

Idaho Fish & Game News

January 2011



Volume 23, Number 1

Fishing in Winter Offers Something for Everyone

What could be better; a light snowfall from pewter clouds, murmuring ripples hiding elusive prey – quiet, solitude, cold, fishing a winter stream.

Traditionally stream fishing was a summertime thing – winter is the time for ice fishing. But winter also offers some of the best steelhead fishing and many rivers are open to trout catch-and-release fishing, and perhaps the most overlooked opportunity is fishing for native mountain whitefish.

For years, fishing on rivers and streams was open Saturday of the Memorial Day weekend through November 30. A winter stream season opened December 1 and ran through March 31 on trout, whitefish and brook trout on selected streams.

Through the years, more and more stream segments have been opened through the winter by exception – so many in fact that the exceptions outnumbered the streams open under the general rule.

That's going to change with new fishing rules that take effect January 1. The 2011-2012 fishing rules may focus attention on the abundant opportunities through the winter, but they bring little real change on the ground.

The new fishing rules make year-round seasons on rivers and streams the general rule instead of the exception. Most streams already are open through the winter, but the change brings some new opportunities by opening streams from April through the Friday before Memorial Day.

Other major changes add a month of ice fishing on Henrys Lake and opens the Snake River below American Falls Dam to winter fishing.

The new rule keeps Henrys Lake open through January 1, providing another month of ice fishing.

The winter fishing season on the Snake River below American Falls Dam begins October 16 for catch-and-release using artificial flies and lures. The general harvest season begins Saturday of Memorial Day weekend and ends October 15.

Elsewhere in the state, ice fishing opportunities for trout, perch, bluegill and other species can be found at many lowland lakes. Anglers should be careful before venturing onto the ice as conditions can vary considerably depending on the lake and the time of the year. Most lowland lakes are stocked with trout and provide good ice fishing. When fishing for trout, try using worms, eggs or power bait on a glow hook just 3 to 10 feet under the surface. If the fish aren't biting, move around until you find those fish.

For anglers brave enough to get out there and tough out the elements, good winter fishing opportunities are available in many streams and rivers for mountain whitefish and trout. Be sure to check the regulations; many rivers and streams are open only to catch-and-release when fishing for trout.

In winter, larger cutthroat trout congregate in some of the
(Fishing in Winter continued on Page 2)



Winter steelhead fishing on the Boise River is popular. *IDFG photo*

Inside this issue

Page 3: **Whitefish Don't Jump**

Page 4: **Winter Fishing Opportunities**



Cold weather and frozen lakes bring out the hardest of anglers.

IDFG photo

Beneath the Ice

Ice fishing on lakes or reservoirs can provide outdoor adventure during 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.

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, with baits such as maggots, worms or cut bait.

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 five lines per angler – but when

(Fishing in Winter from Page 1)

deeper slower pools. One way to locate these pools is to look for trout rising for midges during warm winter days.

For some hardy anglers, winter means it's time to fish for mountain whitefish. Try drifting a beadhead nymph along the bottom. One of the favorite baits are maggots, which are legal in most waters in the winter.

If that's not enough, spring steelhead season opens January 1 on the Clearwater, Salmon and Little Salmon rivers, the lower Snake, the Snake above Hells Canyon Dam and on the Boise rivers.

Some of the best steelhead fishing can be had during winter, as fish tend to stack up in the deeper, slower holes. These spots often are fairly easy to locate by the number of anglers fishing the best spots. Anglers who venture up Hells Canyon may have the river all to themselves.

Good fishing can be had from boat or shore and techniques range from back trolling plugs to bouncing bait on the bottom to drifting bobbers with plastic beads or bait beneath. A general rule of thumb is if you aren't catching them try going smaller. Many people catch fish using a single plastic bead.

Details on these and many other fishing opportunities are included in the new brochure as well as additional rule changes in each region.

Anglers also will find the brochure in an easier to read format and 16 pages shorter. All the rules are presented by region, eliminating the need for statewide rules. The number of exceptions was reduced by a third overall while maintaining all existing protections.

Anglers will need a 2011 fishing license and relevant permits after December 31.



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 about two 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.



Idaho Fish and Game News
 Fish and Game Commission
 Chairman: Dr. Wayne Wright
 Director: Cal Groen
 Published by Idaho Fish and Game
 600 South Walnut
 P.O. Box 25, Boise, ID 83707
 (208) 334-3746
 E-mail: idfginfo@idfg.idaho.gov
<http://fishandgame.idaho.gov>
 Volume 23, Number 1

Inches of Ice:	Safe Load
1-2	Unsafe!
3	Group use - spread out
4	General use
5	Snowmobile/ATV
7-8	Car (2 ton gross)
8	Light truck (2 ½ ton gross)
10	Medium Truck (3 ½ ton gross)



Safety on the Ice

Anglers must use their own discretion when deciding whether or not the ice is thick enough for ice fishing.

