the ice outside river bends is usually weaker due to the undermining effects of the faster current.
- The insulating effect of snow slows down the freezing process. The extra weight also reduces how much weight the ice sheet can support. Also, ice near shore can be weaker than ice that is farther out.
- Booming and cracking ice isn't necessarily dangerous. It only means that the ice is expanding and contracting as the temperature changes.
- Schools of fish or flocks of waterfowl can also adversely affect the relative safety of ice. The movement of fish can bring warm water up from the bottom of the lake. In the past, this has opened holes in the ice causing snowmobiles and cars to break through.



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Here are the ice thickness safety guidelines:

- 2" or less - **STAY OFF**
- 4" - Ice fishing or other activities on foot
- 5" - Snowmobile or ATV
- 8" - 12" - Car or small pickup
- 12" - 15" - Medium truck

Note: These guidelines are for new, clear solid ice and many factors other than thickness can cause ice to be unsafe.

Note: White ice or "snow ice" is only about half as strong as new clear ice. Double the above thickness guidelines when traveling on white ice.

Additional Safety Tips:

- It's a good idea to always carry with you a rope or flotation device to help someone who may have fallen through the ice. Remember **NOT** to approach the area where someone has fallen through, as this ice will be quite vulnerable to weight.
 - Wear a personal flotation device (life vest) under your winter gear.
 - Carry a pair of ice picks. It's very difficult to pull yourself back onto the surface of slippery ice while weighted down with heavy clothing. The ice picks really help pulling yourself back onto solid ice.
- Please view this excellent video, by Pike Pole Fishing, about self rescue on ice. Always be prepared.