

Lake Simcoe ice fishing heating up

Due to the unseasonably mild winter we've experienced so far, the start to the ice fishing season on Lake Simcoe this year is one of the latest on record.

Despite the relatively late commencement, that shouldn't deter anglers from trying their luck.

Based on early findings through their angler catch sampling survey, the Ministry of Natural Resources Lake Simcoe Fisheries Assessment unit notes there's still some good fishing to be had on this frozen body of water.

Conducted every other year, this season's angler catch survey is taking place along the south half of Lake Simcoe, cites Ron Allen, a



Outdoors

Mike Hayakama

ministry spokesman from the Sutton-based Lake Simcoe Assessment Unit.

Under this program, Allen pointed out the ministry has been approaching anglers and asking them if they've caught any fish.

In their discussions with fortunate anglers, the ministry has recorded data from their catches including length, weight and scale samples to determine age.

GOOD FISHING FOR LAKE

TROUT AND WHITEFISH

Surveying an area between Fox Island and the west side of Georgina Island this past Tuesday, Allen witnessed some excellent catches of lake trout and whitefish.

The catches were as good as what I've seen," said Allen, in trying to compare catches from past years.

Of the catches recorded, Allen revealed the biggest lake trout brought up onto the ice was one weighing near 19 pounds.

He added that every lake trout surveyed was of the stocked variety. This can be determined by noticing if any fins were clipped.

To date, the biggest whitefish they've observed hovered around the six-lb mark.

Close to two-thirds of these catches, Allen added, were stocked fish as evidenced by fin clips.

PERCH CATCHES AVERAGE SO FAR

Carrying out their survey on the south side of Georgina Island on Wednesday, Allen reported catches of yellow perch was average at this time of the year.

It's typical for perch fishing to improve as the season progresses since they begin to school up prior to their

spring spawning," he said.

As for catches of other species, Allen noted they saw just one herring brought up onto the ice.

Allen conceded the lake's herring population has been on a decline in recent years.

As for why herring numbers have dwindled, he said several factors could come into play including the large numbers of lake trout that seek forage, which includes the herring.

As well, the increasing presence of zebra mussels into Lake Simcoe could factor into the equation in terms of water quality for spawning purposes.

The survey crew also did not report any early catches of smelts, another favourite forage food for lake trout, or northern pike, which are usually found along the south side of Georgina Island and Cooks Bay.

Although the survey crew has just begun to go out onto the lake, they are optimistic at what they've seen so far and encourage anglers to try their luck before the season comes to a conclusion.

"In terms of the quality of fishing, it's high now," said Allen.

However, he warned anglers that anyone thinking of venturing onto the lake should contact ice hut operators or locals who go out almost on a daily basis to check on ice conditions.

"Normally there should be anywhere from 12 to 16 inches of clear blue ice at this time of the year," said Allen. "But this year we've had anywhere from six to 10 inches."

Because of this, Allen warns anglers not to even think about driving a vehicle onto the lake's frozen surface just yet.



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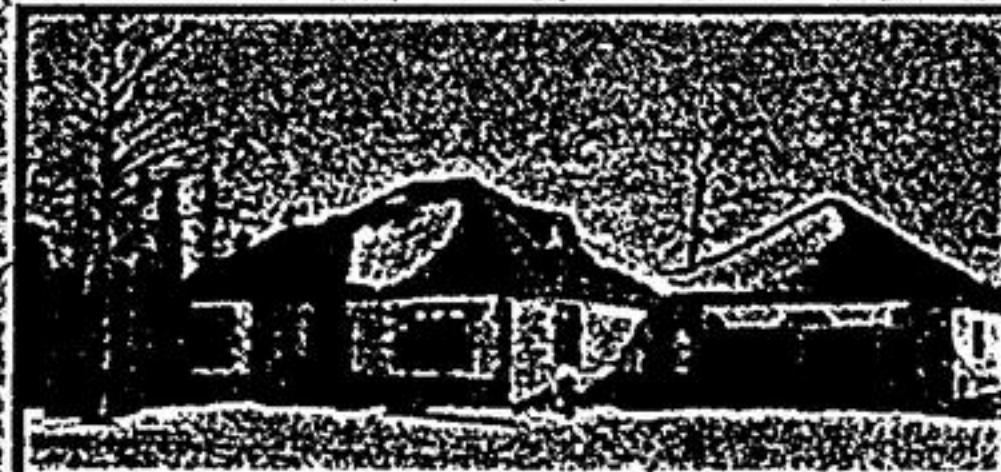
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