

Utah Wildlife News
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In this issue:

Find the fish

See birds; have fun in the sun

Winter—a tough time for deer

Two openings on Wildlife Board

Apply for a big game permit

Find the Right Depth, and Don't Move Your Bait Much

Ice fishing success hinges on three things

Putting your bait or lure at the depth the fish are—and then not moving it much—are the keys to catching fish through the ice.

And using some simple devices that will help you know when you have a fish on the end of your line is a big help too.

Drew Cushing, warm water sport fisheries coordinator for the Division of Wildlife Resources, says fish become lethargic when they're under the ice.

"Fish will often stay at a certain water depth all winter long," Cushing says. "Also, they aren't as willing to move fast to catch their food.

"Keep those two things in mind," he says, "and you should find plenty of fish on the end of your line this winter."

Technique

As you search for fish, and also after you find them, don't move your bait or lure much. Keep it still. If you do want to give your bait or lure a little action, don't move it up and down much. And move it slowly.

"Remember that fish under the ice aren't willing to expend a lot of energy to catch their food," Cushing says. "If you move your bait or lure too much or too fast, the fish might decide it's not worth its effort to catch what you're offering it.

"The best thing to do," he says, "is find the depth where the fish are. Then drop your bait or lure right in front of the fish."

Water depth

The depth at which you'll find fish varies depending on the species you're after. No matter which water you're fishing in Utah, you'll probably find the following fish at the following depths:

(more)

page 2

Yellow perch

Either right on the bottom of the water you're fishing, or no more than six inches above the bottom.

Splake

Close to the bottom.

Trout, kokanee salmon

Suspended at various depths. You'll find trout and salmon just under the ice to as much as 15 feet below the ice. "Once you find the depth at which trout or salmon are suspended in a water," Cushing says, "there's a good chance you'll find them at that same depth throughout the winter."

To catch trout and salmon, Cushing recommends starting by fishing your bait or lure just under the surface. If you don't get a bite, lower your bait or lure a few feet. Try that depth for awhile. If the fish still aren't biting, continue lowering your bait or lure a few feet at a time. If you're using the right bait or lure, and you're still not catching fish, you'll know trout and salmon aren't using that part of the lake at that time.

Bluegill, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass

Near brush, bulrushes, rocks and weeds. Look for vegetation that's sticking up through the ice or ridges that extend down into the water. To find the depth where the fish are, start by dropping your bait or lure all the way to the bottom of the water you're fishing. Then raise your bait or lure a few feet at a time until you find the fish.

Burbot, walleye, tiger muskie, Northern pike

Near the bottom of the water you're fishing. Each of these fish like to pick baits or lures up, swim a ways with them, and then drop them. Fishing with the bail on your reel open, or using a device called a tip up, are good ways to let the fish run with your bait or lure before you set the hook.

If you're not sure which depth to try, ask anglers you see on the ice. "Most anglers are very willing to tell you the depth at which they're catching fish," Cushing says.

Cushing also reminds you that fish aren't everywhere in a lake. If you drill a hole and fish for 30 minutes without getting any bites, move to a new spot.

"Once you find a spot that has fish," he says, "keep coming back. More often than not, an ice fishing hotspot will stay hot."

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Bobbers

Not only do fish move less under the ice, they also don't bite their food as aggressively. And that can make it challenging to know when a fish is striking your bait or lure. "If you're relying on your fishing rod to tell you when a fish is on the end of your line," Cushing says, "you probably won't know it's time to set the hook."

(Setting the hook involve pulling up on your fishing rod to set the hook in the fish's mouth.)

Fortunately, inexpensive items such as ice bobbers are available. Simply measure the amount of line that will put your bait or lure at the depth you want to fish. Then attach your bobber at that point on your line. The bobber will sit on top of the water with your line dangling under it.

"When you see the bobber move," Cushing says, "you'll know it's time to set the hook."

Tip ups

An item that will cost you about \$15, but that's effective and fun to use, is called a tip up.

A tip up is a mechanism that you use instead of using a regular fishing rod. When a fish takes your bait, a mechanism on the tip up sends a small flag up, letting you know a fish is on the end of your line.

"Using a tip up makes it easier to fish in two holes," Cushing says. "You can drill two holes a ways apart and still know when a fish is biting the line in either hole."

Remember that in addition to your fishing license, you must have a two-pole permit to fish with two poles or two tip ups. Also, your poles or tip ups cannot be more than 100 feet apart, and you must be able to see each one clearly.

Videos and audio interview

More ice fishing basics are available in two videos produced by the DWR and in an audio interview Cushing recently did.

You can see the videos at www.youtube.com/UDWR. The audio interviews are available at www.wildlife.utah.gov/dwr/multimedia/podcasts.html.

Part 4

Our final story will list some of the best ice-fishing waters in Utah.

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Contact: Mark Hadley, DWR Relations with the Public Specialist (801) 538-4737

Have Fun in the Sun at Winter Bird Festival

See more than 100 species of birds

St. George -- A chance is coming up to see more than 100 species of birds in southern Utah's red rock country. The St. George Winter Bird Festival will be held Jan. 27 – 29.

The festival will be held in St. George and at bird watching hot spots in Washington County. For more information and a schedule of events, visit www.sgcity.org/birdfestival.

Denise Blyn, the festival's coordinator, says the St. George and Washington County area attract birders from across the West. "The area is a hot spot for wintering birds," she says.

Blyn says at last year's event, viewers saw more than 100 species of birds. "We saw everything from Vermillion flycatchers to roadrunners," she says.

Workshops and guided field trips to the birding hot spots will be offered on Jan. 28 and 29. Nationally recognized bird photographer Paul Bannick will be the featured presenter at Dixie State College on the evening of Jan. 28.

