

Winter fishing is angling's

best-kept secret

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
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One of the best-kept secrets in the entire angling community is fishing during the winter. It might not exactly be a secret, but there's a large contingent of anglers who hit the water sometime in March just before the spring spawn, fish through the spring and early summer, then start to peter out once the weather gets hot.

Those same anglers may get back on the water a time or two in the fall, but with no real dedication, and you can forget winter fishing.

The secret is that wintertime fishing can be some of the best of the year. Food is harder to come by, so fish tend to bite more readily when the opportunity arises. Other fish species may actually prefer cooler water and therefore become more active in the wintertime.

The top considerations when fishing in the winter are attire and safety. The first has a lot to do with the second. Just like riding a motorcycle in cold weather, learning what to wear and how to dress negates much of the adversity while reserving much of the enjoyment out on the cold water, pretty much assuring you'll have it to yourself.

For fishing in the Upstate, where the daytime temperatures for the most part stay above freezing, anglers who know how to dress can keep themselves warm and dry during a day on the water.

Dressing for winter fishing is done in three layers. The first is the base layer that goes next to the skin. The purpose of this layer is to cover the skin for comfort, while allowing perspiration to wick through so moisture won't accumulate under your clothing



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Wintertime offers some great angling opportunities once you learn how to prepare for the cold.

Base layers are mostly thin synthetics or wools.

A word about cotton here. Cotton might be warm, but it absorbs water and should be avoided in any of the three layers. That list includes cotton socks, jeans and T-shirts.

The second layer is the mid or insulating layer. These are garments made of denser, thicker synthetics — wool or down. This layer traps air that is warmed by the body but doesn't collect moisture. Fleece, down or other synthetic materials make up this group. During midday, this layer may actually be the outer layer if conditions permit.

The final layer is outerwear. These need to be both windproof and waterproof. The outer garments will vary for fishing on a mid-50s day in January to fishing on a lower-30s day. Rain shell materials work for average days, while dry suits have become popular for harsher days.

Don't forget about your extremities — your head,

neck, face, hands and feet. The same principal applies for each of these areas. Make sure you have the skin covered for comfort, insulated for warmth and protected from wind and water.

A final note about preparation for being on the water in the winter — safety practices deserve the same preparation as fishing and launching plans. Personal flotation devices are a must — no exception in the winter. Additional clothing stored in a dry box or bag is also necessary in the event of a winter spill.

Lastly, always file a float plan. Even better, fish with a partner who can provide help if needed. Learning to dress and keep yourself safe will open a whole new world of angling opportunities.

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