

NEWS RELEASE

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For Brainerd sportsmen, things heat up in the winter Winter weather plus area's many lakes, forests offer diverse outdoor activities

BRAINERD, Minn. – Little things like sub-zero temperatures, a couple feet of snow, and frozen lakes aren't enough to slow down sportsmen in the Brainerd Lakes Area. In fact, winter is when things really start heating up for those who don't mind braving the elements for some fun.

One needs only to look across the frozen lakes to figure out where their interests lie. Throughout winter, small villages of fish houses are present on most of the 465 lakes in this area, proving that ice fishing is king here during the winter months. Fish houses range from tiny two-person portable units to large structures that have many luxuries found at home: TVs, microwaves, couches, recliners, stoves, sinks, bunks, bathrooms and, of course, heaters. With makeshift roads plowed on the ice, it's easy for anglers to leave work and a short time later be sitting in a heated fish house jigging for walleyes through an 8-inch hole drilled through ice that can be two feet thick in the middle of winter.

"Ice fishing has come a long way over the years," said Tourism Director Gretchen Ennis. "We've seen the popularity rise significantly in this area, mainly because the equipment has improved tremendously, allowing anglers to quickly locate a good spot to fish and get set up. It also helps that our lakes are full of walleye, panfish, crappies, northern pike and even lake trout, so they're usually rewarded well for their efforts."

The popularity of ice fishing here is reflected in community events and even business ventures. During the last 16 years, for example, nearby Aitkin has celebrated the start of ice fishing during the World-Famous Fish House Parade. Scheduled for Nov. 28, the celebration attracts upwards of 8,000 people to town to watch dozens of very unique, zany and dressed-up fish houses and anglers parade down Main Street.

On Jan. 24, more than 10,000 anglers will converge on Brainerd to compete in the 19th Annual Brainerd Jaycees \$150,000 Ice Fishing Extravaganza, which is considered the largest ice fishing contest in the world. Some 20,000 holes are pre-drilled in the competition area, which is a 250-acre section of Gull Lake. And then for three hours, anglers try to catch one of 150 largest fish that will qualify for a prize, which includes a 2009 Ford pickup (first place), a new fish-and-ski boat, snowmobiles, ATVs, portable fish houses, ice augers, fishing electronics, vacation packages and more. Last year, a new ATV was awarded to 150th place.

Up the road in Walker, anglers celebrate the ugliest fish in the state: the eelpout. Feb. 20-22 is the 29th Annual International Eelpout Festival, a weekend full of festivities on Leech Lake, including prizes for the largest eelpout and best eelpout "encampment." Other activities include a rugby tournament, polar plunge (in the lake), car racing on ice, ice drilling competition and much more.

Some of the ice fishing equipment that is found in the typical angler's arsenal may have been manufactured by Brainerd-based companies like Nature Vision and Lindy Little Joe. Lindy Little Joe is one of the premier tackle producers in Minnesota, and Nature Vision invented the Aqua-Vu

Underwater Camera, as well as depth finders, the ultra portable Pak Shack fish house and ice fishing rods such as the Buzz Stix, which is battery operated to vibrate by themselves.

In addition to equipment manufacturers, Brainerd is also home to media outlets that share their expertise in fishing and hunting. In-Fisherman magazine, Lindner Media and Babe Winkleman Productions produce magazines and TV shows that are distributed and aired locally and nationally.

Join us to learn more about other outdoor opportunities

The Brainerd Lakes Area has a wealth of sporting and outdoor opportunities, and local guides who will help you enjoy the experience. Contact Gretchen Ennis if you'd like to visit the area and experience the types of activities that get hearty Minnesotans through the winter. We'll customize a Fam Tour for you, so you can get a taste of what we have to offer here. We can arrange for lodging and meals as well. In addition to ice fishing, consider these opportunities:

- Camp Ripley is a 53,000-acre military training facility that has an excellent environmental program. On-going studies include radio tracking the bear and wolf populations. Twice during the winter (December and February/March), researchers use the radio collars to find the hibernating bears, pull them out of their dens and then measure and test them. The researchers encourage media to join them, giving reporters a rare up-close-and-personal encounter with a black bear.
- Darkhouse spearing has a rich and colorful history in the Brainerd Lakes Area, and continues to be very popular. Three high schools in the area offer classes on carving spearing decoys, and Heath's Resort has been renting its 20-plus darkhouses to guests for more than 50 years. Heath's is where artist Les Kouba based his three-painting series on darkhouse spearing.
- With all the lakes and forests in the Brainerd area, trapping opportunities are plentiful. Mink, muskrat, beaver, otter, coyote, red and gray fox are popular choices by trappers. During the winter months, most trappers target bobcat and fisher. Some trap mink, muskrat and beaver through the ice.
- The Brainerd Lakes Area is one of the top birding destinations in the country because it's in a major flyway for migrating birds. Even during the winter, visitors can see a wide variety of birds that aren't normally found in this area, like great gray owls, northern hawk owls, snowy owls and winter finches, including pine siskins, common redpolls, crossbills and pine grosbeaks.
- For active visitors, the Brainerd Lakes Area is home to 240 miles of ungroomed and expertly groomed cross-country ski trails. They include three miles of lighted trails at Northland Arboretum, an advanced 16K course at French Rapids that is rated expert only, and more than a dozen other sites. Snowshoeing is also very popular, with many trails cut through the forests to allow for a peaceful and scenic experience. Snowmobilers will also find diverse and scenic trails in the area – 1,200 miles of groomed trails in all.

More information on the Brainerd Lakes Area is available by visiting the Brainerd Lakes Chamber Web site at www.explorebrainerdlakes.com.

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For more information or photos, contact PR Coordinator Geoff Gorvin at 218-821-9513.