

Early Ice Secrets: Crappie—Walleye

BY JOHN ANDREW

Lake crappie are located in several locations during early ice. The location will depend on several factors from water clarity, incoming and outgoing water sources from the lake you are fishing, depth of the lake, size of the lake, weed growth, fish cribs, location of the cribs (very important), oxygen levels and multiple other factors.

Deeper fish cribs are very good early to midwinter, but deep, clear lakes will produce deep-water crappie in or around deep wood structure all fall and all winter long, right into March. The deeper cribs in small lakes are good at early ice into early midwinter, if there is current moving all year 'round through these 30- to 40-foot deep lakes. The deep wood bite continues all winter long.

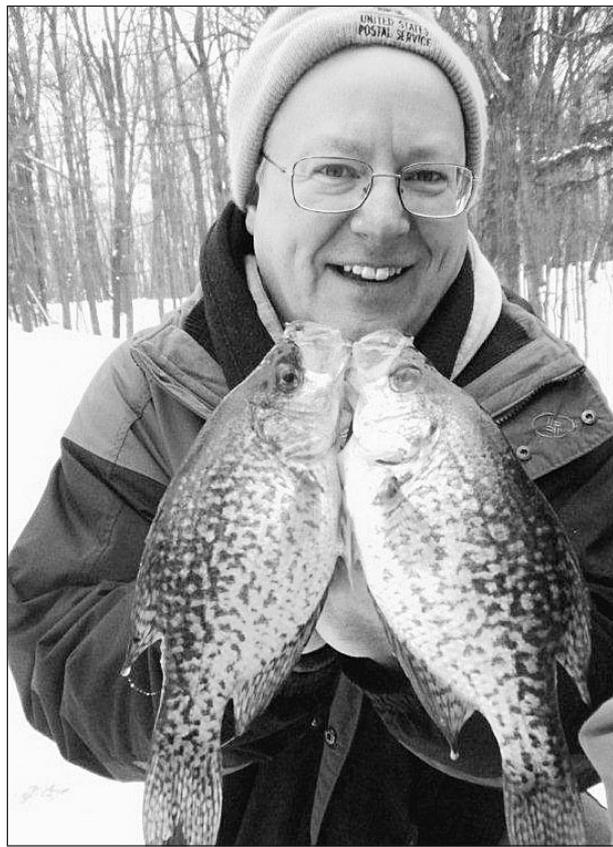
If your lake has 30- to 40-foot depths and a lot of weeds through the shallow areas with no current moving through, the deep bite is good early and dies out as midwinter approaches. Why? Because lack of oxygen will start to take place in the deepest water and the greenest weeds in shallower water will provide the best oxygen. This could be in four to eight feet or 10 to 25 feet, depending on water clarity.

Once again, each lake is different and you need to do your homework before ice-up. What kind of homework? With today's technology use your GPS to find the deep logs, the deep weeds and the deep weed points. Look for the deepest grass that stays green right through the winter and the weed growth that has a small die off through winter.

Also, use the GPS to find the wood, logs, branches and any other structure mixed into the weeds. These areas are gold mines when certain weather conditions are correct—especially during early ice and late ice when the snow is melting down and on mid



