

# Steady Action: Pike Fire up Winter's Icy Waters



Paul Brown caught this northern pike on a tip-up while using a large golden shiner set only a few feet under the ice.



Robert and Jimmy Nelson enjoyed their day catching several nice pike on tip-ups and working the weedlines.



Gregg Miller hoisted these big pike inside the ice house while jigging large shiner minnows on a heavy ice-jigging rod.

by John Andrew

Ice season is finally here and thousands of people across the North Country are enjoying this time of year for ice fishing.

Fishing for northern pike is always a fun daytime activity for all fishermen and the kids. As a tip-up flag pops up, all the kids run to the spot and one of them starts to pull and pull on the line until a nice northern lunges up onto the ice—it is at this moment when all the kids yell and pandemonium breaks out, heard all over the frozen lake.

This brings back a lot of memories, not only for myself, but also for hundreds of others. As families grow up, these once-small kids remember these exciting events for decades. I am proud and honored to have helped create some of those fond memories with all I have worked with. I am going to try to help you enjoy this winter a little more when you are ice fishing.

We start by doing some homework in the open-water season. This is done by looking at the shape of the existing weedline we are going to set tip-ups around. We visually "eye" the weedline just

under the surface of the lake as well as weeds that reach the top. Then we use our sonar to contact the underwater weedline and use our GPS to set waypoints. We "create a trail of the shape" of the weed bed, so when we return later during the hard-water season, we can easily set our tip-ups precisely where we want them. This is a critical part of our success for the subsequent ice season.

If you are very familiar with a lake you wish to fish, and have a pretty good idea of the weedline, use your best judgment to set the tip-ups around the weedy area. You will also need to learn where the best areas are. Pike are normally willing to bite all day long, and if no action has happened after an hour or so with a tip-up, you may want to move it to an area where you have had a few flags pop up.

You may want to try and place your tip-ups about 30 to 50 feet apart when fishing around a weedline for the first time. This may seem like a lot of work, but you will reap the rewards when those flags start popping up. I like to use my four-wheeler or my snowmobile to move me around as I drill the holes (only if ice is thick enough).

We also use the four-wheeler to check flags that pop 200 or 300 hundred feet away. Be sure you check your regulations on how far away you can go from your ice shelter or how far you can go from where you are positioned. If you get too far, and even though you can see the tip-ups, you may have an unattended line issue.

We fill our tip-ups with 60- or 80-pound Dacron line. This is a very thick line and easy to untangle on the ice in windy or in extreme cold. I personally make my own wire leaders with a 20-pound-test line. This wire is flexible and can be purchased on a small plastic spool. Also, small metal sleeves are purchased when purchasing the wire—these sleeves are made for each pound test of wire. When using these small metal sleeves, we run the sleeve up the wire then run the wire through the eyelet of the hook, leaving a small loop to act as a swivel and then slide the open end of the wire back into the sleeve and pinch it down tight with a pliers. I like long leaders, about 25 to 30 inches. We then tie on a swivel to the Dacron line and then slide another sleeve onto the opposite end of the wire. Then, we run the wire back through the opposite end of the swivel and back into the small medal sleeve and pinch it with the pliers. If the wire gets pinched or bent at the hook when fighting a fish, we simply cut the wire at the crimped spot and redo the hook as described above. I like the hook hanging straight, not on a crooked or pinched piece of leader. This seems to help increase our percentage of strikes. Also, the long thin wire leader helps cut through the weeds when retrieving the line, as the pike like to dive deep into the weeds when hooked.

Using large live bait such as 4- or 5-inch golden shiners works very well. Large sucker minnows also work but we do best with shiners. We have occasionally used

frozen smelt bought right out of the grocery store, hooked it and caught pike too. Frozen or fresh cisco also works well. We have noticed pike tend to drop smelt or cisco sometimes before we get to the tip-up.

You will need to explore using a treble hook or single straight hook—at times, either one does well hooking the pike, and at other times only one version works best. Trial and error sometimes is still the best teacher.

When determining how deep to set your bait we have discovered that on or close to the bottom is not always the best choice. (Remember, this is for my clients.) I like to set the bait in position just above the weeds, sometimes just 4 feet under the ice, and, on occasion, if we see pike moving around the bottom with the underwater cameras, we then may set some close to the bottom. The location of your bait is determined by each individual location. Each water environment we fish has different characteristics. We may set our baits close to the bottom when fishing mud flats and then several feet off the bottom when in or around the weeds. Another determining factor on how deep or shallow we set our bait is the time of year. The oxygen levels can decrease as the winter gets later and later in the season depending on where you are fishing. Bluegills may stay in an area, but the pike may leave that area completely. As an ice fishing guide, I see this happen almost every season.

