



Ice Fishing

About Ice Fishing

If you have already stored your fishing gear for the winter, you may want to unpack some of that tackle! Ice fishing is a great winter activity. The gear is simple, there's plenty of room to spread out on the ice, and fish are usually very hungry. Ice fishing is also fun for all ages and all skill levels. Folks of all ages and abilities can have fun fishing without having to be masters of style or technique.

The Division of Sport Fish helps provide ice fishing opportunities by stocking selected high-use lakes specifically for ice fishing. Also, a fair number of stocked fish survive the summer fishing season and are available to the ice fisher.

Bag and possession limits and tackle restrictions may be different in winter than in summer. Please check the regulation booklet for the area you plan to fish. For the most part, each angler is allowed to use two lines through the ice, providing only one hook or lure is used on each line. In some areas, up to five lines through the ice are allowed when fishing for northern pike. All lines must be closely attended.

Don't forget your fishing license! Anglers need a current year's sport fishing license in their possession while sport fishing, including while ice fishing. Sport fishing licenses are issued on a calendar year and expire on December 31, so be sure to have the current year's license in possession



when fishing in January and February. Resident anglers 60 years of age or older, and resident disabled veterans can get a free, permanent license at any ADF&G office. These permanent licenses do not expire.

ADF&G does not monitor ice or trail conditions. This is the responsibility of the land manager. Local lodges or tackle shops may also monitor ice thickness, but it's safest if you check ice thickness yourself. You are always responsible for your own safety. The best ice fishing is usually right after freeze-up because oxygen levels are still high and fish are still very active. Another good time is just before breakup. However, these are also the most dangerous times to be on the ice!

General Cautions About Ice Formation

During freeze-up, ice is thickest near the shore. During breakup, it's just the opposite, the ice is thickest in the center of the lake. Streams or creeks flowing into the



water can cause “overflow” layers of slush, water, and ice. Overflows are sometimes disguised by snow, and may suddenly give way. Extra dry socks and boots will come in handy if overflow is encountered. Underwater springs may also cause a section of the ice to be thinner than surrounding areas. Because the spring thins the ice from underneath, this type of thin ice is sometimes undetectable.

On larger lakes, such as Lake Louise, Skilak Lake, Kenai Lake, or Hidden Lake, freeze and thaw cycles and wind often causes variability in ice thickness. The ice may be three feet thick in one place, and one inch thick just a step away. Ice thickness can vary on flowing waters as well, such as creeks and rivers. Ice is strongest where it’s clear, and weakest where it’s cloudy or full of large bubbles. Snow cover insulates ice, making it thinner. On smaller or midsize lakes, ice

is usually uniformly thick.

Many stores now carry hand-held ice spikes, like large nails, on a line that can be threaded through a jacket. For self-rescue, the spikes provide additional purchase on a slippery edge.

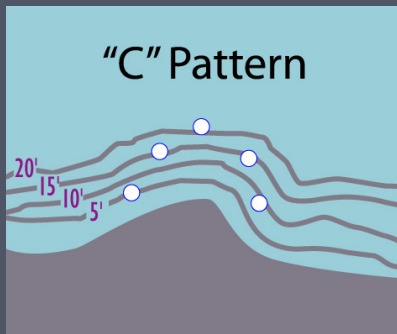
When driving on the ice, keep it slow, under 10 mph. An “ice wave” can be created when a fast-moving vehicle drives over ice. The wave “breaks” ahead of the vehicle, and if any flaw is in the ice, the wave causes it to fail. If you’re with a group of vehicles on the ice, keep a good distance between vehicles, to spread out the weight.

Keep vehicle windows open. You may want to have flotation available, such as a seat cushion. It is not recommended to wear life jackets inside vehicles that are traveling on the ice.

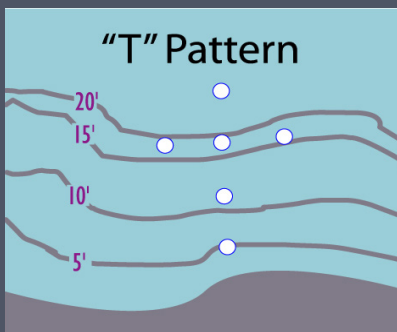
In short, be careful on the ice, just as you are careful on any body of water during the summer months in Alaska’s outdoors.

