

As the onset of the cold season approaches, many anglers could benefit from a reminder of several basic facts related to fishing for trophy trout in frigid waters. Catching big trout in cold water happens consistently for people who adjust their strategies appropriately, acknowledging how low water temperatures affect the fish.

Particularly during the first half of the cold season, roughly from about Thanksgiving to the middle of January or beginning of February, big trout react to passing cold fronts by seeking the safe haven of warmer, deeper water, either in open basins in the middle of bays, or in nearby channels. Channels which end abruptly often prove most useful, since they have little or no current passing through them. Fish instinctively avoid fighting strong currents when cold water stuns them.

When the weather turns toward more favorable temperatures, big trout will come back into shallower water to feed. Often, this happens around dusk and during the night, especially in areas where the water is ultra-clear. Predatory species of fish which prefer to eat other fish do not generally attempt to do so in clear water during daylight hours; they find their hunting much more productive under the cover of darkness. If an incoming tide happens to coincide with the fall of night, this can increase the likelihood of numbers of big trout arriving in a shallow area to feed in a school.

The type of bottom found in a "feeding area" proves less important than its proximity to the place where the big trout ride out the cold spells. If numbers of big fish hunker down during a cold snap in a basin near a sandy spoil bank, the shallows around it might be productive during a subsequent warm spell, even though the bottom is hard sand and grass. Focusing all efforts over muddy bottom will cause some anglers to miss the mother lode. Certainly, some coves and shallow areas with muddy bottoms do hold numbers of large trout in winter, where they occur in places close to deep holes and channels fish use when they are cold-stunned.

Once a likely area is chosen and targeted, a low, slow approach generally works best to attract and trigger strikes from big trout during the first half of the cold season. Soft plastics rigged on sixteenth or eighth-ounce jigheads and slow-sinking twitch baits like MirrOlure's Paul Brown Lures, Catch 5s and Catch 2000s often prove most productive. If a warm-up lasts long enough, or if a prolonged cold snap makes the fish ravenous, faster presentations and/or floating plugs can be ridiculously effective too.

In most cases, catching big trout during the first half of the cold season results from concentrated efforts made with a few choice lures in specific, rather small-scale spaces; the timing of those efforts often coincides with a perceived ripe opportunity generated by a favorable turn in the weather, sometimes slight, sometimes dramatic.