



RECYCLED FISH PRESENTS
**STEWARDSHIP
ON ICE**

The Recycled Fish Sportsman's Stewardship Pledge



I pledge to live a lifestyle of stewardship both on and off the water. Living as a steward means making choices throughout my daily life that benefit lakes, streams and seas – and the fish that swim in them – because my lifestyle runs downstream.

- I will learn and abide by fish and game laws.
- I will practice Catch & Release and harvest selectively.
- I will “police my resource” by turning in poachers and reporting polluters.
- I will make up for “the other guy” by cleaning up litter wherever my adventures take me.
- I will boat safely and responsibly, never trespass, and treat other enthusiasts respectfully.
- I will provide my time, money, and other resources to support stewardship efforts.
- I will take steps to see that my home, lawn, vehicle, workplace and everyday lifestyle are as fish-friendly as I can make them by reducing my water, energy, material and chemical footprint.
- I will encourage others to take on this ethic and will connect others with the outdoors to grow the stewardship community.
- I choose to serve as a role model in protecting what remains and recovering what's been lost of our wild and natural places.
- ***I am a steward.***

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Recycled Fish is the non-profit organization of anglers living a lifestyle of stewardship both on and off the water because our lifestyle runs downstream.

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We are more
than Sportsmen.
We are Stewards.

Leaves are long gone. Ice twinkles in the trees. The fish have a ceiling on their world.

For people like us, our blood heats up with these frozen fantasies. The other thing that gets us all warmed up: big fish. Not just linebacker flatheads or mammoth muskies, but bull bluegills, pounder perch and slab crappies.

Enter Recycled Fish, an organization striving for more and bigger fish through stewardship.

We're just people who love to fish. We're doing what we can to make sure there are more and bigger fish today and a legacy of healthy waters for generations to come.

To get there, it takes all of us living a “lifestyle of stewardship” both on and off the water, because our lifestyle runs downstream.

On the water, it's stuff like catch and release and selective harvest. It's making sure we are never the ones leaving trash on the ice, and cleaning up trash when we find it.

All that stuff is a good start. But truth is, a “lifestyle of stewardship” means looking at our everyday choices, too.

Whether it's recycling, changing the way we take care of our lawns, or even turning off the lights when we leave a room ... that stuff matters to our waters, and the future of our waters, as much as what we do when we're at the lake.

Our lakes, streams and seas need not just sportsmen, but stewards – like you.

S.A.F.E. Angling On Ice Getting the lead out and more

S.A.F.E. stands for “Sustaining Angling, Fish and Ecosystems.” It’s the products and practices we can use to be good stewards when we are on the water. For example, S.A.F.E. Angling means better fish handling, using lead-free and biodegradable baits and lures, and cleaning up trash.

So what can you do to be a S.A.F.E. Angler on ice?



Go unleaded. Lead isn’t the worst thing to ever happen to our waters, but it’s not the best. From the way it’s mined to the time it breaks off our line, lead is hard on our lakes as well as the fish, waterfowl and wildlife in them. Thirty-nine percent of loons, a symbol of the north woods, that were found dead in the wild died from lead poisoning, according to the U.S. Forest Service. Stewards don’t want to be responsible for that. Some alternatives to lead can be pricey, but others are cheap. Ultrasteel, bismuth and tin cost the same or just pennies more than lead. In ice fishing, even premium options make sense because the tackle is so small. Secondly, super-dense non-toxic materials like tungsten are readily available and they fish GREAT – better than lead for sure.

For a thorough list of manufacturers making lead-free ice fishing products, visit [www.RecycledFish.org/SAFE Angling](http://www.RecycledFish.org/SAFE_Angling).



Don’t dump your bait. Invasive species like carp and invasive diseases like Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS) are spread by dumping unused bait buckets. Never dump unused bait down the hole at the end of the day.



Biodegradable beats plastic. Both in fishability and in environmental impacts, most baits molded from protein or other natural materials are better than those made from petroleum products.

Tungsten is not only non-toxic and environmentally friendly, it “fishes heavy,” meaning more sensitivity, faster into the strike zone, and compact profile.



Barbless Hooks

Barbed treble hooks are standard fare on spoons, which are popular in ice fishing. They’re popular for hooking big live baits, too. But trebles are trouble when you’re trying to remove them from a fish quickly, which means more damage to the fish and more air exposure. That reduces post-release survival rates, and if we’re gonna let ‘em go, we want to know they lived, right?

Trebles are almost impossible to remove without harming or killing the fish if the fish happens to swallow one. Furthermore, they are infamous for snagging gloves, jackets, and portable shack fabric.

If trebles do have a place in ice fishing, it would be for use in a quick-strike rig in which live or dead bait is used. Fish like northern pike generally attack their prey from the side, and the use of a quick-strike rig allows the angler to set the hook immediately upon feeling the fish strike, reducing the opportunity for the fish to turn, swallow the bait headfirst and deep-hooking itself.

