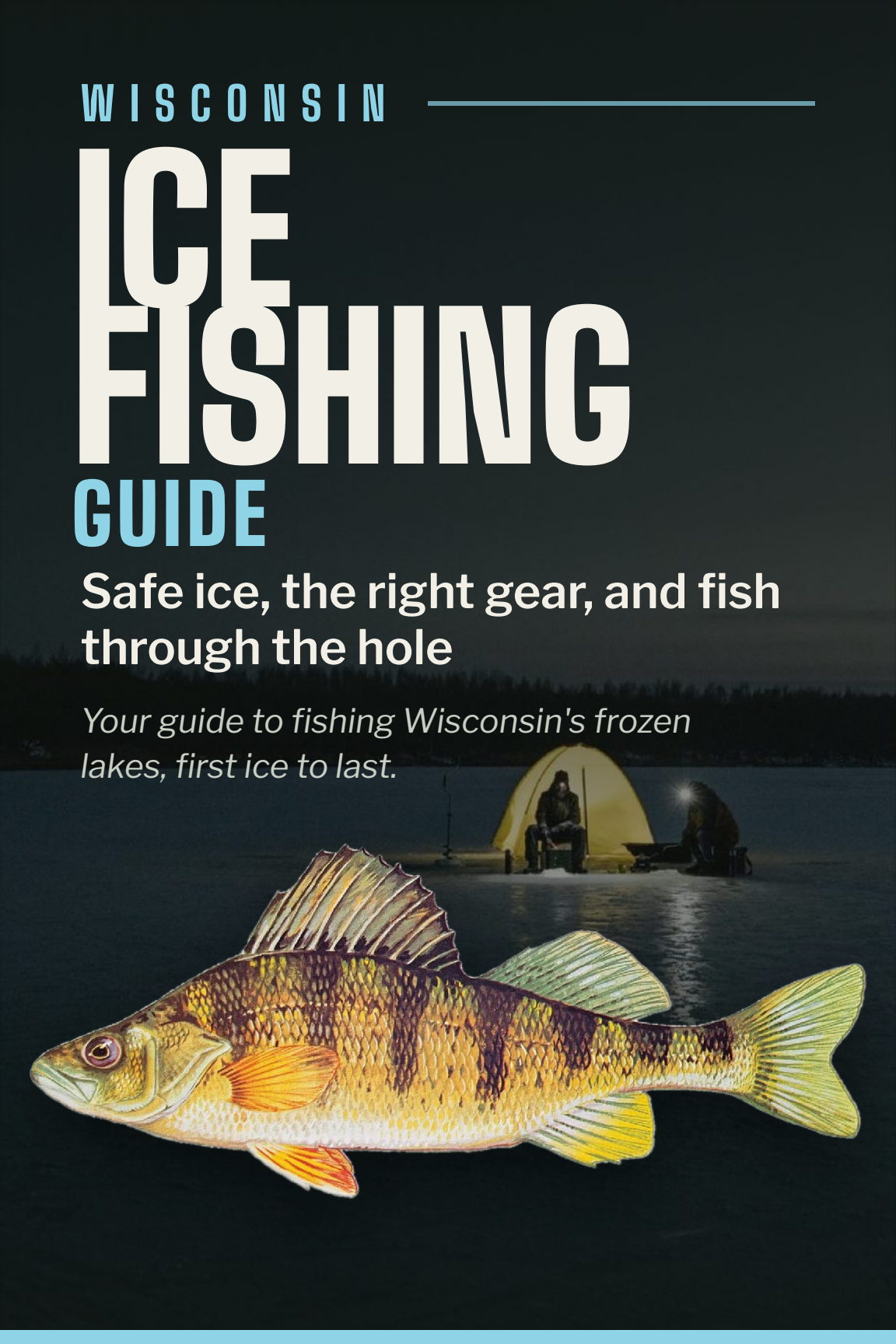
WISCONSIN

ICE FISHING GUIDE

Safe ice, the right gear, and fish through the hole

Your guide to fishing Wisconsin's frozen lakes, first ice to last.

