



East State Best Frozen Panfish Lakes

by Vic Attardo photos by the author

Vast and often frozen to the core are two concepts that describe the eastern side of the Keystone State during the winter. So, where is an ice angler to go for frozen panfish action?

Lackawanna Lake

I'm in love with Lackawanna Lake. Of any ice lake in eastern Pennsylvania, this is where I have done the best over the last two seasons. Two years ago, there was a tournament going on at this 210-acre impoundment, northeast of Scranton. The ice was so jammed with anglers that I wondered if the white sheet could take the weight. That's an exaggeration, of course, but what isn't an embellishment are all of the wonderful bluegills that were caught that day.

Subsequent visits haven't been quite so stellar, but most were good, real good. Most importantly, the bluegills aren't stunted. You never know what a year-class will do from one graduation to the next, but Lackawanna Lake apparently has a good permanent faculty.

The lower, southern end of the lake from the Rt. 407 bridge down towards the dam throat is the most popular area to ice fish. The average depth is seven feet in this area with a deeper core of more than 20 feet running a wiggly line through the center towards the dam.

Lackawanna Lake has weeds, but they're not winter thick. You have to find what depths the bluegills are holding. Days often start out in shallow water. Then, work out to deeper water. Pockets of perch are often

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found near the bridge usually out from the grassy, high-banked shore around the middle boat ramp and ice-skating zone.

When ice fishing Lackawanna Lake, Lackawanna County, be prepared to work some deeper water. Those of you who only use fairly-light jigs will have a hard time determining bottom. Come with some chain jiggging spoons and fatter jigs, and you can do very well here.

Lackawanna Lake also receives trout stockings, and the first drop-offs around the lake are where these fish usually circulate. Pickerel can be caught as well.

Hopewell Lake

Is it ever not weedy on Hopewell Lake? The lower dam of the lake can be a forest, even in mid-winter, and the upper, shallower end of the lake—to a line parallel with the swimming pool—remains pretty grassy as well. For winter panfish, it works. I've frequently caught nice bluegills from the 68-acre Hopewell Lake in French Creek State Park and saw record-sized perch and crappies come from these cold waters. Indeed, these two species have good heft at Hopewell Lake.

The upper end of the lake, by the parking area and swimming pool, gets the most attention. Working out from the tiny island is okay, but you need to drag your ice sled further towards the pool for better action. Depths here are about seven to nine feet, so the tiny jigs will reach bottom.

The brave and able walk a long way down to the bulbous area towards the dam. Depths of more than 20 feet are found in this zone, and I have seen the weeds, big like Ponderosa Pines, curled up under the crystal clear ice and touching the bottom layer. Amazing. I've fished the lower end a few times, and while I've nabbed some real beauties, it can be hit or miss. The upper area out from the pool and jetty is generally more consistent.

Scotts Run Lake is also at French Creek State Park. At 21-acres, it's a beautiful impoundment. However, it doesn't have the big panfish offered by Hopewell Lake. What Scotts Run Lake contains is considerable numbers of stocked trout. For that, it receives a lot of attention from ice anglers.

Sometimes the larger Hopewell Lake won't be thoroughly frozen, but Scotts Run Lake is thoroughly frozen. So, it pays to be flexible when traveling to this state park in Berks and Chester counties.

Lake Towhee

Gosh it's tiny, only 48-acres, but Lake Towhee in Bucks County has large numbers of panfish, and it's easy to fish, making it a good ice mark.

Towhee (named after a beautiful bird) is a county park with good facilities. All you need to do here is park, walk out on the ice about 20 yards from the ramp or 20



Fred Prout raises a nice bluegill from Hopewell Lake, French Creek State Park.



To view or download the ice thickness chart, visit www.fishandboat.com/water/ice_thickness.pdf.

At 21-acres, beautiful Scotts Run Lake in French Creek State Park receives a lot of attention from ice anglers, because it contains considerable numbers of stocked trout.

When it's frozen, Marsh Creek offers big yellow perch, large crappies and good numbers of bluegill. That list is changeable with various year-classes, but the lake is fairly consistent.

While in the wet-water season, I launch across the lake from the state park office. During the winter, I begin my sled pull at the park's main lot and slide across to what is unofficially known as the Park Cove. This wide cove—more like a bay—is a relatively shallow expanse varying between six and ten feet in most spots. It often stays weedy, but not always. When it's weedy, the panfish will hang here.

Another good ice area is by the bridge at Little Conestoga Road. Parking along the road, most ice anglers go into the main lake working the channel that is created by the water coming under the bridge and out into the main body. In the winter, the panfish are not in the shallow weeds where they were in the wet season, so look for this channel.

Duck Harbor Pond

Duck Harbor Pond in Wayne County has more bluegills and perch than you'll find feathers on a flock of ducks. The best winter fishing is towards the lower end of this 221-acre impoundment, and it's a long sled pull from the only public access to this zone.

Some ice anglers do reasonably well 50 yards out and up lake, but the best ice fishing is down in the weeds on a line from the uppermost point on the south side all the way across the lake. If you can make the distance, it's worth the trip.

Perch don't often top 10 or 11 inches here, but they are plentiful. The bluegill are also plentiful and a very nice size. It's fairly shallow through the core of the lower end of the impoundment, so light jigs succeed. ☐



yards from the picnic shoreline and start fishing. Some guys go down to the dam, but I don't see much more happening there than anywhere else on the lake.

Lake Towhee is small and relatively shallow. You can work tiny ice jigs easily, and about the only bad thing that can happen is you'll lose some jigs to the prolific pickerel of the lake.

Marsh Creek Lake

Last year it froze. Some years it doesn't freeze. Marsh Creek Lake in Chester County sits on the ice line of southeast Pennsylvania. Get a warm winter and the hefty 535-acre lake can turn solid for one to two weeks. Get a big chill, and you can enjoy four to six weeks of good ice fishing here.