



ICE FISHING – PREPARE, STAY SAFE, AND FISH SUSTAINABLY A BLUE FISH CANADA ONE-HEALTH FEATURE

The following tips are based on the principal that, as with all fishing, a great day in the outdoors depends on the health of both the angler and resource. Plan and prepare to ensure you get the most from your time in the outdoors. Follow sound angling and conservation best-practices to ensure the sustainability of both the fish and their habitat. As with all Blue Fish Canada fishing tips, we draw on the latest science-based best practices, and the knowledge of local experts.

PLAN AND PREPARE

1. Follow Health and Safety Advisories: Monitor for weather warnings, ice safety reports, health and travel advisories
2. Rules and Regulations: Familiarize yourself with local fishing regulations, live bait and tackle restrictions, consumption advisories, and which fish stocks can be harvested sustainably, when should catch-and-release and selected harvest be practiced, and which species should be avoided.
3. Wear the Right Clothing: Everything from base layers to outerwear, and Backup supplies in case of loss or soakings to ensure your outdoor adventure doesn't end abruptly.
4. Bring the Right Tackle: Make sure your gear is organized and ready to use to avoid down-time on the ice. Bring gear appropriate to the fish species being pursued to minimize your load.
5. Food and Drink: Keep stomachs satisfied and bellies warm by bringing healthy snacks and a warm beverage. Take a bit extra just in case. Some toilet paper and plastic bags can quickly convert a bucket into an emergency toilet.
6. Pack Accordingly: Don't assume you can drive on to the ice. Walking out should always be an option. Exercise caution and know your ice.
7. Drilling Holes: Cutting holes in ice can be easy or physically demanding. Electric, propane or gas augers are convenient, but having a back-up manual auger can save the day.
8. Shelter: Wind breaks, portable shelters and ice chanties can turn even the coldest days into great days on the ice. A portable propane heating system offers that extra bit of comfort.

PERSONAL SAFETY

1. Location – Location: Let people know where you plan to fish and when. You can't always rely on electronics for communications should something go wrong.
2. Safety and First Aid Equipment: This includes cleats for boots if there's no snow cover, and ice picks and throw ropes just in case. A first aid kit is a must.
3. Ice Safety: Test ice thickness and strength as you move on to the ice. Follow local advice on where and where not to travel. Use a spud to test the soundness of the ice, and drill test holes to confirm ice quality.
4. Electronics: Having a compass and fully charged phone is not just a convenience but can quickly become your most valuable asset should weather turn bad or there's an accident. Download a map on to your phone before heading out to avoid getting lost. Keep your phone warm to prevent the battery from discharging.
5. Staying Warm: Whether you choose to wear your protection from the elements, or to depend on a permanent or portable ice shelter, redundancy is never a bad thing when dealing with extreme low temperatures. Layering clothing to adjust as needed, removing layers when physically active, and layering back up as sweat evaporates and the body cools.
6. Carbon Monoxide: Portable heaters are great but be sure to keep shelters well ventilated, so undetectable carbon monoxide doesn't build up. If alone or planning a sleepover, a carbon monoxide detector is a good idea.
7. Sun Protection and Hydration: Just like summer, avoiding sun burns and dehydration are issues on bright sunny days in winter as well. Worse, snow and ice reflect the sun's rays making hats ineffective. Quality sunglasses with UV and UVA protection are a must.
8. Flotation: Flotation jackets and pants, or one-piece flotation suits, offer both convenience and safety. A personal flotation device is a good idea at the beginning or end of season, or when ice conditions are unknown. Keep your ice picks on you at all times.

FISH SUSTAINABLY

1. Use Rod and Line Sized Appropriately for each Fish Species: Using the right strength rod and line for each fish species ensures fish are captured without causing undue fatigue. Properly matched hook strength and size increases your hook-to-landing ratio and helps ensure fish go back healthy. The use of leaders when targeting toothy fish prevents their breaking off with your tackle in tow.
2. Minimize Time Fish Spend Out of Water: Avoid subjecting fish to extreme cold or wind that can cause frostbite or damage to their eyes. Remove fishhooks quickly and minimize the amount of time a fish will spend out of the water.

3. Keep Hook Cutters and Removers Handy: Needle-nose pliers and hook removers make hook removal efficient and safe by keeping hands away from the mouths of toothy fish and hook points. When hooks are difficult to remove, hook cutters can quickly and safely separate fish from lures.
4. Avoid Removal of Fish-Protecting Slime: Bacteria found in fish slime serve as a protective coating. Make sure your hands are wet and hold fish away from clothing. Do not put fish you intend to return on dry ice or snow to avoid removing slime.
5. Support the Bellies of Large Fish with Your Hands: Fish are anatomically designed to move through water with minimal resistance and live in a constant state of neutral buoyancy. They do not possess the stomach muscles required to support internal organs when out of the water and subjected to gravity.
6. Harvest Fish Lower on the Food Chain: Alpha predator fish are like lions; they claim territory and live solitary lives. By targeting fish considered by apex predators as prey, you are harvesting fish that grow quicker and in greater numbers. Keeping smaller fish of targeted species means larger breeders can continue to sustain the population.
7. Harvest from Put-and-Take Fisheries, and support Fish Stock Rebuilding Efforts: Hatchery fish are routinely stocked to enhance fishing opportunities, or to rebuild depleted fish stocks to self-sustaining levels. If harvesting fish is the goal, choose a put-and-take fishery or a sustainable wild fish stocks. When fishing bodies of water where fish stocks are in the process of rebuilding to sustainable levels, practice catch-and-release.
8. Fish the Right Depths: Most fish species like perch, walleye, pike and crappie experience barotrauma issues when caught at depth greater than ten meters and may not survive release. Other species like lake trout and whitefish have the ability to expel air from their swim bladders and are better suited for healthy sustainable release when caught in the deep water. Be sure to fish at the right depth when practicing catch-and-release to ensure fish go back healthy.
9. Limit Harvest of Fish to One Meal: Just because you can, doesn't mean you should fill your daily fish harvesting limit each time you go fishing. Many regulations include maximum numbers of fish you possess including what's in your freezer. Frozen fish lose up to 30% of their flavor and can suffer freezer burn after six months. Fresh is always best!
10. Exercise Restraint When Harvesting Fish Near Urban Centres: Fishing locations situated near-by highly popular ice fishing locations experience higher fishing pressure than do more remote less-frequented locations. Not all fish harvesting regulations consider proximity to urban populations. Limit your harvest or practice catch-and-release when fishing popular waters.