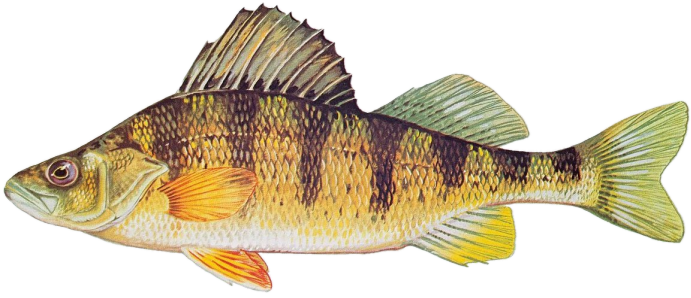


WISCONSIN

ICE FISHING

Guide

Safe ice, the right gear, and fish through the hole



Wisconsin Ice Fishing Guide
First edition, October 2026

© 2026 Lake Sheet. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be copied or shared without permission, except short quotes in reviews.

Read this first. Fishing rules change every year and differ by lake. Everything about seasons, sizes and bag limits in this book is for the 2026–27 season, checked 2026-10-08. Always check the current Wisconsin DNR rules and your lake's own rules before you fish. Depth maps are not for navigation. Ice is never guaranteed safe. You are responsible for your own safety and for following the law.

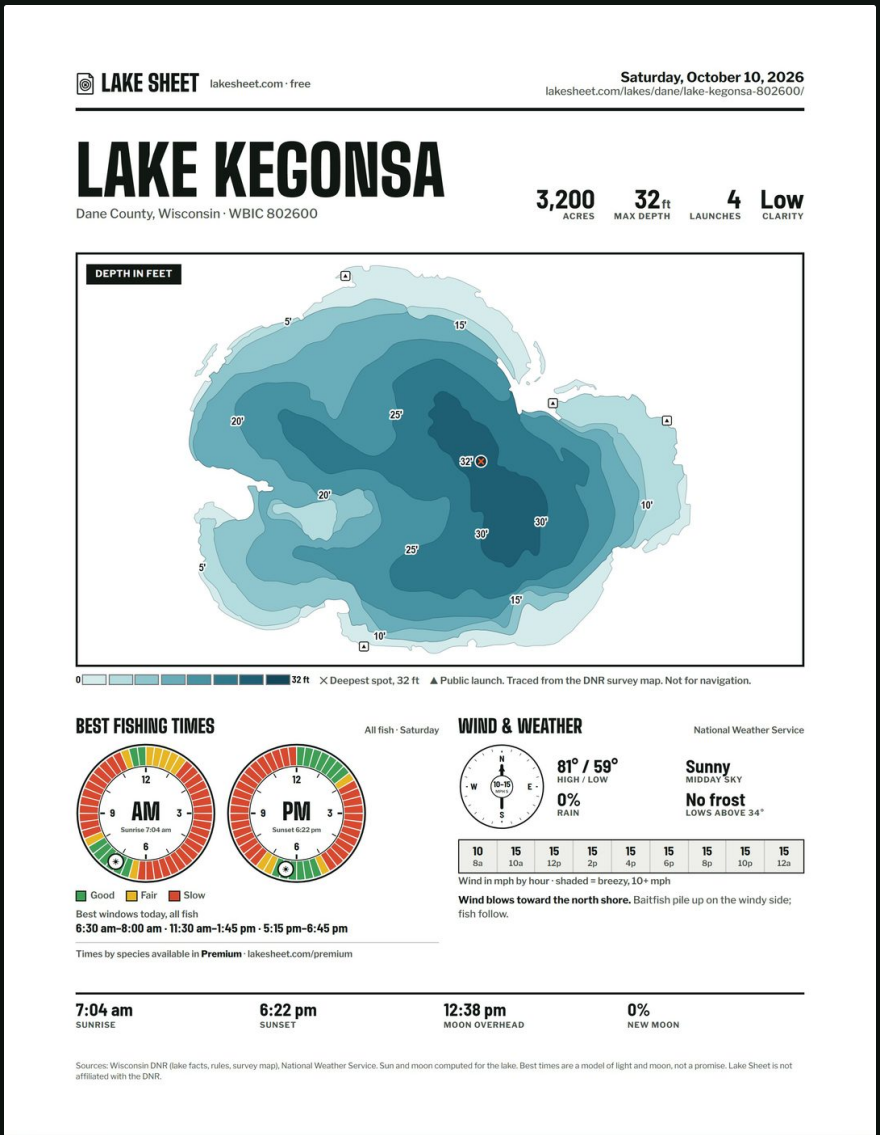
Lake Sheet is not affiliated with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Lake facts come from DNR survey and stocking records as published by Lake Sheet; see the sources at the back of the book.

