

Ice Fishing Light Biting Panfish  
WFC Member Tim Manske



Anyone who has spent time jigging for panfish knows how light the bite can become during these cold water days (and nights) in Wisconsin. We switch from 4# or 6 # line down to 2# or even 1# ice lines. We spool this fine lines onto micro size reels which are affixed to ultra light ice jigging rods, and then we add the spring steel tips to make the winter panfish bites detectable. Some of us will struggle with the slip bobbers, which inevitably become stuck when the slide hole becomes slushed or frozen. It was during a night of crappie fishing that I ran across a technique that you may find useful for these light biters.

This night the feeding crappies were 18'-22' deep and taking the bait in an upward motion. The only way that I could know that one was gently toying with my Big Dave's minnow tipped ice jig was to watch the line would go from almost straight to slightly limp. A slight snap and there was the hook up--a nice 10-12" crappie. Problem was that in less than an hour it became difficult to stare at that barely visible line in the light of my lantern. With my eye strain starting a painful headache I tried to equip one of my jigging rods with a foam style cut to length slip bobber.

The yellow foam bobber was easier to watch and sure enough the bobber would rise ever so slightly when the weight of the minnow and jig were lessened by the nibbling crappie. This rig caused another challenge though; the bobber would not slide back to the right depth with out help due to the slush and ice forming in the gap which the line was supposed to slip through. This was not acceptable since the crappies would bite in short spurts of 2-4 minutes and then nothing for the next 10-15 minutes. I did not want to spend 20-30 seconds helping the line through my slip bobber.

Then I happened onto a solution to my problem. I removed the bobber from the line to try to make the gap a bit larger to allow the line to slip through with less ice up. While I had the bobber off and the line in the water I had set the jigging rod down with the slip knot (not a rubber stopper) about 1/8" below the water surface. Reshaping the bobber I watched the knot wiggle, a lively minnow I assumed until the knot rose up to the waters surface and created a very slight circular wave pattern on the surface—quick set and there was another nice slab. Bobber quickly went back into the mini ice box and after quickly pulling 3 more slabs up I rigged my other rod with a slip knot. This night I would pull more than 50 crappies up in less than 2 hours and take 15 tasty crappies (about what the 3 of us will eat) home to my kids for a Friday night fish fry.

This had now become my go to bite detector for light biters. Using the line keeper notch that most decent reels now have it is easy to set the depth and adjust the knot just below the waters surface. The orange or yellow slip bobber knots provides no resistance to the fish, are easily visible and the slightest action on my jig below will set the knot into a wiggling dance. When the bite is slight, give this a try and you'll save some eye strain while hooking up more panfish.