

HILLS CREEK LAKE

by Vic Attardo

photos by the author

I like to think of the 317 acres of Hills Creek Lake, Tioga County, as the first to freeze and the last to thaw. That may not be totally accurate as a couple of small and mid-size impoundments in the northcentral tier may get that honor depending on the weather, but Hills Creek Lake is a pretty good bet for early and late solid water.

Last year when many other lakes were opening up after a relatively short winter, Hills Creek Lake took on a brief second round of fishable ice in February that resulted in two days of Bluegill fishing. That happens a lot on this wide, shallow water body.

What makes the ice season remarkable at Hills Creek Lake is it manages to hold onto its green growth through the cold weather. These weeds host many Bluegills and good numbers of Yellow Perch as well.

Be prepared for all sorts of weather while ice fishing Hills Creek Lake. Last year, a trip starting on January 9



opened with 7-degrees F and strong east winds, which drove me indoors and, of course, the fish hardly bit. The next day it was 17-degrees F in the morning with winds from the south and plenty of Bluegills were caught. On the third day, the weather forecast called for heavy rain and strong winds, but we woke to full sun, no wind and a morning Bluegill bite. On Hills Creek Lake, you have to be prepared for anything, and take advantage of those good moments.

Greg and Annette Kratzer, Juniata County, did just that during three days of fishing at Hills Creek Lake.

"This is the best adventure I've ever had," said Kratzer, as the number of Bluegills and Pumpkinseeds piled up around her.

The main area of Hills Creek Lake is a broad irregular oval with a channel that starts in the back shallows, then broadens, deepens and winds quite a bite as it cuts through the heart of the impoundment.

On either side of the channel are extensive flats in the 5- to 8-foot range through most of the upper half of the lake. Other flats go deeper, with common depths of about 15 feet as the lake narrows. Across the lower third of Hills Creek Lake, you'll find shallows against the shorelines but also substantial drop-offs.

The majority of winter fishing is performed in the upper half of Hills Creek Lake. Anglers are dedicated to the stumps, and they make impressive catches.

When fishing Hills Creek Lake, as in other frozen lakes when targeting Bluegills, don't fish the densest weeds. Instead look for patches and sparse spots in the patches. This is where the Bluegills are ready for catching.

One mistake ice anglers make on the flats of Hills Creek Lake is to constantly move around. Catchable Bluegills on Hills Creek Lake like to circulate and move when feeding. Bluegills are abundant and return on a circuitous route.

I like to both deadstick and actively jig my ice rods on the weedy flats. It's often beneficial to do both at the same time. I'll set up three or four rods in holders or on buckets while jiggling another rod. I search an area to discover a hole that holds more Bluegills than the other holes. If no one is catching fish around me, I'll consider pulling a sled.

While I like using tungsten jigs, I prefer light, lead head jigs on Hills Creek Lake, because most of the lake isn't deep. Lead head jigs produce a softer jiggling action. ☐



Not every day is bitter cold on Hills Creek Lake, Tioga County. Annette Kratzer shows her catch.



A Hills Creek Lake Bluegill sparkles in the morning sun.

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