lakesheet.com

FREE WITH THIS BOOK

YOUR FREE LAKE SHEET

Free for more than 4,600 Wisconsin lakes: two printable pages, made for the boat. This is the real sheet for Lake Kegonsa.



LAKE SHEET lakesheet.com · free

Saturday, October 10, 2026
lakesheet.com/lakes/dane/lake-kegonsa-802600/

LAKE KEGONSA

Dane County, Wisconsin · WBIC 802600

3,200	32 ft	4	Low
ACRES	MAX DEPTH	LAUNCHES	CLARITY

DEPTH IN FEET

5' 15' 20' 25' 32' 20' 10' 30' 30' 25' 5' 15' 10'

0 32 ft · ✕ Deepest spot, 32 ft · ▲ Public launch. Traced from the DNR survey map. Not for navigation.

BEST FISHING TIMES

All fish · Saturday

AM — Sunrise 7:04 am

PM — Sunset 6:22 pm

Good · Fair · Slow

Best windows today, all fish
6:30 am–8:00 am · 11:30 am–1:45 pm · 5:15 pm–6:45 pm

Times by species available in **Premium** · lakesheet.com/premium

WIND & WEATHER

National Weather Service

81° / 59°
HIGH / LOW

0%
RAIN

Sunny
MIDDAY SKY

No frost
LOWS ABOVE 34°

10	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
8a	10a	12p	2p	4p	6p	8p	10p	12a

Wind in mph by hour · shaded = breezy, 10+ mph

Wind blows toward the north shore. Baitfish pile up on the windy side; fish follow.

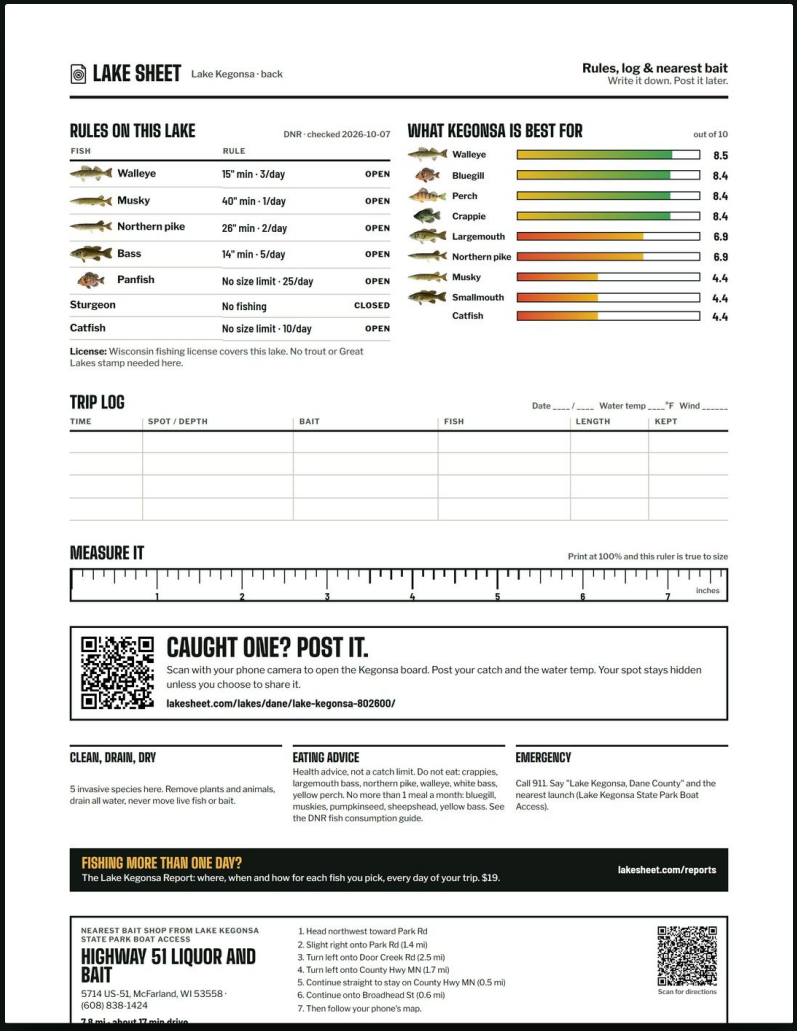
7:04 am	6:22 pm	12:38 pm	0%
SUNRISE	SUNSET	MOON OVERHEAD	NEW MOON