Bannick will also lead a field trip on Jan. 29. And he'll be the keynote speaker at a festival banquet held that evening.

Lynn Chamberlain, regional conservation outreach manager for the Division of Wildlife Resources, says if you're interested in birds, you should have a great time at the event.

The Division of Wildlife Resources, Red Cliffs Audubon, the city of St. George and Dixie State College have teamed up to put this year's festival together. This is the eighth straight year the festival has been held.

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Want to Gather Shed Antlers in Utah? You Must Complete an Online Course First

Late winter and early spring is the worst time of the year for elk, moose and especially deer in Utah.

Deep snow makes it harder for deer to move and find food in the winter. And cold temperatures sap the deers' strength. By the time winter ends, deer are usually the weakest they'll be all year.

Winter is also the time of year when male deer, elk and moose shed their antlers. The animals will be without antlers until this spring, when they'll start to grow a new set.

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Gathering shed antlers

Gathering antlers that drop off the heads of deer, elk and moose is an activity that's grown in popularity across the country, including here in Utah. The challenge with shed-antler gathering is that it happens during the worst time of the year for the animals and the habitat they rely on in the winter.

"By the time winter ends, the animals are stressed," says Mike Fowlks, Law Enforcement Section chief for the Division of Wildlife Resources.

"The habitat they rely on in the winter is also wet," he says. "It's easily damaged. Once the habitat is damaged, it can take years for it to recover."

Fortunately, Fowlks says you can have fun gathering shed antlers without stressing the animals and damaging their habitat.

"A free course that's available at our website will show you how," he says.

Fowlks says you must complete the DWR's Antler Gathering Ethics course if you want to gather shed antlers in Utah between Feb. 1 and April 15.

Free course

The free course is available at www.wildlife.utah.gov/shedantler. After you finish the course, make sure you print a certificate that shows you've completed the course. "And make sure you carry your certificate with you," Fowlks says. "By law, you must have your certificate with you while you're gathering shed antlers."

If you have young children, and you've completed the course, your children don't need to complete it. As long as you've completed the course, your certificate will cover your kids too.

Fowlks says if you complete the course, you can gather antlers across Utah. "Please remember, though, that many of the state's wildlife management areas are closed in the spring and the winter to protect wildlife," he says.

You must complete the course if you want to gather shed antlers between Feb. 1 and April 15. If you wait until April 15 or later to gather antlers, you don't need to complete the course.

For more information, call the nearest Division of Wildlife Resources office or the DWR's Salt Lake City office at (801) 538-4700.

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Contact: Mark Hadley, DWR Relations with the Public Specialist (801) 538-4737

Two Openings on the Utah Wildlife Board

Applications accepted until March 17

The group that has the final say about hunting, fishing and how wildlife are managed in Utah has two openings it needs to fill.

In August, Rick Woodard and Keele Johnson—two members of the Utah Wildlife Board—will leave the board after six years of service.

Gov. Gary Herbert is looking for two people—one from central Utah and one from southeastern Utah—to take their place.

Staci Coons, board coordinator for the Division of Wildlife Resources, says the Utah Wildlife Board consists of seven citizens from different parts of the state. To help manage wildlife in the state, Utah has been divided into five regions. State law requires that every region have at least one citizen on the board.

Coons says Woodard is the only member of the board from central Utah. And Johnson is the only member from southeastern Utah. “That’s why only those who live in central or southeastern Utah can apply,” she says. “The board needs people from those parts of the state to take Rick and Keele’s place.”

To serve on the board, Coons says you need to have a strong interest in Utah’s wildlife and wildlife management in the state. You also need to be committed to serving and representing the people of Utah.

Applications and nominating committee

Applications to fill the two positions will be accepted until March 17.

To apply or for more information, visit <http://go.usa.gov/rS4> on the Web.

The Utah Wildlife Board Nominating Committee—an 11-member committee appointed by Gov. Herbert—will review the applications and select candidates to interview. Then the committee will forward its recommendations to the governor. Gov. Herbert will make the final decision about who will fill the vacancies.

The members the governor appoints will serve six-year terms.

Coons says board members attend six to seven wildlife board meetings in Salt Lake City each year. “They’re also encouraged to attend monthly Wildlife Regional Advisory Council meetings in their regions,” she says. “Some overnight travel is also required.”

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Contact: Mark Hadley, DWR Relations with the Public Specialist (801) 538-4737

Apply for a Big Game Hunting Permit

Applications accepted starting Feb. 1

If you enjoy hunting big game in Utah, a time you wait for all year is almost here. Starting Feb. 1, you can apply for a permit to hunt big game animals in 2011.

“Big game hunting in Utah is very popular with people across the country,” says Judi Tutorow, wildlife licensing coordinator for the Division of Wildlife Resources. “We expect to receive about 280,000 applications this year.”

Start applying on Feb. 1

You can apply for a 2011 permit at www.wildlife.utah.gov starting Feb. 1. Your application must be received through the website no later than 11 p.m. on March 3 to be entered in the draw for permits.

If you have questions or need help completing your application, please call any DWR office before 6 p.m. on March 3.

Results of the 2011 Utah big game draw will be available by May 31.

Applying for a point

If you're not going to hunt in 2011, you can still apply for a bonus point or a preference point. These points increase the chance that you'll draw a permit the next time you apply.

You can start applying for a point on Feb. 1. Your application for a point must be received through www.wildlife.utah.gov no later than 11 p.m. on March 10.

Please remember that you must have a hunting license or a combination license to apply for a point or a hunting permit.

For more information, call the nearest Division of Wildlife Resources office or the DWR's Salt Lake City office at (801) 538-4700.

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