



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 eager to bite.

Ice fishing is also fun for all ages, and all skill levels. Anglers 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 ice fishers.



Regulations

Bag and possession limits and tackle restrictions may be different in winter than in summer. Please check the regulations 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! Most anglers between the ages of 16 and 59 need a current year's sport fishing license in their possession. These licenses expire on December 31, so be sure to have next 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 application at any ADF&G office. These permanent licenses do not expire.

Ice Safety

You are always responsible for your own safety.

If the ice doesn't seem safe to you, don't go out.

ADF&G does not monitor ice or trail conditions — that's 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.

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, when the ice melts and releases food trapped from fall and winter. However, these are also the most dangerous times to be on the ice!

Ice Safety

- 5-6 inches of clear ice is recommended for foot traffic.
 - 12 inches of clear ice is recommended for vehicles.
 - Always check the ice yourself.
- In the Anchorage and Matanuska-Susitna Valley areas, the ice is usually thick enough to support foot traffic by mid-November or early December.
- In other areas, ice may not form until January.

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. Inflowing streams or creeks can cause “overflow” — layers of slush, water, and ice. Overflows are sometimes hidden under snow, and may suddenly give way. Extra pairs of dry socks and boots come in handy if overflow is encountered.

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.

Underwater springs may also cause sections of ice to be thinner than surrounding areas. Because spring activity thins the ice from underneath, this type of thin ice is sometimes undetectable.

On very large lakes, such as Lake Louise, Skilak Lake, Kenai Lake, or Hidden Lake, freeze-thaw cycles and wind often cause 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 on 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 mid-sized lakes, ice is usually uniformly thick.

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.

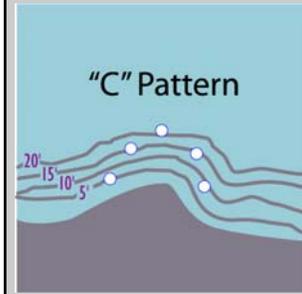
In short, be careful on the ice, just as you are careful on any body of water during the summer months in Alaska's outdoors.

Ice fishing techniques

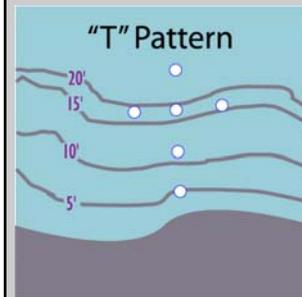
Most ice fishers place a small split-shot weight about 10 inches above the hook and either suspend the bait with a bobber or “tease” the fish by periodically jiggling the bait. For burbot, lake trout, and northern pike, fish near

Drilling patterns

Drilling patterns may help in finding fish.



The “C” pattern follows the lake shoreline, and is usually used 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 a 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.

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 bobber or smaller hook.

Lures are usually constantly jiggled up and down. Some anglers combine techniques by “sweetening” their lure or jig with a small piece of shrimp or salmon egg. The best results come from varying the movement of the lure: use the jiggling motion, then flutter the lure or spinner from the surface to the bottom, and then finally hold the lure still for a while.

Because deeper water runs 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



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

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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 late morning and early evening 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.

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 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 slot-

ted 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 fly reel loaded with floating fly line and finished with a 3 to 6-foot monofilament leader of



Photo courtesy Ken Marsh WildNorthwestImages.com

4- 12-pound-test. Use smaller hooks, such as sizes 6 through 12. Thick fly line is easier to see on the ice, and easier to keep ice-free.

A tip-up works well for bottom-feeding pike, burbot, and lake trout. Leave the bail open to reduce the drag, and wait for the flag to pop up.

Many believe 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 (Swedish Pimples® and Daredevils®), spinners (Mepps® and Vibrax®), and lead-head jigs. Some anglers use flies.

Larger hooks and heavier lines may be necessary if you are targeting lake trout or northern pike. When fishing for burbot, hooks by regulation must have at least a 3/4-inch gap between the point and shank. Flashy lures, herring, smelt (hooligan), or the heads (only) of other **sport-caught** fish are the best baits for burbot, lake trout, and pike.

Optional Equipment

Some optional equipment includes a 5-gallon bucket to carry your gear and to sit on while fishing. A child's

Bait

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

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

Contrary to popular opinion, **CORN IS NOT RECOMMENDED**. It can lead to intestinal blockage and death.

sled is also helpful to transport gear across the ice. Fish-finding electronics have recently been developed specifically for ice fishing applications.

Some bring a portable heater (ALWAYS use in well-ventilated areas to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning), and hand- and foot-warmer packs (available at most sporting goods stores). Some 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 (king) salmon. Some lakes receive fingerling (4-5 inch) coho (silver) 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.sf.adfg.state.ak.us, and click first on “Stocking and Hatcheries,” then on the “Lake Stocking” tab.

To find out where the lakes are, and to print out maps of the contours of the lakes, click on “Lake Maps” on that same page.

Selected lakes with wild fish populations, such as burbot, lake trout, and wild rainbow trout and Arctic char, have been mapped, and those maps also available at the Lake Map website.

ADF&G offices in Anchorage, Palmer, and Soldotna also have hard-copy lake maps and stocking information.

Ice Houses

A wide variety of portable shelters are available at sporting good stores. These portable, temporary shelters are allowed on all waters for day-use only. Permanent structures need the approval of the land manager, and some land managers require ice houses to be registered. Check with the land manager 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
Anchorage, AK 99508
Ph (907) 343-4474
www.ci.anchorage.ak.us

Matanuska-Susitna Borough

350 East Dahlia Avenue
Palmer, Alaska 99645
(907)745-4801

www.matsugov.us

State of Alaska, Dept. of Natural Resources Division of State Parks

550 West Seventh Ave., Suite 1260
Anchorage, AK 99501-3557
(907) 269-8400
www.dnr.state.ak.us

Kenai Peninsula Borough

44 North Binkley Ave.
Soldotna, Alaska, 99669
(907) 262-4441
www.borough.kenai.ak.us

Family Fun

Ice fishing is a great sport for the entire family—folks of all ages and abilities can have fun fishing, and maybe catch a few fresh fish for the dinner table, without having to be masters of style or technique.

Ice fishing is a great way to start kids out on their first fishing trip, and gives Alaskans another good reason to be outdoors during the winter.