Drilling Patterns

Drilling patterns may help in finding fish.



The “C” pattern follows the lake shoreline and is usually around a point jutting into the lake. Start the “C” next to the shore and work your way out into the lake and back to shore until fish are located.



The “T” pattern works on any part of the lake. If the first hole draws a blank, drill new holes at evenly-spaced intervals across the bottom contours. Once fish are located, drill a second hole to the right or left.



Tackle Suggestions and Helpful Gear

First of all, wear warm clothing, a pair of warm gloves, and a good pair of waterproof winter boots. The open surface of lakes is often more windy than the protected land.

You’ll need a tool to cut a hole through the ice. A sharp spud bar will go through the ice fairly quickly during early winter. When the ice is over 6 inches thick, ice augers, either hand-powered, electric or gasoline-powered, work better. Remember to keep the blades sharp so you can quickly cut the hole. Replace the blade guard on your auger when not in use, to avoid cutting yourself or your gear. If you don’t have an auger, look around for holes drilled by someone else, especially on the more popular lakes. Sometimes all it takes is a couple of chops with the spud bar to re-open the hole.

A skimmer helps to keep the hole clear of snow and ice after the hole is drilled. A large slotted kitchen spoon works fine, or you can buy a skimmer specifically designed for ice fishing. You’ll also need something to measure the ice with. Some skimmers have measuring

tapes engraved on the handle, or you can take a ruler or measuring tape.

For fishing gear, leave the expensive complicated gear at home. Use strong, simple equipment, which is less likely to freeze up. Many tackle shops and department stores sell gear specifically for ice fishing. Fishing gear can also sometimes turn up in second-hand stores.

The best setup is a simple ice fishing rod with 4-10 pound monofilament line. Use smaller hooks, such as sizes 6 through 12.



Most ice fishers place a small split shot weight about 10 inches above the hook and either suspend the bait with a bobber or “tease” the fish by periodically jiggling the bait. For burbot and lake trout, fish near the bottom. If no action occurs within 10 to 15 minutes, you should check the bait, change depths, or even try a new hole. Since you’re allowed two lines, you may want to try fishing at different depths. Once you have found the fish, adjust all baits to that depth. If fish are nibbling lightly and you are unable to set the hook, you may want to switch to a smaller hook.

Lures are usually constantly jigged up and down. Some anglers combine techniques by adding a small piece of shrimp or salmon eggs. The best results

come from varying the movement of the lure: use the jiggling motion, then flutter the lure in the water column, and then finally hold the lure still for a while.

Deeper depths of water run out of oxygen first during the winter; fishing is most productive in shallow areas. The best areas to fish for rainbow trout are off small peninsulas, near underwater structures that provide cover, or near the edges of drop-offs to deeper water. Landlocked Chinook and coho salmon generally forage around the entire lake searching for food. Dolly Varden/Arctic char are generally found near the bottom. Burbot are most active in the evening as they move onto gravel bars and shoals to feed. Burbot are generally caught in water less than 25 feet deep. Northern pike anglers usually have greatest success in shallow water near the shoreline during early morning and late afternoon hours.

If you are not planning to keep the fish you catch, use larger hooks and release the fish as quickly as possible. Placing a fish on the ice causes severe scale loss and removes the protective slime layer. If you release a fish that has damaged gills, missing scales and slime, that fish has little chance of survival. It is illegal to waste any species of sport caught fish.

A tip-up works well for pike, burbot, and lake trout.

There are many who say the best bait by far is fresh, not frozen or canned, cocktail shrimp. Canned clams are also used. The most popular lures include small spoons (i.e. Swedish Pimples® and Daredevils®), spinners (i.e. Mepps® and Vibrax®), and lead-head jigs. Some anglers use flies.

Larger hooks and line may be necessary if you are targeting lake trout or northern pike. Flashy lures, herring, smelt, or the head, tail, fins or viscera of other sport-caught fish are the best baits for burbot, lake trout, and northern pike.



