

# Catching Winter Pike on the Flats



These happy fishermen enjoyed their day while catching pike on tip-ups.



More great pike fishing on the ice using the methods and techniques described in this article.



This young angler enjoyed pulling in this pike while fishing with a tip-up and golden shiner.



Ed Shinton caught this nice ice pike while fishing with John Andrew.



Youngsters strain to lift a group of pike they enjoyed catching on an outing with their parents.

by John Andrew

Winter is in full swing all across the Midwestern states, and the northern pike are biting. Using tip-ups and live baits such as golden shiners, sucker minnows or river shiners are all good options for these aggressive feeders.

We are focusing on large weed flats with a depth ranging from eight to 24 feet deep. Please do not misunderstand; when fishing a large weedy bay, we can travel several hundred yards at ten feet, then several hundred yards at 16 feet, and so on. There are several different types of weeds located in many lakes. Let's briefly discuss the panfish connection to better understand the pike feeding location in this article.

Most panfish that are located on a weed flat are going to relate to a subtle depth change of two or three feet, with some wood mixed into the weeds, or weeds that are taller than the surrounding weeds. These are all critical locations for the pike feeding stations.

Most of the panfish will be inside of the weeds or wood (suspended), and the perch may use the subtle depth change of two feet (old shallow creek channel). These observations are made year after year while ice fishing with the use of an underwater camera. Drilling dozens of holes may help you find some fish. However, pinpointing the exact location comes from your GPS and your open-water, late-fall observations, and then returning to these described

locations during ice-up.

When setting our pike baits under our tip-ups, we never lower the bait down to the bottom and then lift it up a foot or so. Over the last few decades, we found that when fishing weed flats, putting our bait just a few feet under the ice is the "critical concept" to our success. Depending how deep the bottom of the lake is located in reference to the bottom of the ice is very, very important. If the bottom of the lake is 15 feet deep in the area we are fishing, the weeds are standing four feet off the bottom and the ice is three feet thick. We will set our baits about seven feet deep under the ice.

When I teach my clients this formula for live bait tip-up fishing for pike, most people think our bait should be down in the weeds where the pike are, but that's not correct. First, I like to use three- to five-inch live bait for tip-up pike fishing. This size of live bait is very good for attracting pike. This larger bait also will move all around under the ice and will occasionally trip the flag. The aggressive behavior of this bait will also swim towards any cover they can reach, including the weeds. They will swim directly towards the weeds and attempt to use a weed stalk for cover and in turn get the hook stuck in the weeds resulting in no strike for that tip-up. To help stop this from happening, I like to set a couple of heavier split shots about two feet above the wire leader, which keeps the bait vertical.

The pike will travel long distances when feeding on a weed flat during the winter. A quick example of this—that taught me an important lesson 24 winters ago—was when a client was reeling in a 23-inch pike while fishing inside the ice house and he tried to lift the pike through the hole with two-pound mono. Of course the line snapped, and he said, "I should have had him," as his bright orange ice jig was right on the lip of the pike's mouth. About one-and-a-half hours later, about two football fields away from the ice house when using a tip-up, we landed a 23-inch

pike with the same bright orange ice jig on the lip of his mouth.

Setting our tip-ups in a wide pattern around a weed flat (as much as 100 feet apart) is very productive. You do need to read up on any regulations on how far your tip-ups can be set away from your stationed area before it will be declared an "unattended line." There is a distance limit on how far away you can legally set up a tip-up from where you are stationed.

Also be sure to use a pair of binoculars if it is windy, because if a flag is up and you do not see it, once again, there is a time limit as to how long a flag can be up before it is declared as an, "unattended line".

Read your local regulations.

Using a thin wire leader that can be tied directly to your hook is very, very important. Using the right size hook is also very critical to your success. This hook needs to match your bait size. Colored treble hooks at certain times seem to make a big difference, just as they do during open water.

Northern pike are very aggressive, hard fighting, fantastic daytime feeders and very good eating. A lot of people simply think they are too slimy, smelly, too many bones and too hard to clean. Once you learn how to clean them, simply go ahead and fry them up like any panfish or walleye and get ready to enjoy the great northern pike for the 2015 ice season. **MWO**

John Andrew, owner and operator of The Angler's Choice Guide Service, is a two-time world record holder, a two-time Outstanding Angler Achievement Award winner, a full-time year 'round tour guide for fishing and hunting for the state of Wisconsin, from which Andrew is a full-time resident and a current and active member of four local chambers of commerce, specializing in Vilas, Oneida and Iron counties. He may be reached at: Phone: 715-892-3020 or 715-686-2012 Email: ohnandrew@centurytel.net Website: theanglerschoicguideservice.com

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