Sources: Wisconsin DNR (lake facts, rules, survey map), National Weather Service. Sun and moon computed for the lake. Best times are a model of light and moon, not a promise. Lake Sheet is not affiliated with the DNR.

1. **Depth map** traced from the DNR survey, deepest spot marked (traced lakes)
2. **Lake facts:** acres, max depth, launches, clarity
3. **Best times** from the sun and moon on AM and PM dials
4. **Wind and weather** by the hour, and which shore the wind hits
5. **Sun and moon** times for the lake
6. **Sources and date** on every fact

THE BACK OF THE SHEET

RULES, LOG & NEAREST BAIT



LAKE SHEET Lake Kegonsa · back

Rules, log & nearest bait
Write it down. Post it later.

RULES ON THIS LAKE

DNR · checked 2026-10-07

FISH	RULE	
Walleye	15" min · 3/day	OPEN
Musky	40" min · 1/day	OPEN
Northern pike	26" min · 2/day	OPEN
Bass	14" min · 5/day	OPEN
Panfish	No size limit · 25/day	OPEN
Sturgeon	No fishing	CLOSED
Catfish	No size limit · 10/day	OPEN

License: Wisconsin fishing license covers this lake. No trout or Great Lakes stamp needed here.

WHAT KEGONSA IS BEST FOR

out of 10

Walleye	8.5
Bluegill	8.4
Perch	8.4
Crappie	8.4
Largemouth	6.9
Northern pike	6.9
Musky	4.4
Smallmouth	4.4
Catfish	4.4

TRIP LOG

Date ____ / ____ Water temp ____°F Wind _____

TIME	SPOT / DEPTH	BAIT	FISH	LENGTH	KEPT

MEASURE IT

Print at 100% and this ruler is true to size

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 inches

CAUGHT ONE? POST IT.

Scan with your phone camera to open the Kegonsa board. Post your catch and the water temp. Your spot stays hidden unless you choose to share it.

lakesheet.com/lakes/dane/lake-kegonsa-802600/

CLEAN, DRAIN, DRY

5 invasive species here. Remove plants and animals, drain all water, never move live fish or bait.

EATING ADVICE

Health advice, not a catch limit. Do not eat: crappies, largemouth bass, northern pike, walleye, white bass, yellow perch. No more than 1 meal a month: bluegill, muskies, pumpkinseed, sheepshead, yellow bass. See the DNR fish consumption guide.

EMERGENCY

Call 911. Say "Lake Kegonsa, Dane County" and the nearest launch (Lake Kegonsa State Park Boat Access).

