

# Beneath the Ice

Ice fishing on lakes or reservoirs can provide some much-needed outdoor adventure during those long winter months. Yellow perch and rainbow trout are the most common species pursued beneath the ice, and a number of Idaho waters have both species in abundance.

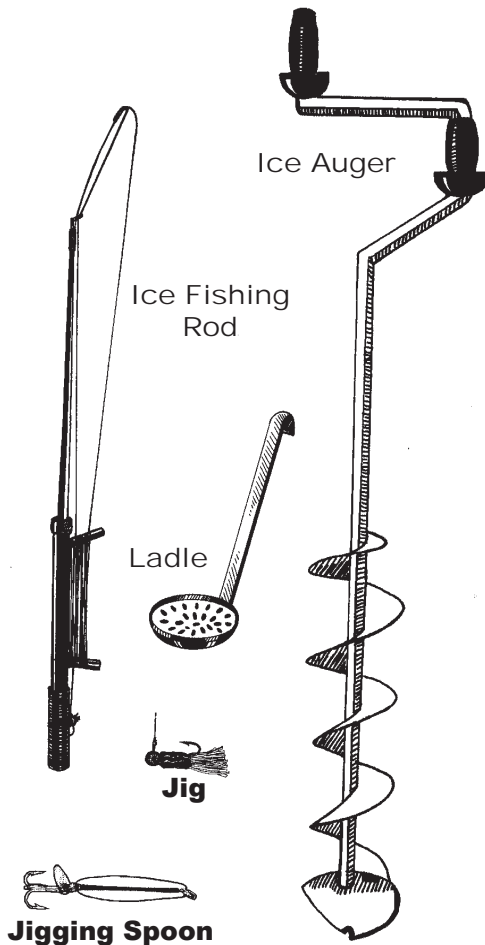
Ice is generally safe for walking when 3 to 4 inches thick; if you are venturing out on snow machines or ATVs, wait for 8 to 10 inches of clear, solid ice. Ice fishing with a partner is a good idea, particularly during early and late winter.

While specialized ice fishing gear is available, any rod and reel will suffice for the casual ice angler. Terminal tackle should include an assortment of jigs, glow hooks and ice flies, in combination with baits such as maggots, worms or cut bait.



Mike Demick, IDFG

## Ice Fishing Equipment



### ***Kids and ice fishing - they go together!***

To get started, drill a series of test holes. Rules dictate that no hole may be larger than 10 inches in diameter for safety's sake. Most Idaho waters allow for up to 5 lines per angler (when the bite is on, it gets busy!). Try different locations at varying depths until you find fish. Perch generally are found near the bottom, whether the water is 10 feet deep or 40, while trout tend to be found closer to the surface.

Jigging can be a very effective ice fishing technique. To jig, drop the bait to the bottom, then reel up approximately 2 feet of line. Slowly raise the rod tip about a foot, then allow it to settle back down. Repeat this procedure until a fish strikes.

Some anglers prefer a more passive approach, simply still fishing and waiting for a strike. Either way, when the fish begin to bite, the ice fishing action can get fast and furious.



# Wild Trout Streams

**A**mong Idaho's 26,000 miles of streams are some of the world's most famous trout fishing waters. The Henrys Fork, Silver Creek, the South Fork Snake River and Kelly Creek, for example, are the subjects of dozens of books, hundreds of articles, and countless angler daydreams. For some anglers, a chance to test their fishing skills against ultra wary rainbow trout in places like Harriman Ranch or

native cutthroat, or the abundance of brook trout.

The geographic and geologic diversity of the Gem State gives rise to every stream type from small mountain streams to spring creeks to larger freestone rivers. The interaction of water (hydrology) and earth (geology) helps determine channel shape, habitat type and even the insect hatches that occur.

**Freestone streams** – the most common

Idaho stream type – are driven by snowmelt and spring runoff. Fish habitat can best be described as dynamic: low in the winter, high in the spring, and gradually decreasing through summer and fall. In the spring, water levels – and fishing conditions – can vary from day to day due to rain or melting snow. Fishing will generally improve as flows start to drop. Freestone stream trout often migrate seasonally to adjust to changing conditions or to reach spawning areas. Famous Idaho freestone streams include Kelly Creek, the St. Joe River and the South Fork of the Snake River.

**Spring Creeks** are primarily influenced by groundwater or natural spring flows. Conditions such as flows and temperature tend

to be more consistent than in freestone streams. This translates into more reliable fishing conditions and aquatic insects in abundance. When temperatures are optimal for trout, the result can be truly exceptional growth rates. The biggest fishing challenge associated with spring creeks is usually the fish themselves; they can be some of the toughest trout in the world to catch. Because spring creeks generally flow slowly and have crystal clear water, fish are easily spooked and anglers must be stealthy and present the lure or fly in just the right spot. Idaho's famous spring creeks include Silver Creek and the Henrys Fork of the Snake River.



