

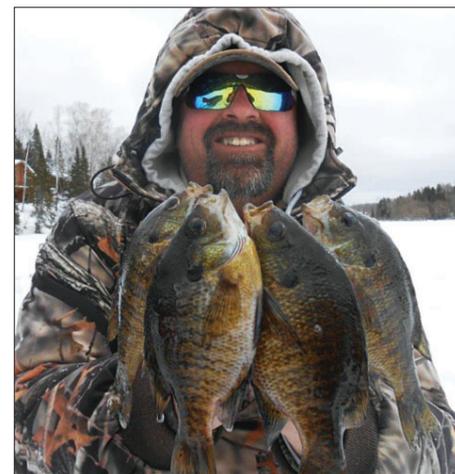
Track Down and Dial in First-ice Bluegills



This happy angler produced these 'gills fishing over deep wood using waxworms and small ice jigs.



Bluegills from a 22-foot weedline.



These 'gills came from a weed flat at 5 to 10 feet deep using 2-pound-test and 1/32-ounce ice jigs.

by John Andrew

Many times we talk about a specific location of the fish we're targeting and that is and always will be relative to the water environment. Here, we'll look at first-ice 'gills on a large lake with multiple, diverse locations and methods.

On a lake over 1,000 acres with large sections of deep, clear water and areas of shallow weedy conditions both close to one another, good oxygen levels can be found throughout winter. That diversity of the lake contributes to these levels. When we fish deeper water, we like to seek deep-wood structure like a tree extending off the shoreline and down into the water or a deep woodpile on the bottom. 'Gills swim in this structure and can be in deeper water.

When fishing weeds we like them deep where the fish are suspended slightly above, where they stop growing and where bluegills are on the bottom within 5 feet of a weedline. But the most popular location is the shallow weeds from 4 to 9 feet.

Always use 1- or 2-pound-test mono line. The 2-pound-test is used for less break-offs. Simply put, we catch more on light test mono, day in and day out. Using a mono

leader in conjunction with braided line is also a good choice.

One method that has been used more is an underwater camera or a flasher. When using the camera, we simply have immediate eye contact with the fish, the hook and structure. Setting the hook is as simple as watching the fish bite the bait. We have six wood-paneled, insulated and heated ice houses on different lakes every winter and each one has underwater cameras.

The camera is perhaps the best teacher of all (if the water is clear enough) and can get you on fish. We can take the bait away from certain fish and attempt to coax others into biting. We can then see what lure color attracts fish and what color they do not like. We can also watch to see if live bait or plastic is best or which vibrations employed to the line work. Also, the bottom conditions, weeds, rocks, ledges, wood, etc., can be seen with the underwater camera.

Color in the world of fishing is very important. Ask any fishing pro guide or television host how important color is for their lures and you better pull up a chair because you are going to be there for a long

time. We also use the color that best attracts bluegills on a camera.

The following may be hard to believe, but this is how I do it:

Once I am on the fish and they're swimming around my camera I'll put down one color at a time in a certain size hook—usually very small 1/32 or 1/64 ounce on 2-pound-test mono with no bait only a spoon or jig. I'll then watch how they behave with no movement applied to the lure and hook and then with some movement made afterward. Now, this is important: Some 'gills may strike every color I put down but, they'll always continue to strike one color when they leave the other colors alone. If you have discovered what the best color is for that water environment, go with it. This may

change with conditions that are lighter, but you still have discovered the most liked daytime color to use.

As for that time of day, the light conditions can make a difference on some lakes. For deep water, late in the day is not as good as 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. And when fishing the shallower water in weeds, we like sunrise to 10:30 a.m. and then later from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. The light conditions can open up a window of opportunity during the day. **MWO**

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Learning Without Distractions for Building Confidence

by Bill Takacs

By the start of spring fishing, many of us have probably gone to the sport shows, perhaps attended a few seminars and even watched numerous fishing shows. During the past few months, chances are good that you have seen or heard about a new method of fishing for your favorite species or a new lure that is gaining attention. After buying that new lure, chances are also good that you put it in the bottom of your tackle box or tackle bag. You may have intentions of trying it later or when the fish are not biting your usual baits.

The same thing can be said about a new method of fishing or a new technique or presentation, whether it's flipping, pitching, drop-shotting, vertically jigging spoons, frogging, etc. More than likely you will try these new techniques or methods when fish are inactive or just not hitting your usual stuff.

Neither of the above scenarios is conducive to learning or developing confidence in something new. Confidence comes from having success, and success comes from putting forth a good effort and giving yourself a chance to catch more.

For most, confidence comes from successful past experiences. Luck could play a role in any tournament win, but you cannot rely merely on luck for consistency. Fishing knowledge and successful past experiences breed confidence. And fishing knowledge comes from your time on the water and other education.

To develop this confidence in something new, you must give yourself the opportunities and trying newer things when times are slow. I learned many years ago that if I truly want to learn I must give it effort at 100 percent. The only way for me to do this is to devote all of my time on the water to that new lure or newer, unused method. For me, that means leaving all other distractions behind. Do not load the boat with your usual tackle in these instances; take only what you will need to accomplish your goal of learning newer tackle and techniques. If you take all of your bait and line it is just too easy to give up on what you are trying to learn and to go back to your tried and true presentations or lures.

Several years ago, I wanted to learn the flipping technique for bass fishing. I had the right equipment including the rod, reel, line, skirted jig, etc., to practice this presentation. I left all of my other tackle at home. I gave this my full attention until I was comfortable and confident enough that I could catch fish reasonably consistently.

Leave everything else behind and give yourself the chance to be successful and develop your confidence. This works for it and me will work for you. **MWO**

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