



Ice Fishing Hot Spots in Western Pennsylvania

by *Jerry Bush*

photo-Janelle Howard

Western Pennsylvania offers many ice fishing opportunities, and some anglers may be surprised to find safe ice nearly as far south as Pittsburgh.

Erie County

Lake Pleasant is stocked in the spring and the winter with trout. It is a favorite location for ice fishing enthusiasts.

Howard Eaton Reservoir is near Pennsylvania's border with New York. Its expanse of 159 acres is a panfish hot spot. You may also catch Northern Pike and Walleyes.

LeBoeuf Lake, near Waterford, holds Largemouth Bass and Northern Pike. Some large Bluegills are also found in this lake.

No conversation about Erie County's ice fishing is complete without deserved recognition given to Lake Erie's Presque Isle Bay. Species found in Presque Isle Bay include Bluegills, Northern Pike, Pumpkinseeds, bass, crappies, perch, and steelhead. Coaxing one of the larger gamefish through an 8-inch hole in the ice is challenging. Recognizing the current hot spots at Presque Isle is easy. Look for the "tent cities"—an affectionate name describing the conglomeration of ice fishing shelters on the ice.

Crawford County

With a surface area of 925 acres, Conneaut Lake is Pennsylvania's largest natural lake. Here, perch and panfish are most targeted in winter, but many anglers hope for Muskellunge and Walleyes as well.

With more than 17,000 acres of water, Pymatuning Reservoir is king in Crawford County. Anglers seek Muskellunge, Walleyes, bass, panfish, and perch. Most of the Muskellunge stocked in Pennsylvania are spawned from brood stock from Pymatuning Reservoir. Pymatuning Reservoir is western Pennsylvania's most productive winter Walleye fishery.

Mercer County

Heading south, we find Mercer County's ice fishing season is a week or two shorter than Erie and Crawford counties, but

safe ice is available most years for 4 to 6 weeks. Shenango River Lake may be the best body of water in western Pennsylvania to consistently catch big Bluegills and large crappies, as well as White Bass.

Lake Wilhelm's 1,680 acres is a fun fishery to collect a mixed bucket of Bluegills, crappies, perch, and a few Walleyes.

Butler County

Only 40-miles north of Pittsburgh, Lake Arthur holds 3,225 acres of water in Moraine State Park, and most years it provides safe ice fishing for 2 to 3 weeks. Lake Arthur is home to Channel Catfish, Largemouth Bass, Northern Pike, and panfish. Some Muskellunge and Walleyes are also present.

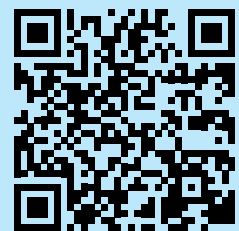
Gear

Panfish are most often attracted to tear drop jigs tipped with maggots, mealworms, or pieces of red worms. Sometimes, soft plastic grubs of various colors work well. Most catches occur when the jig is bounced a few inches from the bottom.

Larger gamefish prefer a lead head jig tipped with a minnow submerged below a rod and reel or attached to a tip-up device. Use baitfish lures and spoons.

A 2-foot rod and plastic reel with a spring bobber at the end of the pole catches as many fish as other rods. A manual auger is sufficient for most ice fishing anglers, but a motorized auger is desired by true enthusiasts who are constantly on the ice in the most northern counties. ☐

**To check State Park
ice conditions:**



[dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks/
WinterReport/Pages/default.aspx](https://dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks/WinterReport/Pages/default.aspx)