

Browns and Bows threw the ice

By Capt Eric Haataja

If you've never had the chance to experience catching a giant steelhead or brown trout threw then is the time to try it. We finally have some solid ice here in Southern WI harbors a little sooner than expected this year. The Brown Trout are mostly done spawning and the Rainbow Trout will spawn in the Great Lakes Tributaries in the spring. With the right presentations you'll be able to successfully catch these fish on a consistent basis threw the ice. This past fall I did several charter and guide trips on the rivers and harbors and we managed to land some very big browns up to 25 lbs. The fishing was excellent right up to the latest cold snap we just got, and these trout will still be in the same areas.

Browns and Rainbows are not that hard to catch, one of the simplest ways to approach fishing for browns and steelhead threw the ice is an approach that has worked for me for many years. I approach these fish as if I'm targeting winter walleye's, which basically means I use all the same tackle and lines with a few minor modifications. Brown Trout are an opportunistic feeder; I've caught them on all sorts of baits and different color schemes. However over the years the 4 best baits for me seem to be Minnows, spawn, jigging spoons, and hair jigs or tubes jigs in no particular order. Rainbow trout basically will hit the same baits but at times they will hold higher in the water column and sometimes prefer gold or orange type jigging spoons.

The tackle that I'm using is high performance Frabill hardwood classic tip ups are my 1st choice for tip ups. When setting my tip ups I generally will fish them 1-4 feet off the bottom depending on the depth of the harbor or river I'm fishing. When the flag pops up I never allow the fish to run with it or "let them take it" if your spool on your tip up is moving at all set the hook immediately. Trout will often spit the bait quickly after a pick up, which is another reason why I use the Frabill hardwood classic tip ups because they are the smoothest tip ups with the least amount of friction I've seen.

When jigging I'm using 8- 10 lb test and a medium action jigging rod. If the water is very clear in the harbor your fishing you may want to try and use lighter line such as 6 lb test. I will move around at times from hole to hole when thing slow down but I've found that generally staying put in one spots seems to work just fine. Also when I jig I'm paying close attention to my electronics always looking for fish above or below my bait. At times the fish will come in and smash your bait before you ever get a chance to see the on your electronics and other times they will circle back and play cat and mouse with your jigging spoon or bait. We provide all the bait, tackle, and heated Frabill ice shacks to keep you warm and dry. If you're looking to get out and experience some of this Brown or Rainbow trout fishing give us a call. Keep things simple you should have no problem landing some trout this winter. On a side note, your required to have a Great Lakes Trout Stamp when fishing for trout in the harbors and rivers that flow into Lake Michigan.. If you plan on keeping any of these fish a gaff works very well, but if you

plan on releasing the fish then just hand grab your fish. The harbors I generally fish the most are:

The Milwaukee Harbor, Kenosha Harbor, Sheboygan Harbor and Racine Harbor. Remember be careful and always take extra precaution when fishing the great lakes harbors and tributaries, no fish is worth risking you life for!

Best of Luck and be safe!

Capt. Eric Haataja

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