Nearly Everyone Likes March 1 Trout Opener

By GORDON YEAGER
Post-Bulletin Outdoors Writer

February is going to take one day longer to get rid of this leap year, but even so, the day after is still the opening of the trout season in southeastern Minnesota.



It seems incredible that a March 1 opening, subject to below-zero temperatures, could have any sort of public support, but most trout fishermen seem to like the early start ... even if only a tiny minority actually get out in that kind of weather.

The Section of Fisheries of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) likes it because it gets them out of the spring stocking scramble and it has cut down the yahoo element that was infesting the openers in May.

And it has generated some dandy bad jokes about trolling from snowmobiles and the best fly to fish under thin ice.

Golly, DNR, you should have done it sooner.

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LAKE CITY'S ICE FISHING contest comes first, though, on Feb. 21, from 1:30 to 4 p.m. The fishing area is being outlined on the ice and about a week before the event the holes will be drilled. The last two years have seen quite good fishing on contest day; a few years earlier one perch was the whole action. You never know at a fish contest.

Right now the sandpike in Lake Pepin aren't exactly setting the fishing world aflame, and there isn't too much else hitting anywhere near consistently.

Jim Schneider, area fisheries supervisor at the regional DNR here, has a good fish story. As he tells it, he went fishing about two weeks ago with a pretty good old boy who managed to churn up silver bass like it was mid-September.

The guy jigged small rapalas in about 18 feet of water and a 1¼ feet off the bottom, and turned up silvers while minnow users nearby watched.

Whatever technique this guy has, he ought to bottle and sell it or give it away; not very many silvers get caught after the fall season closes, yet they have to be somewhere. Maybe he can open up a whole new fishing resource.

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CATFISH SNAGGING on Lake Pepin had its first casualty recently, when a La Crosse angler was nailed for the illegal practice. The DNR was hoping for a court test, but the angler forfeited bail instead.

The problem, it would seem, is that except for the law, there is nothing really wrong with snagging catfish in the winter; it's about the only way except netting them.

But snagging game fish is another matter and right now there's no distinction.

The DNR is said to have some new regs in mind, but these will have to wait for a meeting of the Boundary Commission so the Wisconsin interpretation is the same.

Somehow, there should be regulations so the law-abiding angler knows what's legal, so he doesn't have to take a chance, as is the case under the present rules.

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THOSE WINTER CATFISH hold another hazard, too. They've been living on their fat, which makes them a little gamey, but they also may be running rather hot on PCB levels.

PCBs concentrate in the fat of a fish, and when the fat is used up the PCB concentration in the fish is likely to increase. This was the case, at least, with some pesticides, and PCBs seem to be reacting about the same.

The DNR will soon be setting out the 300-foot markers below the Red Wing and Alma dams, to cut down on the spring angling and snagging of female walleyes that concentrate there.

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PINE ISLAND TRAPSHOOTERS could use a good area turnout at the merchandise shoot of the Pine Island Sportsmen's Club Sunday, starting at 10 a.m.

The club was ripped off for about $450 in shells and equipment recently, and the shoot is to make up for some of the losses.

Shooting will be for chickens, turkeys, bacon and sausage. It's going to take a lot of banging to make up for the shells, electronics and trap gear lost by the club, but such happenings seem a hazard of the times.

Maybe it's lucky the club members didn't catch the burglars in the act; they might have hurt one of the lawbreakers, which probably would have been more of a problem than the burglary.

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SILVER LAKE GEESE have been moving into the DNR cornfields east of Rochester, after having apparently about cleaned up the picked fields in the area. This has been a good winter so far for the honkers, with lots of bare corn ground and few long sustained cold periods.

With all the units of the power plant going Thursday morning the lake was really steaming in the cold dawn air and the geese on the lake and shoreline were covered with a rime of frost and snow.

As the birds woke up they would stretch their necks and wings, then duck under the surface to wash off the frost or snow.

There's supposed to be something character-building about a cold shower in the morning, but from the shore, on a plus-one-degree morning, the sight would send shivers down the spine of a frozen fish.

The low snow levels in this area should be good news for fish in most lakes, for the light isn't masked off, as with deep snow, and the oxygen supply should stay higher.

Only the shallow waterfowl lakes like Rice and Freeborn and that group are in trouble and opened to promiscuous fishing.

Fisheries personnel and the Army Corps of Engineers will meet in Lake City Feb. 18 to discuss ways to alleviate ice problems such as the one last fall when the Chippewa ice dammed the Mississippi at the end of Lake Pepin and drained the backwaters.

The ice dam wasn't anyone's fault, and it doesn't happen every year, but there apparently was quite a loss of panfish from the drop in water levels under the ice downstream from Wabasha to the Alma dam. The two groups hope to work out some contingency plan so the loss can be cut if it happens again.

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PUZZLE OF THE WEEK — Why is it your ballpoint pen never leaks when you are wearing a cheap shirt?

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