

NDF&G December 7th Newsletter

Mild Weather Hampers Ice Formation

While November was kind to North Dakota's hunters, unseasonably mild temperatures did little to help usher in the ice fishing season. Knowing this, winter anglers are encouraged to use caution and allow ice to harden significantly before venturing on state waters.

North Dakota Game and Fish Department water safety coordinator Nancy Boldt said the daytime high temperature must remain below freezing for several days to start producing stable ice. "We are finally beginning to have this weather pattern, but it is going to take a consistent stretch of freezing temperatures to form solid ice," she said.

Boldt recommends anglers and trappers visit with locals, including other anglers and people at local bait shops, before going on any lake, especially one that is unfamiliar. "But it is also important to study ice conditions before accessing any of North Dakota's frozen waters," Boldt said.

Some tips to be aware of are:

Snow insulates ice, hampering solid ice formation, and makes it difficult to check thickness. Snow also hides the blemishes, such as cracked, weak and open water areas.

Avoid cracks, pressure ridges, slushy or darker areas that signal thinner ice. The same goes for ice that forms around partially submerged trees, brush, embankments or other structures.

Ice thickness is not consistent and can vary significantly even in a small area. Ice shouldn't be judge by appearance alone. Anglers should drill test holes as they make their way out on the lake, and an ice chisel should be used to check ice thickness while moving around. Daily temperature changes cause ice to expand and contract, affecting its strength.

The following minimums are recommended for travel on clear-blue lake ice formed under ideal conditions. However, early in the winter it's a good idea to double these figures to be safe: 4 inches for a group walking single file; 6 inches for a snowmobile or all-terrain vehicle; 8-12 inches for an automobile; and 12-15 inches for a pickup/truck.

These tips could help save a life:

Wear a personal flotation device and carry a cell phone.

Carry ice picks or a set of screwdrivers to pull yourself back on the ice if you fall through.

If someone breaks through the ice, call 911 immediately. Rescue attempts should employ a long pole, board, rope, blanket or snowmobile suit. If that's not possible, throw the victim a life jacket, empty water jug or other buoyant object. Go to the victim as a last resort, but do this by forming a human chain where rescuers lie on the ice with each person holding the feet of the person in front.

To treat hypothermia, replace wet clothing with dry clothing and immediately transport victim to a hospital.

Most Hunter Education Classes Offered Early

Individuals interested in taking a hunter education class in 2010 should know that most courses are offered over the next few months.

Jon Hanson, hunter education coordinator for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, said a majority are taught in March, April and May. "These classes fill up quickly because they are held before

the deer application deadline," he said. "This is especially important for this year's apprentice hunters, because to hunt deer in 2010 they need to be certified in hunter education."

An apprentice hunting license provides individuals age 16 and older with a one-year hunter education exemption for small game and deer. However, to continue beyond the trial year, a hunter education course is required. In 2009, more than 2,300 apprentice hunting licenses were issued, with nearly 700 designated for deer.

To register for a hunter education course, students need to sign up online at the Game and Fish Department's website, gf.nd.gov. "Many classes will be added over the next several weeks, and the rest will be added throughout the year as they are finalized," Hanson said.

To register, click on the online services tab, and "online course enrollment" under the hunter education heading. Classes are listed by city, and can also be sorted by start date. To register for a class, click on "enroll" next to the specific class, and follow the simple instructions. Personal information is required. Those who do not have access to the Internet and want to sign up for a class can call the hunter education program in Bismarck at (701) 328-6615.

State law requires anyone born after December 31, 1961 to pass a certified hunter education course to hunt in the state. Hunter education is mandatory for youth who are turning 12 years old, and children can take the class at age 11.