

Utah Wildlife News
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Mark Hadley, Editor
(801) 538-4737

In this issue:

Give ice fishing a try!

No trapping change

More bear hunting permits

New black bear plan

Cold Ice Means Hot Fishing

Winter is one of the best times to catch fish

Just because it's cold doesn't mean it's time to put your fishing gear away. In fact, if you put your gear away now, you might miss some of the best fishing of the year.

That's right—those “crazy” people standing on the ice at waters across Utah aren't so crazy after all. They know a layer of cold ice means hot fishing in the water beneath the ice.

“You can set your watch by it,” says Drew Cushing, warm water sport fisheries coordinator for the Division of Wildlife Resources. “When ice starts to form on a body of water, the fish under the ice get very active. And they're eager to bite.”

And that eagerness to bite often continues through the winter.

A cheap and fun way to fish

Cushing says fishing on the ice provides anglers with several advantages:

- If you're willing to walk, you can reach any part of the reservoir you want to fish.

Cushing says ice is the great equalizer. “In the winter, you don't need a boat or a float tube to reach certain parts of a reservoir,” he says. “If you have a rod and a reel, and you're willing to walk, you can reach any part of the reservoir you want to fish.”

- Catching fish in the winter doesn't require the skill needed to catch fish during other times of the year. If you drop your bait in front of the fish, the fish will probably take it.
- You don't need a lot of expensive equipment. A short rod and reel; some line, hooks and wax worms or meal worms; and a digging bar or an ice auger are all you need to get started.

If you like to fish with lures, you may want to include a few ice flies and small jigs in your tackle box too.

(more)

page 2

- Because you can dig two holes close together, ice fishing is a great way to double your fun by fishing with two poles. Just make sure you have a two-pole permit before you dip that second line in the water.
- In addition to catching fish, you and those you're fishing with can have fun visiting together. Just drill your holes close together and enjoy your visit. "Most ice anglers really look forward to the social side of ice fishing," Cushing says.

That sounds great. But isn't it hard to drill a hole through the ice?

One thing that surprises many first-time ice anglers is how easy it is to drill a hole through the ice.

Cushing says if you have a hand auger, you can drill through six to eight inches of ice in about a minute. "It'll take a little longer if you use a digging bar," he says, "but not much."

Digging bars cost between \$5 and \$10. Manual ice augers cost about \$50.

Great! But how can I have fun if I'm cold?

Temperatures can be cold during the ice-fishing season. But that doesn't mean you have to be cold. You can stay warm simply by dressing for the conditions.

Cushing says one piece of equipment that anglers often forget is a pair of waterproof boots. As the day warms, slush can develop on top of the ice. "Having a pair of waterproof boots will keep your feet warm and dry," he says.

Sounds good. But how do I know if the ice is safe to walk on?

Most anglers wait until the ice is at least 4 inches thick before walking on it.

Ice is usually thinnest near the shore. Before you walk out, Cushing says you should stay close to shore and dig or drill a test hole to see how thick the ice is. You may also want to dig or drill some additional holes as you walk out.

If you find that the ice in your test holes is at least four inches thick, you can be almost certain that the ice farther out is at least four inches thick, or thicker.

Two ice-related items that you may want to consider buying are ice cleats and ice spikes.

You can strap the ice cleats to the bottom of your boots. The cleats will give you better traction as you walk on the ice.

Ice spikes are two short pieces of metal. They're often attached by a short cord that you can drape around the neck.

If you fall through the ice, you can pull yourself out by jabbing the spikes into the top of the ice near the edge of the hole.

Part 2

Next week's story will focus on the equipment you'll need to catch fish through the ice.

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

Trapping Law Won't Change

Salt Lake City -- The amount of time between when a trapper sets a non-lethal trap, and when he has to check it again, won't change in Utah.

On Jan. 4, the Utah Wildlife Board voted 4-2 to keep a requirement that trappers must check their non-lethal foothold traps within 48 hours of setting them.

The Division of Wildlife Resources opposed lengthening the time past 48 hours. And four of Utah's five Regional Advisory Councils also voted against lengthening the time.

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More Chances to Hunt Bears

Wildlife Board approves more hunting permits for 2011

Salt Lake City -- By all indications, black bears in Utah are doing well. And that means hunters will have a few more chances to hunt bears in 2011.

On Jan. 4, the Utah Wildlife Board approved several bear hunting changes for Utah's 2011 seasons. All of the changes the board approved will be available in the 2011 Utah Black Bear Guidebook. The free guidebook should be available at www.wildlife.utah.gov/guidebooks during the week of Jan. 31.

The following are some of the changes the board approved:

- A total of 419 hunting permits. That's 53 more than the 366 offered in 2010.