Other than that, when possible, remove and replace treble hooks with single hooks on spoons and vertical minnow swimming jigs and lures.

Single hooks with the barb mashed down have excellent penetration and holding power, and our research has shown that the ratio of landed fish on single hooks is equal to that of treble hooks.

Choose an appropriate-sized straight-shank j-hook, preferably with a straight eye. Open-eye siwash-style hooks can be an excellent choice.

As for live bait, circle hooks are awesome for high hookup rates right in the corner of the mouth. Try them and you’ll be surprised how well they work!

Finally, we all know how important it is to take kids fishing. Barbless hooks present less risk – we want to get kids hooked on fishing, not hook kids. That can spoil the sport for them.



Barbless hooks make unhooking fish a breeze.

Get a handle on 'em Handling fish and busting myths

MYTH #1 – If it swam away it lived.

BUSTED – Nope. Fish caught on single barbless hooks from less than 20 feet of water and handled minimally have a 97 percent survival rate. That's good! But add variables – deep water, barbed hooks and air exposure – and the numbers change. Many fish that swim off suffer “delayed mortality” within 72 hours. Good stewards handle fish so that they'll live when they let 'em swim.

MYTH #2 – Fish can be kind of “frozen” and then brought back to life.

BUSTED – Stop me if you've heard this one.

First winter on the ice, just learning the ropes.

Your buddy says, “Yeah, one day I got done ice fishing, all my fish had been on the ice for a few hours. Threw 'em in a bucket and when I got home, they were so froze up they were hard to clean. So I put a little warm water in the bucket and left them alone. A few hours later, darn things were swimming around, lively as could be!”

Whether you believe that in whole, in part, or not at all, we've all heard some variation of it. It's not true.

Just like during open water, fish can breathe only under water. In fact, when it's cold, it can be even more important to get fish back into the water quickly. If the air temperature is below freezing, fish suffer freezing damage to their fins, gills, and eyes very quickly – which can be fatal.

MYTH #3 – Hold 'em up by the gill plate for a cool picture!

BUSTED – Don't do that. For big fish, hold them horizontally with a hand under the belly, rather than vertically by the lower jaw or gills, no matter what you saw in your favorite magazine. Horizontal holds prevent dislocation of the jaw or spine and damage to internal organs.



Not only are horizontal holds better for the fish, they make for more interesting photos, too.

Selective Harvest Ensuring Abundance

Winter fishing in the North can be a hot and cold affair. It can feel like forever between bites, and then the bite turns on and landing fish gets to be like factory work.

Today's electronics like portable sonar units or underwater cameras can be powerful tools in locating concentrations of fish quickly. GPS can get us back to the spot-on-the-spot time after time. With the power of these advancements comes the need for responsible use.

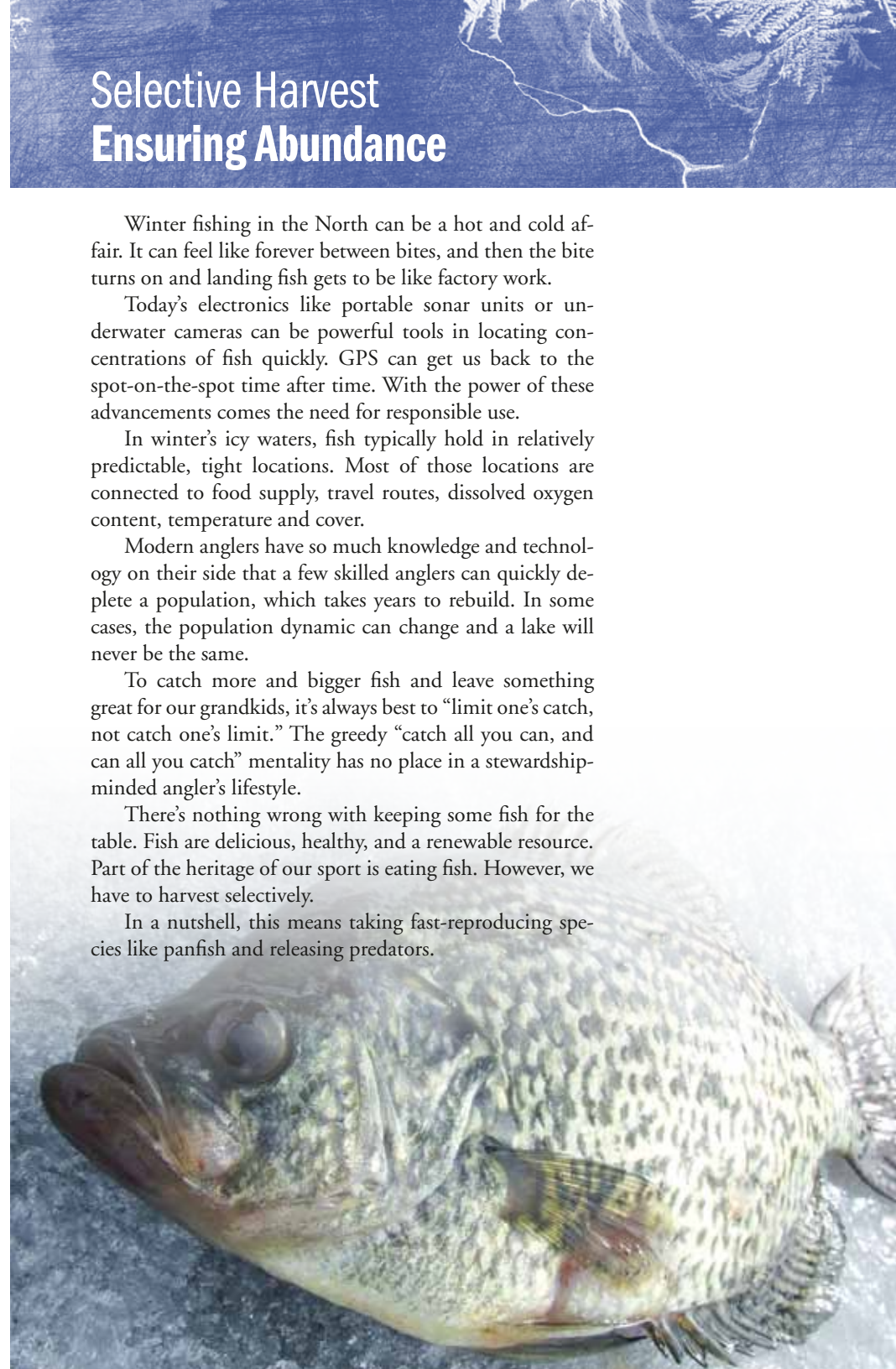
In winter's icy waters, fish typically hold in relatively predictable, tight locations. Most of those locations are connected to food supply, travel routes, dissolved oxygen content, temperature and cover.

