

ICE FISHING EAGLE

LOOKING FOR LEGAL PIKE ON EAGLE SPRINGS LAKE

BY TERRY BITZ OF
OUTDOOR CONVERGENCE

On an invitation, I joined my friend Jeff Waltz of Dousman to fish Eagle Springs Lake up in Waukesha, County on a Saturday afternoon in January. Eagle Springs is a shallow, 311 acre lake located in the hills of the Kettle Moraine area.

Jeff is an avid northern pike fisherman and catching the toothy critters through the ice is his favorite way to fish.

I convinced my friend Bill Pocius to join Jeff and me for an outing on the hard water.

Jeff already had three tip-ups set up in his holes when Bill and I arrived at the lake.

“My wife and I have fished this lake twice this season,” said Jeff after I had introduced him to Bill. “Out of the eight pike we've caught, five were of legal size including a 35 incher.”

We decided to drill three holes near an island where Jeff has had success on previous outings. A check of the holes revealed weeds at the bottom of one hole and a muddy bottom in the other two.

“I generally prefer to set up over weeds, but we have caught our biggest fish in this area,” Jeff said.

While setting the tip-ups and baiting them with large roach minnows, we noticed that a flag was up in the air on one of Jeff's tip-ups. So we hustled over to the hole where Jeff proceeded to set the hook and pull in the fish. It was a chunky northern pike of about 24 inches. The fish was unhooked and quickly placed back into the icy water.



Jeff Waltz Pulls a Northern Pike Out Through the Ice on Eagle Springs Lake in Waukesha County

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We continued setting up our rigs, placing the last set of tip-ups about 300 feet west of the Island. We had just finished setting the last of the rigs when I noticed a flag was flying on a tip-up near the island. Of course it was the tip-up furthest from us.

While trotting over to the hole, we decided Bill should handle the tip-up. Because his ice fishing skills were a bit rusty, we provided him a few instructions before he pulled the rig out of the hole and proceeded to pull in the excess line. Once Bill felt tension on the line, he set the hook. He battled the fish and hauled it through the hole onto the ice. It turned out to be a 28 inch pike.

“This fish hasn't missed many meals,” said Bill in reference to fish's large girth.



Bill Pocius Holds a Legal Sized Northern Pike Caught On Eagle Springs Lake

Unfortunately, it was hooked inside the throat. Mindful of recent studies which show that fish with hooks left in their gullets will die after their release, we decided to try and remove the hook.

We grabbed a set of our extra long needle nose pliers, a pair of bolt cutters and a mouth spreader. Bill was able to grab onto the hook with the needle nose pliers. Just as I was going to cut the ends of the hook, Bill gave it a twist and popped it free. We placed the head of the fish in the hole and within seconds it swam away. It was a successful release.

Over the next couple of hours, a flag would occasionally pop up and we would scurry over to land the fish and re-bait the hook. In between, we would discuss fishing and the next day's Packer-Bear game.

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Interestingly, bass were attracted to Jeff tip-ups as he landed several of the small fish throughout the afternoon. It was likely due to his tip-up placement and use of smaller minnows.

Late in the day, another flag on a tip-up near the island suddenly flew up in the air indicating a fish had taken the bait. We again let Bill handle this tip-up telling him he needed the practice.

He confidently moved the tip-up to the side of the hole and proceed to land a pike measuring 27 inches in length. Apparently, Bill had a hot hand when it came to landing legal sized fish.

After the sun had set, the temperatures began to rapidly decline. Our noses and cheeks let us know the temperatures had plunged close to zero. The fish were no longer biting so we packed up and headed off the ice.

Considering the post cold front conditions, we considered landing seven fish, two of which were of legal size, a good afternoon of fishing.