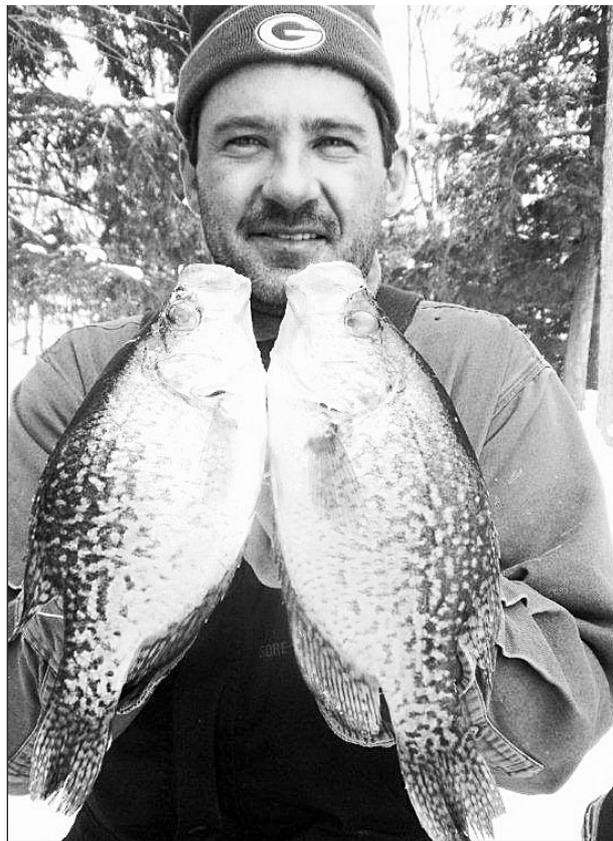
This client enjoyed the warmth of the ice house while catching these early ice crappie.



These early ice crappie came from a large Hemlock tree submerged right off the steep breaking shoreline. Crappie minnows were the answer and two-pound-test line.



These kids had an absolute joyful day this early ice season catching crappie with their parents and expert guide John Andrew.



Early ice crappie caught on deep log piles, made this client ever so happy, as was guide John Andrew.

and our underwater camera. We never drill dozens of holes.

Lake walleye are also located in several locations at early ice and all year long. On Trout Lake in northern Wisconsin we were catching walleye in 86 feet of water on the bottom at 12 noon, just a couple of weeks ago. In the evening at sunset, we were catching walleye on the same lake in 12 feet of water—yes, 12 feet! Does this mean the walleye from 86 feet moved up to 12 feet? No, it does not. This simply means the fish are at several different locations.

Catching early ice walleye is always done in shallow water (for most fishermen). Does this mean the walleye were shallow during midday somewhere else in the lake and biting our hooks at sunset in shallow water where our tip-ups are located? Not likely. We like very light current areas the best for our early tip-up locations. Although, certain lakes that have cisco and whitefish, ice fishing (at first ice) in their spawning locations is also very effective. In dark water lakes we like long extended flats, wide underwater points extending off of the shoreline, tops of shallow rock bars and along weed flats.

Understanding that the fish may indeed be in deeper water during daytime hours (but not in 80 feet), then migrating along the shoreline, flat, edge, rock bar, current area or weed line that has yielded food for them in the past is the normal behavior of those fish. Catching walleye in the 70- to 90-foot depths right up to dark proves to me that the shallow bite that starts 40 minutes later are all together different fish. These fish also behave, feed and adapt differently.

For us, we like a medium golden shiner; eight- to 12-pound fluorocarbon or super line leader; and #6 or #8, red, green, blue, gold or glow treble hook. The shiner is hooked lightly through the skin and there are multiple locations on the shiner where to place

your hook. Even in four feet of water, we still like our shiner 12 inches off the bottom.

Let's go get 'em.

The author, John Andrew, owner/operator of the AnglersChoiceGuideService.com is a two-time world record holder. He can be reached at 715-892-3020. John Andrew is a fulltime resident and fulltime, year 'round tour guide for fishing and hunting in the state of Wisconsin, specializing in Vilas, Iron, and Oneida counties.

to late winter days when the wind is blowing.

We like to use two-pound-test, clear line or fluorocarbon in stained or clear water. In stained water we like to use larger ice jigs, glow-in-the-dark jigs. Glow colors do make a big difference. We use larger crappie minnows and tip-downs (if it's not windy) and our flasher. In clear water we use the two-pound-test, smaller crappie minnows, smaller ice jigs, very thin diameter hook and split shot hooked to the minnow, tip-downs

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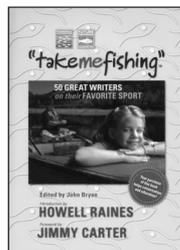
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