

## OUTDOORS

# Slow start on area ice

## Safe ice misses ideal lunar conditions

**F**irst ice is usually “hot” ice.

Not so this year.

Although our first “safe” ice arrived about a week ago, fish are already in a midwinter state of mind.



**TED PECK**

This should be a learning experience for folks who are serious to the point of being obsessed with the ways of fishes.

The jet stream finally shifted, bringing our first true arctic blast as you read these words. Good news is, we’re makin’ ice. Bad news is, fishing will be generally tough for the next month or so.

Last week temperatures were tickling the 30s. This usually means good fishing almost all day long. But the bite was only aggressive near dawn, dusk and when that weather system passed through here ahead of the arctic vortex.

There are two likely reasons first ice didn’t produce the good fishing we were all hoping for: the lunar cycle and limited daylight hours.

Statistics prove the most productive time to fish is three days on either side of a full moon. The most aggressive bite on each of those six

days happens at different times for different reasons. But barring wild negative local conditions, the full-moon period is generally the best time to hook up.

The new moon period—that we’re in this weekend—can be almost as good. However, most folks would consider our first seasonal taste of below-zero wind chills a weather situation qualifying for “wild negative” status.

Our unseasonably warm weather the past couple weeks provided ideal conditions to ponder the impact of shorter daylight hours on fishing success. Most anglers experienced action that was slow early but then slacked right off: the classic midwinter pattern.

High-water conditions in Lake Koshkonong and other southern Wisconsin fisheries right before freeze-up might result in an increase in shove ice later this winter as water levels recede.

Shove ice occurs along drastic current and depth change seams. In some cases a shove, or heave, can span the entire lake. Ice can be three feet thick on either side of this theme, but inches—or less—where the seams meet.

Seams should be avoided if possible. If they must be crossed, it’s wise to let somebody else go first.

Right now we have about four inches of good ice on Koshkonong, similar ice thickness up on Lake Wisconsin and about three inches on Monona Bay. As noted, we’re

making ice right now. But even with below-zero nights and single-digit days, I don’t believe Lake Mendota will freeze all the way across until about Jan. 21—which also ushers in our next full moon period.

Conventional wisdom says winter will stick around for awhile. But the last few months have defied conventional wisdom. We’ll just have to wait and see.

Chasing lake trout on Big Green Lake on Valentine’s Day has been an annual outing for my crew for probably a decade now. After more than 40 years of wedded bliss, my wife Candy is just fine with a Valentine’s gift of absence.

Maybe we’ll be chasing those big green torpedoes again this year. Maybe the weather will get mild again and we’ll be out there in boats below the Dells dam or over on the Mississippi River at Red Wing.

A road trip to Devil’s Lake, North Dakota, or Lake Erie might be in the cards. Opportunity is directly related to degree of desire. Those who really want to go fishin’ will always find a way to go fishin’.

Ask yourself this question: Have you ever met an old timer who said, “I wish I had spent more time working?”

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