FISHING MORE THAN ONE DAY?
The Lake Kegonsa Report: where, when and how for each fish you pick, every day of your trip. $19.

lakesheet.com/reports

NEAREST BAIT SHOP FROM LAKE KEGONSA STATE PARK BOAT ACCESS

HIGHWAY 51 LIQUOR AND BAIT

5714 US-51, McFarland, WI 53558 · (608) 838-1424

7.8 mi · about 17 min drive

1. Head northwest toward Park Rd
2. Slight right onto Park Rd (1.4 mi)
3. Turn left onto Door Creek Rd (2.5 mi)
4. Turn left onto County Hwy MN (1.7 mi)
5. Continue straight to stay on County Hwy MN (0.5 mi)
6. Continue onto Broadhead St (0.6 mi)
7. Then follow your phone's map.

Scan for directions

1. **This lake's rules** for every fish, from the DNR
2. **What the lake is best for,** rated by fish
3. **Trip log** and a true-size **ruler**
4. **Invasive species** and eating advice
5. **Nearest bait shop** we know of, with turn-by-turn directions
6. Scan to post your catch

lakesheet.com

Find your lake, print it, take it in the boat

CONTENTS

1	Ice safety first	7
2	First ice to last ice	17
3	Gear for the ice	23
4	Techniques that catch fish through the ice	35
5	Fish by fish on the ice	45
6	Reading the lake through the ice	55
7	Wisconsin ice lake picks	61
8	Rules on the ice	67
9	Clean and cook winter fish	77
10	The questions people ask	85
11	Kids corner	89
12	Fishing log	91
	Sources	95
	More from Lake Sheet	97

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Read Chapter 1 before you set foot on the ice, and read it again each December. After that, use the book the way you fish: Chapter 2 for when your lakes freeze, Chapter 3 to buy only what you need, Chapters 4 and 5 for how to catch the fish you're after, Chapter 6 to plan where to drill, and Chapter 7 to pick a lake.

IF YOU HAVE ONE EVENING

1. Read Chapter 1, ice safety. All of it.
2. Pull up your lake's free Lake Sheet (page 2).
3. Read your fish in Chapter 5.
4. Buy the starter kit in 3.10 and a pair of ice picks.

IF YOU'VE NEVER ICE FISHED

1. Chapter 1: how to stay safe.
2. Chapter 3: the budget kit.
3. Chapter 4: jigging for panfish.
4. Chapter 10: the questions everyone asks.

The QR codes. Most lakes named in this book have a code. Scan it with your phone camera and you land on that lake's free Lake Sheet: depth map, best times, wind, launches, the nearest bait shop and the lake's own rules.

The rules. Seasons, shelter dates and bag limits change, and many lakes have their own. Rules in this book are for the 2026–27 season. Before you keep a fish, check the current rules. The fastest way is the rules box on your lake's Lake Sheet.

The ice. Nothing in this book can tell you that ice is safe. The Wisconsin DNR says it plainly: no ice is ever 100 percent safe. Check it yourself, every trip, every few steps.



CHAPTER 1

ICE SAFETY FIRST

Every winter people go through the ice in Wisconsin. Most of them knew better and went anyway: on first ice, near a river mouth, after a warm spell, in the dark. This chapter is the one to read twice. It covers what the DNR says about ice, the thickness numbers anglers use, the gear that saves lives, where ice is weakest, vehicles, and exactly what to do if you or a friend falls in.

1.1 What the DNR says · **1.2** Thickness guidelines · **1.3** Clear ice, white ice, gray ice · **1.4** Where ice is weakest · **1.5** The safety kit · **1.6** Checking ice step by step · **1.7** Vehicles on the ice · **1.8** If you fall in · **1.9** Helping someone else · **1.10** Cold, wind and carbon monoxide

1.1
WHAT THE DNR SAYS

The Wisconsin DNR does not publish a "safe" thickness. Its ice-safety page says there is "no such thing as 100 percent safe ice," and its brochure ends with one rule: **treat all ice as unsafe.**

The DNR's reasons are worth knowing, because they explain every accident:

- You can't judge ice by one thing: not its look, age, thickness, temperature or whether it has snow on it. Strength comes from all of them together.
- Ice changes from lake to lake, and from spot to spot on the same lake.
- **The DNR does not monitor ice.** Local bait shops, fishing clubs and resorts check it every day and know the bad spots. Ask them first.