Southcentral Sport Fish Offices

Anchorage:	(907) 267.2218
Cordova:	(907) 424.3212
Glennallen:	(907) 822.3309
Homer:.....	(907) 235.8191
Palmer:	(907) 746.6300
Soldotna:.....	(907) 262.9368

Some of the best baits for rainbow trout, Arctic char, Arctic grayling, and landlocked salmon are:

- * Cured salmon eggs
- * Canned clams
- * Raw, fresh cocktail shrimp.

However, contrary to popular opinion, **CORN IS NOT RECOMMENDED**. It can lead to intestinal blockage and death in the fish.

Optional Equipment

Some optional equipment includes a 5-gallon bucket to carry your gear and to sit on while fishing. A child's sled is also helpful to transport gear across the ice. Fish finding electronics have been developed specifically for ice fishing applications.

Some anglers will bring a portable heater (ALWAYS in a well-ventilated area to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning), and hand and foot warmer packs. Many ice fishers combine fishing with skating or cross-country skiing as ways to pass the time between bites and to help keep warm.

Where to Go Ice Fishing

ADF&G provides ice fishing opportunities by stocking selected lakes mostly with 8-10 inch Chinook salmon. Some lakes receive 4-5 inch fingerling coho salmon, which grow to catchable size in one or two years. The fish are usually stocked in late October or early November. Many other stocked lakes may have rainbow trout, Arctic char, or Arctic grayling “left over” from summer stocking, thus providing additional opportunity.

To find out which lakes have been stocked, visit www.adfg.alaska.gov, and click on “Fishing” and then “Sport Fishing”. To find out where the lakes are, and to print out maps of the contours of the lakes click on “Alaska Lake Database” on the left hand side. Use the interactive mapper to search lakes by name, species, stocking records and more! Lakes with green markers are currently stocked by ADF&G.

Family Fun

Ice fishing is a great sport for the entire family. Ice fishing is a great way to start kids out on their first fishing trip, and gives Alaskans another reason to be outdoors and continue fishing during the cold winter months.



Ice Houses

A wide variety of portable shelters are available at sporting good stores. These portable, temporary shelters are allowed on all waters. Permanent structures need the approval of the land manager, and some land managers require ice houses to be registered. Check with the owner of the land if you want to leave your ice house up for any length of time.

Some land managers with ice house regulations include:

Municipality of Anchorage -Parks & Recreation
120 South Bragaw Street
(907) 343-4474

Matanuska-Susitna Borough
350 East Dahlia Avenue
(907)745-4801

State of Alaska, Dept. of Natural Resources
Division of State Parks
550 West Seventh Avenue, Suite 1260
(907) 269-8400