Rob Parkins

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***Pursuing wild trout in an Idaho stream is as much about getting away as it is about catching fish***

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Silver Creek is the pinnacle of stream trout fishing. For others, what really makes Idaho special is the many dozens of lesser-known streams full of willing rainbow and cutthroat trout.

Whatever stream sits at the top of your list, it is difficult to argue that *variety* makes Idaho truly special to stream trout anglers. Idaho has it all, from a quick lunch hour trip to the Boise River in the capitol city, to a week-long adventure in the Middle Fork Salmon River wilderness, and everything in-between. Variety also describes the fish, whether it's the acrobatic fight of a rainbow, the charge of a German brown, the aggressiveness and beauty of a





## Mountain Whitefish - Idaho's Unsung Native

While most Idaho anglers sing the praises of salmon, steelhead and resident trout, only a handful focus much attention on another member of the trout family, the mountain whitefish. Whitefish are more widely distributed and occur in higher numbers than any other member of Idaho's trout/salmon family. Despite their abundance, whitefish are either overlooked or avoided by Idaho anglers because – despite their kinship – they don't resemble or fight like a trout.

Mountain whitefish tend to be more abundant than trout, in part because they produce so many eggs. Spawning in October and November, whitefish may deposit 20,000 to 40,000 eggs, compared with 2,000 to 4,000 for an average trout. Whitefish can also live more than 15 years and can tolerate warmer water than most trout.

Although whitefish do not jump like a trout when on the end of your line, they do put up a pretty fair fight. To target whitefish with a rod and reel, remember that they tend to run in schools during most of the year, usually in pools and deeper runs below fast water riffles. In winter months, this schooling behavior becomes even stronger. So when you find one whitefish, you have probably found a bunch.



Evin Oneale, IDFG



Evin Oneale, IDFG

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***Mountain whitefish are best pursued using small hooks fished near the bottom of deep pools***

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Because so few anglers target mountain whitefish, they represent an underutilized harvest opportunity for anglers desiring to take some fish home. In most locations, whitefish limits are 25 per day. If keeping whitefish is of no interest, you may choose to pursue them on a catch and release basis.

Whitefish tend to focus their feeding on aquatic insects, on or near the river bottom. To catch them, bait anglers fish on the bottom, using smaller hooks with grubs, a single salmon egg or a small piece of worm. Fly anglers often use weight to get a midge, caddis or even stonefly imitation near the bottom. In the summer, whitefish can be found feeding on small mayflies at the tailouts of pools or runs, making them vulnerable to a well-placed dry fly.

If you keep some whitefish for eating, they can be prepared using just about any trout recipe. Whitefish have a slightly higher oil content to their flesh, making them great for smoking, and they are delicious battered and deep fried. And folks who enjoy pickled fish swear by pickled whitefish.





# Mountain Lakes Fishing

Anglers are attracted to Idaho mountain (alpine) lakes for a variety of reasons including solitude and spectacular views – in addition to great fishing. Whatever the reason, Idaho alpine lakes are tremendously popular.

Idaho has more than 3,000 alpine lakes of which about 1,300 are stocked or have natural fish populations. Fish and Game typically stocks these lakes via airplane, but some lakes are stocked by horseback or backpack. Stocked species include rainbow trout, grayling, golden trout, and cutthroat trout to name a few. Some of these fish species are exclusive to mountain lakes – yet another reason to give them a try.



Joe Kozfay, IDFG



Martin Koenig, IDFG

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## **Mountain lakes are special places** *that can produce trophy trout*

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In most cases, mountain lakes are stocked with trout fry on a three-year cycle. The lakes are cold, pristine and often so clear you can see the bottom. In these conditions, fish grow slowly; it may take 3 to 4 years for a fish to reach “keeper” size. Limited natural food further slows growth rates, but makes these fish eager to bite.

Use the Idaho Fish Planner - located on the Fish and Game website - to help choose where to fish based on fish species of interest, access, fish stocking history and recent fish sampling. Remember that some mountain lakes were stocked years ago and those fish are reproducing on their own so there may

be great fishing even though a lake has not been stocked recently.

Most mountain lakes can be reached only on foot or by horseback, while a handful are accessible by vehicle. Some are along well-marked trails. Many others are in truly remote, backcountry locations. The more remote the lake, the less likely you’ll be sharing it with other anglers. A good set of topographic maps, a compass and a GPS unit will help you find your destination.

Mountain lakes fishing equipment should include a break-down fishing rod in a sturdy case. Many anglers pack in a lightweight float tube which allows for easier fishing. Fly anglers should consider bringing both floating and sinking fly line and a small assortment of wet and dry flies. Remember that these fish are looking for food and usually aren’t too finicky. Spin anglers should bring along a small selection of flashy spinners, spoons or crankbaits.

Natural baits, including grasshoppers, beetles and stonefly larvae, can also be used.

As with other types of fishing, check the regulations before you go. Most mountain lakes have general rules, but some have special gear, size or bag limit restrictions. Handle fish properly when catch and release fishing. And please help preserve these special places by packing out your trash.

