



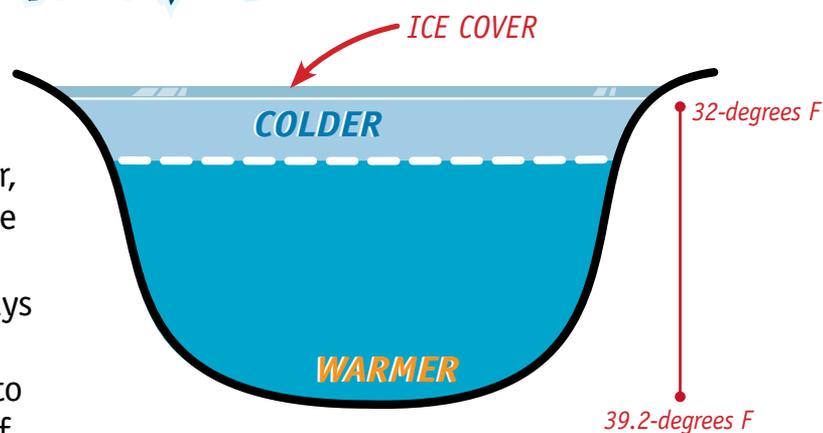
FINDING FISH UNDER THE FROZEN WATER

PONDS AND LAKES

Water freezes at 32-degrees F, but it is most dense at 39.2-degrees F. During winter, and before ice forms, the entire pond or lake may be at this temperature. As the surface waters cool more, the colder water layer stays at the surface. If the surface water remains calm and stays at 32-degrees F, ice begins to form. The layer of ice is “floating” on top of the lake—like an ice cube floating in a cold drink. The ice forms from the surface down, the colder the weather, the thicker the ice. The water beneath the ice is insulated from the cold and often remains at 39.2-degrees F.

Under the ice, the level of activity and **metabolism** of fish is less than during other times of the year. Using less energy means fish can eat less. Fish may sometimes use their stored energy reserves over the winter. Other times, they may eat but do not use much energy to find food. Bluegills eat plankton and other invertebrates that remain active during the winter. Small ice fishing lures and flies imitate these food items. If you know anything about ice fishing, you know that fish don't move far or fast.

Fish may also move to deeper water where temperatures are slightly warmer.



Young fish find refuge among vegetation or other cover. Carp and bullhead catfish lie still on the bottom or may bury themselves in the mud. Sunken logs or human-made fish structures offer protection for others.

Small increases in water temperature may result in an increase of activity. A clear, sunny day can warm the water just a few degrees. The water entering a lake or pond may also be warmer. Fish will move to the warmer water. The fish and things they eat will be gathered at these spots. Activity is higher at these spots than other places due to the warmer water and abundance of food. Finding these places is the key to ice fishing success. The opposite also is true, and a small decrease in water temperature causes fish to slow down. When this happens, anglers say the fish are “turned off.”

STREAMS AND RIVERS

Unlike the deep water in a pond or a lake, the moving water in streams, creeks and rivers is exposed to winter weather. The water temperature in many of these waters changes with the weather. It may be cold enough to form ice along the water's edge. During the winter months, fish move to calm, deeper water. They find shelter near things that block the current. Fish use less energy remaining in these spots, compared to where you find them in summer. Fish may also gather where springs or other warm water enters. These places can be fishing hot spots.

Fish like Walleyes, Muskellunge, Smallmouth Bass, trout and pike remain active during the winter months. Look for them in places sheltered from current. They will not chase your bait as they do in summer. Your presentation needs to be precise and slow. Bites are gentle, because fish will not move far for food when the water is cold. Fish like catfish and carp are less active.



*Yellow
Breeches
Creek,
Cumberland
County*

FISHING CAN BE GREAT WHEN IT'S COLD OUTSIDE

Fish become more active during warm and sunny days. Even then, fish do not move far or very fast, so slow down. Safety is also important when fishing in winter. **Hypothermia** can happen quickly. That's when your body temperature drops below 95-degrees F. Wear clothing that will protect you from the cold. Bring a change of clothes in case you get wet. Most important, wear a life jacket, and never go fishing alone. For more information on ice fishing and safety, visit our website at www.fishandboat.com/ice.htm.



Bluegill