The DNR's brochure lists what affects ice strength: its color and texture, thickness, cracks, the air temperature over days and on the day, sunlight, wind, snow cover, water depth, lake size, springs and currents, inlets and outlets, and swings in the weather.

> **ASK BEFORE YOU GO**
> The nearest bait shop is listed on every Lake Sheet, with directions. Call or stop in and ask three things: how thick is it, where are people fishing, and where should I stay off?

1.2
THICKNESS GUIDELINES

Because the Wisconsin DNR gives no numbers, most anglers use the Minnesota DNR's guidelines for **new, clear, solid ice**. They are a minimum, not a promise.

CLEAR ICE	WHAT IT MAY HOLD (MINNESOTA DNR GUIDELINE)
Under 4"	Stay off
4"	Ice fishing and other activities on foot
5"–7"	Snowmobile or small ATV

7"–8"	Side-by-side ATV
9"–10"	Small car or SUV
11"–12"	Medium SUV or small truck
13"	Medium truck
16"–17"	Heavy-duty truck
20"+	Heavy-duty truck with a wheelhouse shelter

Double these numbers on white ice. The Minnesota DNR says white "snow ice" is only about half as strong as new clear ice.

How much can 12 inches hold? On the guideline above, 11 to 12 inches of new clear ice may hold a medium SUV or small truck. That's for good, clear ice everywhere along your route, and it assumes you've checked. A foot of white or slushy ice may not hold even that, and the Minnesota DNR warns that ice "can be two feet thick in one place and one inch thick a few yards away."

NEVER TRUST ONE HOLE

A single hole tells you about that hole. Check every 150 feet or so as you walk, and every time the ice looks different, with a spud bar or a drill.

1.3

CLEAR ICE, WHITE ICE, GRAY ICE

ICE	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	WHAT IT MEANS
Clear (black) ice	Clear to dark blue or black; you can see into it	Strongest. Forms on calm, cold nights. Use the thickness table.
White (snow) ice	Milky, white, full of air bubbles	Melted snow or slush that refroze. About half as strong. Double the numbers.
Gray or dark spots	Gray, dark, wet patches	Water in the ice. Weak. Stay off.
Honeycombed (candled) ice	Late-season ice that breaks into long crystals	Rotting from the inside. It can look thick and still give way.

Slush on top	Water under the snow, gray footprints	Snow weight has pushed the ice down and water has come up. Ice is weaker and travel is miserable.



FIG 1.1 **Clear ice.** Black or blue-clear ice with no snow on top is the strongest kind. Cracks like these are common and don't always mean danger, but check the thickness.



FIG 1.2 **Broken and rotting ice.** Open water, floating slabs and dark, soggy ice. Stay off.

Snow is the hidden problem. Snow insulates the ice so it grows more slowly underneath, and its weight can push the ice down until water floods the top. A lake that had 6 inches of clear ice before a big snow can have slush, white ice and thin spots a week later.

1.4
WHERE ICE IS WEAKEST

The DNR tells anglers to avoid inlets, outlets and narrows where current can thin the ice. Add the places below, and you have the map of most accidents.

WEAK SPOT	WHY	WHAT TO DO
Inlets, outlets, river mouths, channels and narrows	Moving water keeps wearing the ice from below	Stay well away, even if the rest of the lake is thick
Springs	Groundwater comes in warmer than the lake	Watch for dark spots, softer snow, or ice that's thinner in one area
Pressure ridges and cracks	Ice expands and pushes up into ridges; water can sit beside them	Cross only where others have, at a right angle, after checking; never on a vehicle you can't afford to lose