Underwater cameras have also been a big help in catching some larger pike. We

story continued...

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# New Year's Doesn't Start the Same for Everyone

by Jerry Kiesow

Not all outdoors fun and adventures include hunting or fishing. Outdoors enthusiasts in the Midwest know there are many different ways to enjoy a day, even if it is only for a few hours.

It was New Year's Day, 2015, at 8 a.m. The temperature was in single digits, but the wind was calm. I pulled my truck out of the garage and down the driveway and headed north and west to do one of my monthly chores at a sportsman's club I belong to.

Normally, I would have left earlier, but I had gotten to bed a tad later than usual the night before and slept in until almost 6:30 a.m. I maintained my normal morning routine: getting dressed, going out for the paper and reading it while sipping tea with a cookie or two. There was no need to hurry.

Eventually, I put the camera bag in the truck, told my wife—who was awake, but still in bed—where I was going, and headed out.

The skies were grey, but the roads were clear. It had not snowed overnight, as was predicted. I had the roads to myself.

I hope they (meaning the roads) stay this way, I thought. Maybe I will see something this morning if I don't have to be bothered with a lot of traffic. That would be a nice way to start the New Year.

I enjoyed the landscape and looked for critters as I drove, traveling at slow speeds without becoming an obstacle. I was happy for that—not getting in the way of other, faster, need-to-get-to-work folks.

I cruised along at about 25 to 30 mph, maybe less, and no one cared. How could they? No one else was on the road.

After stopping here and there to identify a hawk or two, I arrived at the club, did what I needed to do and headed for home, but not directly.

I drove a route that took me around the perimeter of the club's hunting grounds. I saw a few tracks, but no live critters. Until, almost at the end of this territory ahead, I saw two red fox crossing the road. I stopped the truck, lowered the window and reached for my camera.

The pair looked to be about a year old, probably the past spring's twins. They clambered along parallel to the roadway, stopping now and again to examine things. I couldn't see what attracted their attention in a cutover cornfield. I waited and watched.

As the pair came close to and then passed by the truck, I took photos—what a pretty pair of healthy-looking foxes they were, with beautiful, sleek fur coats and full tails. They continued on their way, unconcerned with me, so I moved on too.

A few minutes later, while passing through the local nature center property, I spotted a group of seven deer bedded down. I stopped hoping they would stay put. They did not. I had wanted to get a shot at them, with my camera, of course.

From there I took a roundabout way to



Two red foxes with healthy, beautiful fur coats and full tails.

the harbor in nearby Port Washington. I was hoping to find snow buntings in the fields, but saw none. Along the way, some lake-effect snow began to fall.

When I got to the harbor the snow was falling at a pretty good rate. However, as I "patrolled" the harbor parking lot, it became less, and it stopped snowing.

I parked several times and "gassed" the geese and ducks gathered around small patches of open water. I was looking for



A great black-backed gull takes a nap among the ducks and geese on the harbor in Port Washington.

some out-of-the-ordinary waterfowl.

At one stop, I was parallel to the water with the window down. From there I saw a group of gulls squatted on the ice, their feet and heads tucked under their wings. I scanned the gulls through the binoculars. There were two very dark, actually black, objects among the crowd. Longer observation showed them to be gulls, but not our normal ringed-billed or herring gulls. These were great black-backed gulls—not common to our area.

I got out of the truck and took a photo or two as they slept on the ice. They would make a nice addition to my photo file, even though they were sleeping.

I left the harbor, checked out the dominant bull at an elk farm (it still had its head decoration, the only male that did), and ended up in the driveway from which I started this journey. It was 11 a.m. Not bad for a trip that normally can be done in an hour.

And that is how I spent New Year's Day morning last year. I wonder what January 1, 2016 will be like? **MWO**

*Jerry Kiesow enjoys all aspects of the outdoors and shares them in many ways through his photos, words and workshops. He has written a book, Tales of The Peshtigo Putzer, that makes a great gift. Check it all out at his website: jerrykiesow.com.*

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### Steady Action

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will have a heavy ice fishing jig rod ready to go with a thin steel leader and a jig and shiner minnow hooked up. When catching panfish, a large pike may enter the viewing area and scatter the panfish. When this happens we immediately drop down the pre-rigged shiner to coax the big pike into striking. We also like putting a tip-up directly next to the ice shelter, and from time to time, a big pike will take the shiner on that tip-up. When doing this we can actually see the shiner minnow a couple of feet away from where we are actually catching the panfish. This works, give it a try. **MWO**

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