Early season ice anglers should check ice before venturing over deep water. Drill a hole and measure thickness. Four inches of solid ice – not mushy or porous – is generally considered safe for anglers, but it takes 8 to 10 inches to support a snow machine or an ATV.

Fish with a partner, take extra dry clothes and take a throw rope along just in case. Some suggest carrying a knife or sharp instrument on a lanyard around the neck. It would give a person who has fallen through something to grip the ice to help pull themselves out, or to hang onto as they await help.

Anglers should wear warm clothing and be prepared for winter weather and driving conditions. Heavy-soled boots, insulated overalls or wool pants, woolen cap and mittens or gloves are a must.

Cold Water Dangers

Water does not have to be near freezing to kill; it only has to be colder than a person to cause potentially fatal hypothermia.

Cold water wicks body heat 25 times faster than air at that same temperature. Anyone who falls in has only a few minutes before the cold renders them numb and unable to swim.

Most boats float even when capsized or swamped, so get in or on the boat to get as far out of the water as possible.

Wearing a life vest is a must. It will help preserve body heat and keeps even an unconscious person afloat. Get to shelter, change into dry clothing and warm up slowly.

Idaho Fish and Game Policy

Idaho wildlife management policy is set by seven volunteer commissioners. The Idaho Fish and Game Commission's policy decisions are based on research and recommendations by the professional staff of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and with input from the governor's office, the state Legislature, hunters, anglers and the public.

Whitefish Don't Jump

Winter is the traditional season for Idaho's native mountain whitefish.

They're good to eat, fun to catch and have saved many fishing trips. Yet, many an angler turn their nose up at this funny looking member of the trout family.

Fish biologist Steve Elle says Idaho's whitefish deserve more respect.



IDFG photo by Steve Elle

“They don't jump when they're hooked. They don't look like a trout,” Elle said. “They have this funny upturned nose and large scales. So people dismiss them as undesirable. Fact is, they are fun to fish for and taste great.”

Longtime whitefish anglers don't worry about the fish's reputation. To them whitefish are a well kept secret they alone get to enjoy on a winter outing.

“The traditional whitefish fishing season is in the winter time,” Elle said. “This time of year they tend to concentrate in pools where people can catch large numbers of them.”

Those in the know will get together to fish all day at a favorite fishing hole. The limit for whitefish is 25 a day for most waters. When the sun goes down anglers head home with a cooler full of fish to smoke, pickle, freeze or eat for dinner.

“If you drive by a several cars parked along a river on a cold winter day,” Elle

said. “You've probably passed some old-timers fishing for whitefish.”

Fishing Tips:

- Mountain whitefish tend to run in schools, usually in pools and in the deeper runs below fast water riffles. In the winter months the schooling behavior becomes even stronger.

If you find one whitefish, you'll probably find a lot more.

- Mountain whitefish feed on aquatic insects on or near the river bottom. To catch them, bait anglers fish 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 stonefly imitation near the bottom.

The 2011-2012 Fishing Seasons and Rules take effect January 1.

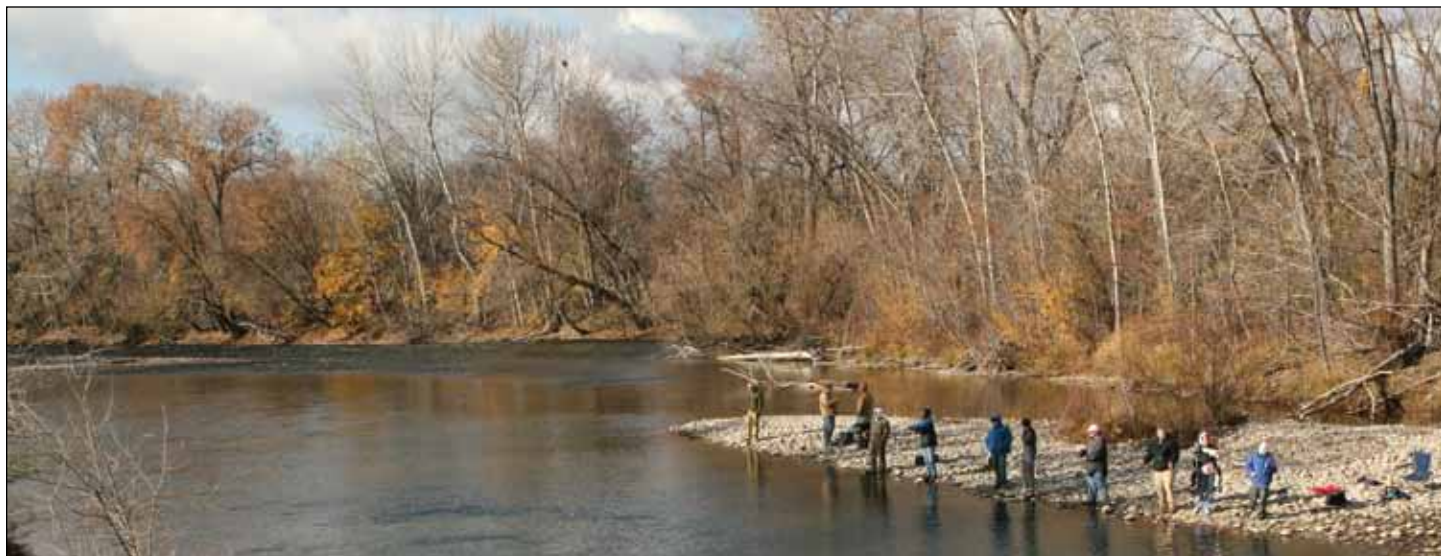
The new brochure has a new format, and it is 16 pages shorter. The rules are regional, rather than statewide, eliminating about one third of the exceptions.