Around docks, piers, logs, rocks and weeds sticking out	Dark objects soak up sun and hold heat	Step past them, not next to them
Near shore late in the season	Shore ice melts first, especially on sunny banks	Expect a gap of soft ice or water at the edge in March
Over deep water at first ice	Big, deep areas freeze last	First ice is a shallow-bay game; stay there
Aerators and open-water areas	Some lakes run aerators that keep water open all winter	Watch for posted signs and thin ice around them
Where many vehicles park	Weight in one place can push ice down and flood it	Spread out; park apart

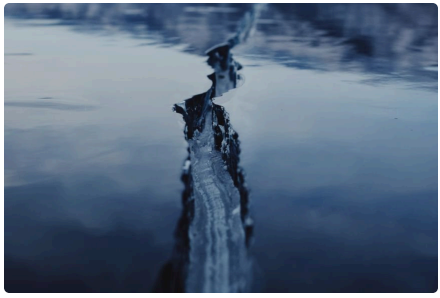


FIG 1.3 An open crack running across lake ice. Cracks and ridges move with temperature and wind; check every time you cross one.



FIG 1.4 A small lake from above: a dark patch of open water or thin ice in the middle, and a gray band of soft ice along the shore. Ice next to open water is the weakest on the lake.

1.5

THE SAFETY KIT

The DNR's brochure lists the gear to carry, and to know how to use: **spud bar, ice picks, life jacket, rope, a float coat, ice cleats**, plus a phone and GPS. Here is what each one does.

ITEM	WHAT IT DOES	WHERE TO CARRY IT	TYPICAL 2026 PRICE
Ice picks (claws)	Two spikes on a cord; you dig them in to pull yourself out	Around your neck or clipped to your chest, outside your coat	$10–25
Spud bar (chisel)	A heavy steel bar you drive into the ice ahead of you; if it goes through in one or two blows, turn around	In your hands, with the wrist strap on	$40–80

Life jacket or float suit	Keeps you up during the first minute of cold shock	Worn, not packed	$40 (vest) to $400–700 (float suit)
Throw rope	50 feet of rope in a bag to reach someone else	Top of the sled	$20–35
Ice cleats	Spikes for your boots so you don't fall	On your boots	$20–50
Phone in a waterproof bag	Call 911	Inside pocket, so the battery stays warm	$10
Whistle	Calls for help if you can't speak	On the pick cord	$5



FIG 1.5 Ice picks: two spiked handles on a cord. Wear them outside your coat where you can grab them.



FIG 1.6 Traction cleats on boots keep you on your feet on bare, wind-polished ice.

Make your own picks. The DNR's page gives instructions: two 4-inch pieces of wooden dowel about the size of a broom handle, a hardened 16-penny or larger nail driven into one end of each and filed to a point, and a strong cord through the other ends, "jump-rope" fashion. Wood floats if you drop them.

> **FLOAT SUITS**
>
> A float suit (bibs and jacket with flotation sewn in) is the best single piece of safety gear you can buy. It's warm, it's waterproof, and it holds you up while you get your picks out. If you fish early and late ice, it pays for itself.

1.6
CHECKING ICE, STEP BY STEP

1. **Before you leave home.** Call the bait shop on your Lake Sheet. Tell someone which lake, where you'll park, and when you'll be back.
2. **At the access.** Look at the shoreline ice. Water, gaps or gray ice at the edge mean the rest isn't to be trusted either. Watch where other people walk, but don't assume they're right.
3. **Put on your picks and cleats** before you step off shore. Unzip nothing; wear your float coat or life jacket.
4. **Strike ahead with the spud bar.** Hit the ice hard, once or twice, every few steps. Solid ice rings and the bar bounces. If the bar goes through or the ice sounds hollow and soft, back up the way you came.
5. **Drill a test hole** within the first 50 feet and measure. Hook a tape measure under the bottom edge of the ice. Repeat every 150 feet or so, and every time the ice color changes.
6. **Walk apart.** In a group, stay 10 feet or more apart in single file, so you don't load the same spot.
7. **Stay away from the weak spots** in 1.4, even if you see tracks there.
8. **Head home before dark.** The DNR's brochure says avoid being on the ice at night. Your own tracks are easier to follow in daylight.