Kenai Peninsula Borough
44 North Binkley Avenue
(907) 262-4441

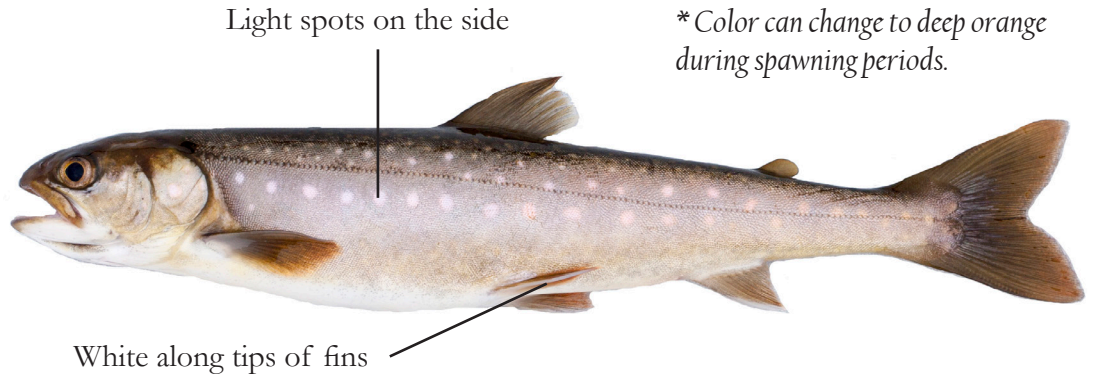


ADF&G Stocked Lakes

Species Identification

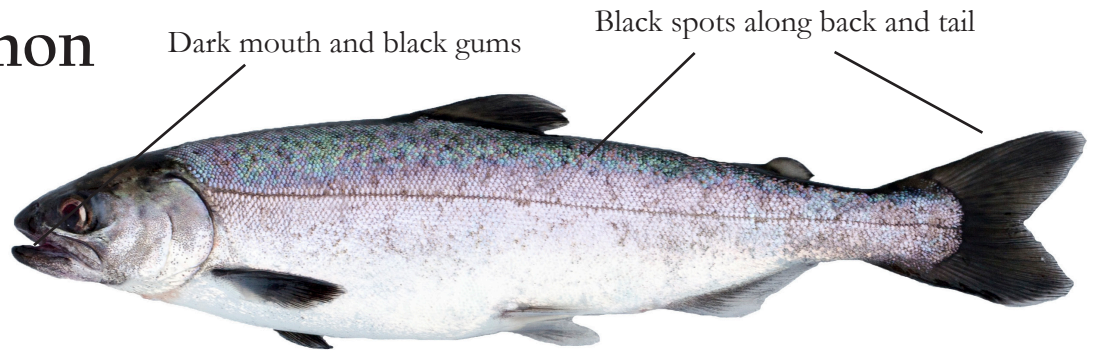
Arctic Char

- Large spots along both sides of the body.
- Coloration can range from pink to orange bellies, dark brown to lighter brown backs, and creamy to orange spots.
- Paired fins are orange to red with a bright white leading edge.



Chinook Salmon

- Black spots along back and on both lobes of the tail.
- Coloration is primarily silver and dark grey.
- Dark mouth and black gums.



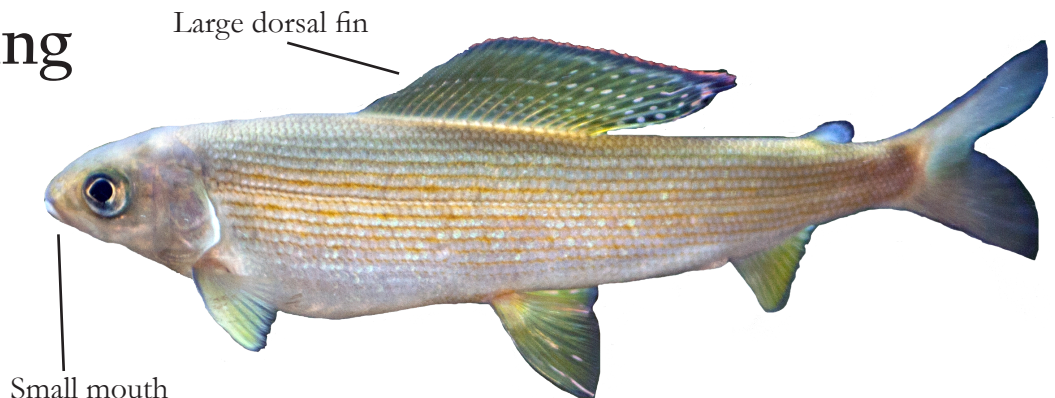
Rainbow Trout

- Black spots along the body and tail.
- Vague pink to prominent red colored band extending from the cheek to the base of the caudal fin (tail).
- White mouth.



Arctic Grayling

- Large dorsal fin.
- The sides of the body and head can be freckled with black spots.
- Small mouth.
- Silver or greyish body with gold or blue tones.



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Southcentral Region

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Division of Sport Fish

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Anchorage, Alaska 99518

Sport Fish Information Center

(907) 267-2218

M-F 8am - 5 pm

Except on state & holidays



These opportunities funded in part by Federal Aid in Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game complies with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. This summary is available in alternative communication formats. If you need assistance, please contact the ADF&G ADA Coordinator at (907) 465-6078; TTY/ Alaska Relay 7-1-1; or 1 (800) 770-8973.