About 40 percent of those who draw a bear-hunting permit end up taking a bear.

The extra 53 permits should result in hunters taking about 180 bears in 2011.

In 2010, hunters took 158 bears.

- Forty one of the 419 permits are premium-limited-entry permits.

If they don't take a bear during the spring hunt, those who draw one of the 41 premium-limited-entry permits can hunt bears again during the fall hunt.

- The spring hunting season has been extended for one week on four additional bear hunting units in Utah.

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The South Slope, Yellowstone unit and the South Slope, Vernal, Diamond Mountain, Bonanza unit in northeastern Utah, and the Central Mountains, Manti-North unit in central Utah, are the three units where the spring season was extended at the request of biologists from the Division of Wildlife Resources.

The Wildlife Board also approved a request from the Southern Region Advisory Council to extend the season one week on the Boulder unit in southern Utah.

Adding the four units brings to 10 the total number of bear hunting units in Utah that have a spring hunting season that runs one week longer than the other units in the state.

The extended season starts April 9 and runs until June 5.

- Those who draw a fall spot-and-stalk permit for the Book Cliffs, Little Creek unit can hunt from August through November.

2010 was the first year a spot-and-stalk bear hunt was held on the unit. To avoid conflicts with big game hunters, bear hunters were not allowed to hunt on the unit in October. But very few deer hunters are allowed to hunt the unit, and the DWR is not aware of any conflicts that occurred between deer and bear hunters. For that reason, DWR biologists recommended that spot-and-stalk bear hunters be allowed to hunt on the unit in October too.

(Spot-and-stalk hunters may not use hounds to track and tree bears, and they may not use bait to try to lure bears in.)

The Book Cliffs, Little Creek unit is in the roadless area in the Book Cliffs.

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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New Bear Plan Approved

Plan will guide bear management until 2023

Salt Lake City -- A plan that will guide how black bears are managed in Utah for the next 12 years was approved on Jan. 4 by the Utah Wildlife Board.

The plan is available at <http://go.usa.gov/rkf>. After clicking on <http://go.usa.gov/rkf>, scroll down to the "Black bear management plan" subhead to find a link to the plan.

The following are among the plan's highlights:

- Currently, most bear hunters in Utah use hounds to track and tree bears. A few use archery equipment and hunt over bait. But starting in 2012, some areas of the state will become spot-and-stalk-only areas.

Hunters may not use hounds or bait during spot-and-stalk hunts.

- Utah will have its first harvest-objective bear hunting areas starting in 2012. Having harvest-objective areas will allow biologists to focus more hunters on bears that are killing livestock and raiding campgrounds.

Currently, all of Utah's bear hunting areas are limited-entry areas. Only those who draw a permit for a limited-entry area can hunt on it.

Under the new plan, some of the limited-entry areas will become harvest-objective areas. The number of hunters who can hunt on a harvest-objective area isn't limited, so switching an area to harvest objective will increase the number of people who can hunt the area. Letting more hunters hunt an area increases the chance that a set number of bears are taken.

As soon as the set number of bears is taken (called the area's quota), the hunt on the area will end for the season.

- Archery hunters can still use bait. Using bait allows archery hunters to lure bears in close enough so they can make a clean and effective shot.
- Currently, three factors are used to determine the health of Utah's bear population—the percentage of females taken by hunters, the average age of the bears taken and the number of adult bears that survive from year to year.

You won't find these three factors in the new plan. In their place, the key factors are:

- The number of females and the number of adult males that hunters take.

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(An adult male bear is a bear that's five years of age or older.)

Justin Dolling, game mammals coordinator for the Division of Wildlife Resources, says the number of females and adult males that hunters take gives important information about how a bear population is doing.

"The number of females is important because females give birth to and care for the cubs," Dolling says. "But the number of adult males hunters take is the best early indicator we have about the health of a bear population."

Dolling says hunters usually find adult males because adult males wander more than the other age groups. "You know a bear population is in decline if the number of adult males hunters take is going down and the number of females is going up," he says.

- Results from two important bear studies will also be used to determine the health of Utah's bear population.

One study involves snagging hair from bears at sites across Utah and then using DNA tests to determine how often bears are visiting the research sites. This study is helping biologists determine the total number of bears in Utah. It's also helping them measure the growth rate of the state's bear population.

The second study involves visiting bear dens in the winter to see how many cubs are in the dens and to assess the health of the cubs and their mothers. This study is giving biologists important information about the number of bears that are coming into Utah's population each year.

A 10-member group called the Utah Black Bear Advisory Committee compiled the new plan. The committee's members are listed at the start of the plan.

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