1.7
VEHICLES ON THE ICE

Snowmobiles, ATVs, side-by-sides and trucks weigh hundreds to thousands of pounds, and the DNR's winter news releases warn about them every year. If you drive on the ice:

- Follow the thickness table in 1.2, **doubled for white ice**, and check your whole route, not just the landing.
- Use plowed, marked ice roads where clubs maintain them. On the Winnebago system, local clubs build and mark roads and post conditions; ask at the access.

- Drive slowly. A fast vehicle pushes a wave under the ice that can break it, especially near shore and pressure ridges.
- Unbuckle your seatbelt, crack a window or open the door, and have an escape plan.
- Park at least 50 feet from other vehicles and move every few hours. If water starts to show around the vehicle, leave.
- Never drive on the ice at night, in fog or in snow when you can't see the route.

1.8
IF YOU FALL IN

Cold water hits in three stages, often taught as **1–10–1**: about **1 minute** of gasping cold shock, about **10 minutes** of useful movement in your arms and hands, and about **1 hour** before you pass out from hypothermia. The first minute is the most dangerous: if your head goes under while you gasp, you can drown. A life jacket or float suit carries you through it.

The DNR's self-rescue steps:

1. **Stay calm and keep breathing.** Don't fight the gasp. Get your head up and control your breathing.
2. **Don't take off your winter clothes.** Heavy clothes trap air, which helps you float and keeps you warm, especially a snowmobile suit.
3. **Turn back the way you came.** That's where the ice held you. What lies ahead is unknown.
4. **Put your hands and arms on the unbroken ice.** Grab your picks.
5. **Kick your feet and dig in your picks** to work forward onto the ice. If your clothes are full of water, lift yourself partway on your elbows and let it drain first.
6. **Don't stand up.** Lie flat until you're completely out, then roll away from the hole to spread your weight.
7. **Get warm right away.** Get to a warm, dry, sheltered place. The DNR warns that in moderate to severe hypothermia you must get medical care: cold blood from your arms and legs rushing back to your heart can cause a fatal heart rhythm.

AFTER A FALL-IN

Don't walk back out "to get your gear." Don't drive yourself home soaking wet if you're shaking hard, confused or slurring. Call 911 if you're unsure.

1.9

HELPING SOMEONE ELSE

The DNR's brochure orders it like this: **call, reach, throw, row**. Don't run to the hole. Too many rescuers end up in the water too.

1. **Call 911.** Say which lake, which shore and what landmark.
2. **Reach.** Lie flat and hold out a rope, a spud bar, a rod, a shovel or a branch. If the person starts pulling you in, let go and start over.
3. **Throw.** Toss a rope and have them tie it around themselves before their hands stop working.
4. **Row.** If you can, push a light boat across the ice, get in, and pull them over the bow. Tie a rope to the boat so others can pull you back.

1.10

COLD, WIND AND CARBON MONOXIDE

Frostbite and wind. On open ice the wind has nothing to stop it. Cover every bit of skin on windy days, change wet gloves and socks, and warm up at the first white or numb patch on your face or fingers.

Carbon monoxide (CO). Propane and other fuel-burning heaters in a closed shelter can build up carbon monoxide quickly, and you can't smell it. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services lists the signs: headache, dizziness, confusion, nausea, shortness of breath and chest pain. It recommends a **battery-powered CO detector** anywhere you burn fuel without electric outlets.

IN ANY HEATED SHELTER

- Run a battery CO alarm, at head height, every time.
- Open the vents or a window flap. Fresh air in, always.
- Use a heater made for indoor or tent use, with low-oxygen and tip-over shutoffs.
- Keep it away from the shelter walls, your clothes and bedding.

NEVER

- Sleep in a shelter with a heater running.
- Run a gas auger, generator or vehicle with the door shut or upwind of the shelter.
- Ignore a headache or dizziness. Get outside into fresh air first, then call for help.