



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks



Spanish Peaks

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Ice Fishing Primer

Ice Fishing

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To those who have never tried it, ice fishing is sometimes looked upon as an oddity. So too are the practitioners of this sport. Seen from a distance, the forlorn-looking souls huddled over the ice often evoke feelings mixed with both pity as well as a strange sense of wonder: why would anyone subject themselves to this treatment?

Once you've spent a little time on the ice however, you'll soon see a different picture. Ice fishing is more than just a way to fill the days between the closing of one open water fishing season and the opening of the next. It is a chance to breathe the cold, clean winter air; to spend quiet time outdoors with family and friends, and to relax and collect one's thoughts away from the blare of the television and radio.

Just walking on the ice can be a surreal experience, especially when no snow obscures the view of the water below. To be suspended over the depths on a clear pane is an experience to be remembered. However, as in any outdoor activity, safety is a primary concern. A good rule to follow is never to fish alone, and try not to be the first person out on the ice. How much ice is needed to safely support a person? Although variable due to weather and water conditions, about four to six inches is a good rule of thumb.

Once you've found a suitable amount of ice covering your favorite lake or pond, the rest is surprisingly simple. Use an ice auger to cut a circular hole in the ice, a scoop will clear the hole of floating ice chips, and a simple rod, lure and bait is all you need to entice the fish. Most any Montana sporting goods store will have a good selection of equipment for a low initial investment. No fancy electronic gear, boats, or elaborate equipment is needed. Dress in your warmest winter clothing, fill a thermos with hot coffee, chocolate or tea, and bring an empty bucket or old lawn chair to sit on.

Ice anglers are usually a friendly crowd, and the best way for a novice to learn the sport is to respectfully approach other anglers fishing nearby. A few minutes of friendly conversation and observation can often be enough to get you started off in the right direction.

Once you've experienced your first taste of success, you may want to experience your first taste of fish caught through the ice. Fortunately, the flavor of fish caught from the cold winter waters is often it's finest. Keep just enough for a meal soon after you get home, and extend your pleasure from the ice into the kitchen.

You may be surprised. The next time you see some heavily dressed forms out fishing on a lake, it won't be pity you feel, but envy.



<http://fwp.mt.gov/education/angler/goFishing/icePrimer.html>