

Winter Time Smallmouth Fishing

by Ray Rigby

When you put your boat away for the winter and start dreaming of next year, does it ever dawn on you maybe next year is now? Well I see it all the time, boats all covered and snug in there covers for the long winters nap. Well I only have one word for these people, WHY? It is a myth that fish don't eat in the winter time, do they run all over the lake or river gorging them selves? Of course not, but they can be caught with a little patience and the right baits. The first thing you should do is assess the water conditions and the body of water your on, temperature of the water is a major contributing factor as well. What is my plan of attack should be the first words to roll off your lips. When fishing a river in the winter time you should always 100% of the time have a hair jig tied on. Now this should not be your only bait, but it should be at the top of your list, this little contraption can make an otherwise unproductive day into one you won't soon forget. The other baits in my arsenal would be tubes in smaller sizes, hellgrammites with a 1/8oz ball head. The first place I would hit is the very same places that I caught fish out of in the summer months, will the fish be there? No probably not, but it will however give you a starting point in eliminating unproductive water. Start moving your way down river to the first deep hole you come to, now deep in a river does not have to be 12-20ft. deep, and deep is relative to the flow. If 6ft. is the deepest hole on the flow, then this will be your best high percentage spot on the flow. The sun and wind should play a major role in your starting position, if it is cloudy and the wind blowing directly at you, you should start at the bottom of the pool right before it starts to shallow up. If the sun is high and bright I would start at the top of the pool where it first drops into deeper water, the fish will be in position for feeding and looking to eat. Remember fish are cold blooded creatures whose body temps are dictated by the water temps. A slight rise in water temps will position the fish for feeding; they still won't be as active as the summer months so don't expect spectacular leaps and jumps, but you will get quite a tug on your line. Once I determine my plan of attack and assess the weather conditions the first thing I reach for is the hair jig. I will trim up the bulk of the jig to make it thinner and leaner; I will then add a small plastic chunk and run it up on the shank of the hook to make my profile as appealing to the fish as the weather will dictate. After I make my first cast to the pool I will let the jig set for about 15-20 seconds to allow everything to settle down. Now I start my retrieve. I pull my offering along at a snails pace and pause for 10-15 seconds between pulls, I do not hop my offerings in the colder months, and the slow drags seem to entice the fish more. This method is not the fastest way to fish, but it is the most productive. If my hair jig offering is not the ticket for this particular stretch I don't just leave, I start working my other baits thru there first, in the same fashion. It is in your best interest to work the pool over very thoroughly with all your offerings; sometimes throwing to the same spot over and over will entice the fish into striking. If you think the spot is a high percentage spot, I would hit it over and over thru out the day, maybe you will get the desired results you where looking for when you set out. I hope this little article will help you in your winter time fishing adventures in search of the winter time Smallmouth.