



It might sound obvious, but it's a good idea to target abundant fish

Attention to detail serves us well, in many areas of our lives. When it comes to ice fishing, there is a 'small detail' that gets ignored more commonly than you might think, in the process handicapping your best efforts before you drill the first hole of the day.

Fishing is all about putting the odds in your favor. There are plenty of odds going against you. For one thing, fish are a moving target. Plus, changing weather conditions, changing food sources, changing weed conditions, and more, "give you plenty of puzzle pieces to put together without adding any," says Dave Genz, the man who revolutionized the sport more than 30 years ago. One of the foundations of the Winter Fishing System— Genz's approach to modern ice fishing— is the importance of planning before you hit the ice. "Don't wait until you get out there to start thinking about what you're going to do to try to catch fish," says Genz.

Coming back to the main topic for today, the 'small detail' many anglers overlook is the importance of going after the most abundant

fish species available. It might sound obvious, says Genz, "but if you're a crappie fisherman and want to go on a lake and catch crappies, what if they aren't the dominant species? You can drill a lot of holes and come away with one or two fish. If they're not there, you're not going to catch them."

### **A Planned Approach**

Again, this might seem obvious, but it's not. Every day, many anglers venture forth and put out a field of tip-ups to catch northern pike on a lake that has relatively few pike. Or, they drill holes along points and rock humps and weed edges, jigging away for walleyes, in a lake where walleyes are very much a minority group.

Here's the fine point, the important take-away: fish populations are in constant flux on most bodies of water. So a lake can have a great reputation for kicking out big bluegills, or monster crappies, or steady walleye action. But— and this is particularly true on smaller fisheries— things can change drastically in a couple years. Sometimes, in one year. Sometimes, even within a single season, if harvest

is heavy and the bite is good.

“Beware of reputations,” says Genz, “because they can get you. You need to go where a good bite is happening right now, for the species you want to catch. You need good information, and it needs to be current. You can get good information from local bait dealers, and you can listen to good rumors you hear in a restaurant or read about on the Internet.

“But don’t bank on anything you hear if it doesn’t pan out after you get there and start fishing. Give everything a good try, but move to a different lake if you aren’t catching what the rumors were promising.”

There is more information available today than ever, including easily accessible test net data, stocking details, and more. State wildlife agencies make their good works available to the public. You can read for yourself how many wall-eyes were caught in the sample nets, and what size they were. But again, realize that by the time you read those numbers they can be old news, if high- or low-water cycles have developed, or if word got out about the great bite on that lake and tons of fish went home in people’s buckets.

“I’m always focused on what’s going on right now, on that lake,” stresses Genz. “Not last year, or years ago. You hear stories all the time, about how they caught all these big crappies on this lake. That doesn’t mean there’s still all these big crappies in that lake.

“You need to find out what’s happening now. You can’t just go to the spot where they caught all those big crappies years ago and expect to find them there. A lot of things can change. Water clarity can change. Weed beds can die off and push the fish into deeper water.

“You have to have a plan when you go out on the ice, something to start with. Go where you think there are a lot of good fish, and target those fish. Decide where you’re going to look first, whether it’s shallow or deep. Give it some time

to pan out. If it doesn’t, change the plan and look in other places for those fish that are supposed to be there.

“If the bite isn’t happening, go to the next lake, where the next best rumors are.”

Genz is known for fishing fast out on the ice, drilling groups of three or four holes and fishing them before deciding where to drill



**Success at the end of the rainbow! A beautiful trout, taken by ice fishing legend Dave Genz, on a small Wisconsin lake known to hold three species of trout. This body of water also holds big bluegills and bass, so you can choose to target any of these fish and expect success. To enhance your own chance of catching fish, dig up current information on waters in your area, and hit the ice with a plan. (Photo by Mark Strand)**

the next three or four. He chooses baits that fish “heavy for their size” so he can get up and down quickly in the water column as he tries to attract and trigger biters. (He designed a line of ice-specific jigs for Lindy.) Rarely does he sit over “sniffers” as he calls them, fish that show up on the Vexilar display but are difficult to catch.

“I’d sooner drop my jig down four holes and fish each one for a few minutes than sit over one hole and drop four different jigs down there,” he says. “You find what you’re looking for faster if you try to make those fish bite and see what they are. A lot of times, if fish show up and they won’t bite, they’re small fish. That’s not what I’m looking for.”

Genz’s approach is both patient and impatient. He is

patient, in that he hits the ice with a plan and methodically sticks to it. He is impatient, in that he does not give any one hole very long to pay off. He targets the dominant species, most of the time, in whatever lake he’s on at the moment— then pursues that species relentlessly until he either catches what he came for or decides it’s time to move on.

Note: Dave Genz, known as Mr. Ice Fishing, was the primary driver of the modern ice fishing revolution. For more, including his instructional DVD on bluegill fishing, go to [www.davegenz.com](http://www.davegenz.com), and [www.iceteam.com](http://www.iceteam.com).