

Gearing up for Hard Water

By Kevin Dahlke



Many anglers don't look forward to when their open water season is coming to an end. This means that they need to put all of their fishing gear away for a number of months, and also getting the boat winterized and getting that ready for the long winter season ahead.

For those anglers that hang up their fishing when the water turns hard, they are the ones that are missing out on some of the best times to be on the water hard or soft. Hard water fishing in my eyes is much easier to get ready for as the equipment is more compact and easier to travel with.

Hard water fishing is much more exhilarating as the physical work that is involved is much more rewarding when fish location is achieved. The solitude of the frozen waters and the coolness of the cool crisp days really get an anglers blood pumping once the hard water season comes around.

The trips that are enjoyed the most are the ones that the ice is not as easy to get to as the adventure getting there is half of the fun. Dragging the house or sled full of gear through the fresh snow and woods is something that all anglers should experience at least once. Many anglers think that the weather is too cold but dressing in layers offsets that cold feeling, but one gets use to it the more that you go.



Getting up at the crack of dawn and stepping out into the frigid cool air, really gives the lungs a shock, but a good shock at that. The numbing of the fingers

while drilling those holes through the ice makes most folks look and think that we may be a little strange. But as we enjoy our times out on the hard water, while others mock, there aren't any other times to be on the water compared to the fishing of the hard water season.

I find that the hard water fishing allows me to have minimal equipment that I am able to carry all of it in a small sled. Equipment consists of an Auger, Skimmer, Flasher, Rods/Reels and some tackle pending the species you are seeking. I am



able to keep all of my gear in the sled in the back of the truck, so that I am able to stop and fish at any time.

To get the full enjoyment of being out in the cold on the ice your clothing is one of the most important pieces of equipment. There are getting to be more and more companies coming out with ice fishing clothing that it is making it easier to stay on the ice much longer. There is a company that has come out

with what they call Arctic Armor and is produced by "idi Gear". There is a built in feature that if you were to fall through the ice, this suit will keep you afloat to allow you to get yourself out of the frigid water. I am looking at this suit and plan on purchasing this as our ice here in New England can be very unpredictable early and late in the season.

As for equipment in the auger stage, power or hand, the most important thing is to make sure that you are using sharp blades. Sharp blades will cut the ice so much easier and will be easier on the motor as well as your arms for the hand version. If the blades are not sharp it will take longer to cut the ice and you will have to work so much harder to get the holes drilled. Blades are inexpensive and pending on how much you use them, they should last you a season or more.

For the electronics a vital component is the battery and should be checked to see the condition and age of it. If it doesn't seem to be holding a good charge, then it is time to replace it. If the battery isn't functioning to what it is suppose to be doing, this will in turn affect the signal that the flasher is trying to get. There is nothing worse then being on the ice and the battery starts acting up as this could really put a damper on your day on the ice.

For rod/reel equipment the line is a vital component that should be replaced before the ice season even starts. Ice will do a lot of damage to the fishing line and if your reels still have last year's line on them, make sure to change that out.

A good lubing of the reels is always a good maintenance thing to do as the cold temperatures make the reels fish differently compared to the warm summer days.

These are a few of the key items that should always be looked at before the hard water season gets here. Ice fishing is not that complex of a sport and with a little hard work, good electronics and some determination to find fish; this can turn out to be the best time on the lake. I will never say that ice fishing is easy but there are days that you only have to drill a few holes and that is all that is needed. But then there are the other days when 60 holes are needed to locate fish.



This is where the determination comes into play and if you really want to get the fullest experience, you need to just get out there. Once you have been bitten by the ice fishing bug, there is no other season that compares to sitting out there on the hard water. When we get to this time of year, I know that I get very anxious for the upcoming hard water and you should be to.

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