

A look at getting dressed for cold-weather fishing

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
FOR THE JOURNAL

Although winter doesn't officially arrive for a few more weeks, spending a day on the water fishing this time of year will make you forget about what season it is and create a desire to just stay warm.

Dressing for a winter fishing event is not unlike any other outdoor sport — you'll want to combine layers of clothing that can be added or subtracted as the day wears on. The winter angler's outfit can be broken down into three layers — base, mid-level and outer garments.

When dressing in layers, it's always better to use several thinner layers than one or two thicker layers.

BASE LAYER

The layer closest to the skin needs to be lightweight, wicking and made of anything but cotton. Cotton kills, and it's even been referred to as the "death fabric" when it comes to being worn on the water due to its loss of insulating ability when it gets wet, as well as its absorption of water. The better alternative is to use polypropylene or wool undergarments that will wick away moisture when wet — either from sweating or immersion — and still retain its insulating qualities.

MID-LEVEL

Suggestions for mid-layer clothing include a wide array of fleece or wool garments — anything but a pair of blue jeans, which are cotton and will lose any insulating qualities when wet and hold moisture to the skin, sucking away body heat. Products from Patagonia and North Face are good choices or if you prefer old school — a wool sweater. The cate-

gory typically referred to as "fleece" may be either wool, synthetic or a blend, but any of them work well.

OUTER WEAR

The qualities to look for in a good outer-layer garment is a waterproof shell that still allows air to circulate to let heat out when paddling. Under extreme conditions, some anglers may invest in a dry suit that is more suited for northern climates, but there are Gore-tex garments that fit the bill nicely in South Carolina's milder climate.

DON'T FORGET THE HEAD, HANDS AND FEET

The extremities are the

most likely to get wet on a fishing outing, and more heat is lost from the head than the rest of the body combined.

A pair of good socks are worth their weight in gold. The same qualifications for underwear go for socks as well. Wool and fleece are popular, but be sure they don't restrict circulation in your feet. You can top it all off with a fleece or wool toboggan. When it comes to covering the neck and face, many of today's outer garments now offer integrated hoodies that create a solid layer between the chest and head — usually in the form of a hood — and may even incorporate a lining that can be used as a face shield.

FINISH UP WITH A PAIR OF INSULATED BOOTS

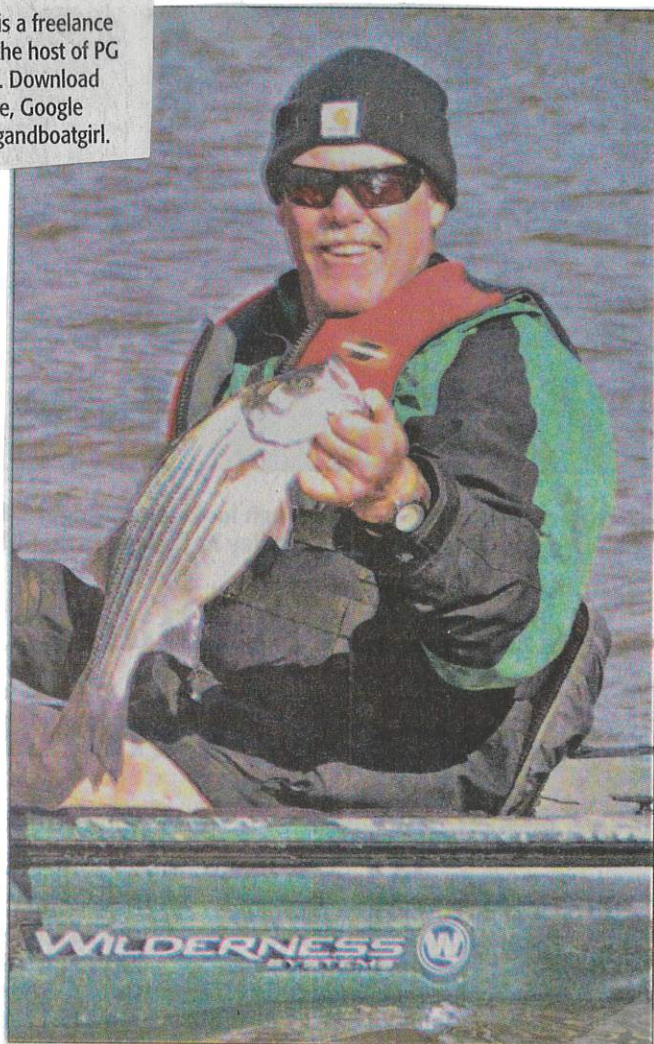
The lining should be wool or synthetic — not cotton. Most cold-rated boots will have a thinsulate rating by brand name — 400 for moderate cold, 800 for more extreme. Some anglers lean toward calf-length footwear to assist with launching the boat if you have to step

in a foot or so of water in order to get cleared from the launch point.

On a final note, wear your life jacket when fishing in cold weather. Today's inflatable jackets allow the angler much more freedom of move-

ment, and some models will self-inflate once they hit the water. Put it on when you leave your tow vehicle and take it off when you've got everything loaded back up at the end of the day. The life you save could be your own.

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Dressing in layers will help keep you warm and dry on the water in cold weather.