The main changes are:

Streams and rivers are open year round, unless closed by exception.

The winter season on Henrys Lake is one month longer, running through January 1.

A winter catch-and-release season on the Snake River below the American Falls Dam will run from October 16 through the Friday before Memorial Day weekend. The harvest season will run from Memorial Day weekend through October 15.



Anglers often line popular Boise River fishing holes during the winter.

IDFG photo by Evin Oneale

Winter Fishing Opportunities by Region Around the State

Panhandle:

For ice fishing, Fernan, Avondale, Twin, Kelso, Rose, Round, Robinson, Smith, Brush and Shepherd lakes are good for bluegill, yellow perch, largemouth bass and rainbow trout. Cocolalla is the best for yellow perch. Spirit Lake anglers will find plenty of 8- to 10-inch kokanee. When Priest Lake freezes, lake trout can be caught through the ice. Winter is also a great time to fish rivers. And it's the best time for whitefish.

Clearwater:

Ice fishing for trout, perch and bluegill can be found at lowland lakes stocked with trout or try Elk Creek Reservoir for brook trout up to 15 to 18 inches. Winchester Lake has trout, bass, yellow perch, crappie and perhaps catfish. Winter fishing is available on most larger streams and rivers, such as lower Selway, Lochsa, North Fork Clearwater and Middle Fork Clearwater for mountain whitefish, trout and steelhead. Most are open all year, but many are open only to catch-and-release when fishing for trout.

Southwest:

C.J. Strike Reservoir: fishing from the bank or a boat for trout and perch. Winter perch fishing near the dam and around rocky outcroppings. Urban ponds include Park Center and Quinns ponds in Boise, Merrill Pond in Eagle,

Settlers Pond in Meridian and Wilson Ponds in Nampa. The lower Boise River is open with rainbow, brown trout and whitefish. South Fork Boise River below Anderson Ranch Dam has wild trout with access through the winter, catch-and-release only; mountain whitefish may be harvested. Lake Cascade has lots of perch, rainbow trout, coho, salmon and kokanee. Horsethief Reservoir: Good trout fishing, road and foot access. Lost Valley Reservoir: Good rainbow trout fishing, easy snowmobile access. Tripod Reservoir: Good trout fishing, snowmobile access.

Magic Valley:

Magic Reservoir popular for yellow perch and trout. Salmon Falls Creek Reservoir: Not the best ice conditions; anglers should use caution on the main reservoir, trout and yellow perch. Lake Walcott: anglers have been catching trout near the dam. Little Wood Reservoir: slower ice fishing than other reservoirs, and trout rarely exceed 16 inches. Little Wood River: Open all year, with brown and rainbow trout. Big Wood River: offers catch-and-release fishing. Rock Creek: year-round now open upstream from the Highline canal. Water is low, but a good opportunity to catch trout.

Southeast:

Two new winter fishing opportunities.

The Snake River below American Falls Dam and the Portneuf River above Lava Hot Springs will be open during the winter for catch-and-release fishing. Some of the best ice fishing in the state; for trout, try Chesterfield, Deep, and Devils Creek reservoirs. For yellow perch, Sportsman Park on American Falls Reservoir, Weston, and Alexander reservoirs.

Upper Snake:

Ririe Reservoir yields yellow perch and kokanee. Island Park Reservoir good for large trout and kokanee. Mackay Reservoir is one of the best ice fisheries in the region; anglers routinely catch limits of kokanee mixed with trout. South Fork Snake River offers good trout fishing. The lower Henrys Fork is open all year; January 1, the upper river will open as well, above Harriman State Park it is catch-and-release only.

Salmon:

Williams Lake yields 12- to 17-inch rainbow trout. Jimmy Smith and Herd lakes have bag limits of 25 trout. The Salmon River is open all year to trout fishing. Only adipose-fin clipped rainbow trout may be harvested. Steelhead tend to hold in the canyon reach below North Fork. Ice can make getting to the river hazardous.