



*On sunnier days, fishing inside a shelter will improve your vision and ability to read ice fishing electronics. You never know what may bite. The nice white bass (top left) took a jig while the angler was fishing for bluegills and crappies.*

# Using Ice Fishing Electronics

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*photos by the author*

There have been many changes in ice fishing over the years. From better lines to high-powered augers, there is always plenty of new gear. None of these changes have made a bigger difference than the use of sonar and video cameras. Both systems allow anglers to have real-time knowledge of what is happening under their feet when they are on a lake. Often, these systems can make the difference between having a good day on the lake or going home empty handed.

## Sonar units

The most important piece of ice fishing gear you can purchase after your rod and reel is your sonar unit. There are many different brands, styles and types of sonar units on the market designed for ice fishing. Most are either flashers or LCD graphs. Flashers are better at showing real-time information. They immediately show the change in the position of both bait and fish as it happens. However, they are harder to learn how to use. LCD graphs show the same information as a flasher, only in picture format. They tend to be harder to see in low light and have less contrast but are intuitive to use. With either, simply drill a hole, clean it out and lower the transducer of the unit into the water. Lower your lure

down, and adjust the gain on the unit so that you can see its position in the water column. Fish accordingly. Use a sonar unit any time you are ice fishing to monitor fish and bait positions, set tip-up depths, find weed beds and more. If you can't get the fish to bite, use your sonar to help. If you do not see a fish suspended near your lure, actively jig until a fish shows up on the screen. Slow or completely stop the action of your lure, and wait for a bite. If the fish that come into your lure are finicky, try slowly raising the lure toward the surface. Keep a finger on the line to feel the light bite.

## Video cameras

Underwater video cameras are amazing ice fishing tools and show you the fish that get away. Begin by lowering the camera slowly to avoid scaring the fish. Monitor its progress using a sonar unit. Try not to hit the bottom of the lake when lowering the camera. This disturbs sediment and makes viewing a challenge. When using a camera, it works well to set up two holes about a foot apart. One hole will be for the camera. The other hole will be used for your line and you sonar unit. Position your lure in front of the camera, so you can see the reaction that fish have to it. Often, panfish

that seem uncatchable may be biting very lightly. It's extremely rewarding to watch a nice bluegill take your lure, and set the hook and reel it up. Many units have infrared LED bulbs on the camera housing. This will allow you to see the fish and your bait in low light conditions but should only be turned on when necessary. It may scare fish.

## Ice fishing techniques using electronics

Can't find the fish? Start looking throughout the lake by using a technique called running and gunning. This can be done with both video and sonar. If the ice is thin and clear, place the sonar transducer on the ice in a small puddle of water. It has to be wet to work well. Carry a thermos for this purpose. Then, simply look for fish before drilling holes. If the ice is too thick to permit this method, drill a lot of holes. You may need to let the fish acclimate to the disturbance prior to seeing them on sonar. Using a wide-angle transducer will allow you to see more of the bottom and find fish easier when using this technique. If you're using video, lower the camera down the hole about two feet above the bottom and look around. You'll be able to see more than your sonar can, and you can differentiate between crappies and carp before you start fishing. ☐



*A combination video camera and flasher unit is a new option on the market for anglers wanting to use both technologies in a single, compact package.*



*Watch your sonar unit closely when jigging for panfish. Actively targeting suspended fish that are seen on sonar is one of the best ways to catch bluegills, perch and other panfish.*



*There are currently many different sonar and video camera units on the market. These two units are an LCD video camera and a flasher.*



## Learn how to read your flasher

On this display, there are three lighted areas. The top lighted area from 0 to the right, has no meaning and is always present. The deepest signal indicates the bottom is at 9 feet of depth. The middle signal shows one or more fish centered at about 5 feet of depth. Red signals are the strongest. Orange signals are medium, and green signals are the weakest. Your gain should be set so that a small lure shows on the flasher as a green signal. Signals at the edge of the area covered by the sonar cone angle will be weak, so keep in mind that a big fish just to side of your hole can show up as a small green mark.