Modern anglers have so much knowledge and technology on their side that a few skilled anglers can quickly deplete a population, which takes years to rebuild. In some cases, the population dynamic can change and a lake will never be the same.

To catch more and bigger fish and leave something great for our grandkids, it's always best to “limit one's catch, not catch one's limit.” The greedy “catch all you can, and can all you catch” mentality has no place in a stewardship-minded angler's lifestyle.

There's nothing wrong with keeping some fish for the table. Fish are delicious, healthy, and a renewable resource. Part of the heritage of our sport is eating fish. However, we have to harvest selectively.

In a nutshell, this means taking fast-reproducing species like panfish and releasing predators.



A Steward's Guide to Selective Harvest

No matter what species you're harvesting, keep mid-sized fish and release the biggest specimens. Big fish aren't usually just old, they're genetically superior faster growers.

Whose kids are going to be taller, Shaquille O'Neill or Tom Cruise? Shaquille O'Neill, of course! Why?

The answer is genetics.

Big fish make big fish, and small fish make small fish – even if they're the same species. Take big fish out of a population and you take big genes out of population. All these years, we kept the big ones and threw the little ones back. Guess what we got in return? Smaller fish!

Worst of all, true giants too often are hung on walls. These days, a steward will take a photo and have a painting, drawing or fiberglass reproduction made to preserve a trophy catch. Quality reproductions look just as good, cost about the same, last longer, and allow those giant fish to spread their good genes in future spawning cycles.

For suggestions on artists, visit www.RecycledFish.org/resources.

Yellow perch are a delicious example of an abundant, fast-reproducing species well suited for selective harvest.



Common Ice Fishing Species

EAT ME

- Bluegill (under 9")
- Crappie (under 14")
- Yellow Perch
- Yellow Bass
- White Bass
- White Perch
- Hatchery Trout
- Whitefish
- Smelt
- Ling Cod
- Non-native Lake Trout (invasive in western waters)
- Channel Catfish

LIMITED HARVEST

- Walleye and Sauger (a couple of mid-sized fish)
- Northern Pike (mid-sized fish from waters abundant with pike)
- Largemouth Bass (mid-sized fish from waters abundant with bass)
- Salmon

NO HARVEST


- Muskies
- Smallmouth Bass
- Wild, Native Trout and Char


Releasing pike like this one helps maintain a healthy predator-prey balance, ensuring great fishing for all species.


Tournament Care When Ounces Count


For thousands of anglers, part of the fun of fishing in the winter includes tournaments and derbies.


Tournaments involve fishing for several hours, then bringing a certain number of fish to a weigh-in. Most tournaments require that these fish be kept alive. These tips will help you bring live, healthy fish to the weigh-in:

 **Keep fish in a white, insulated bucket or cooler with a floating thermometer.** These fish come out of 34-degree water. Dark colored and un-insulated containers heat up quickly, and even a 10-degree temperature change can kill the fish.

 **A battery-operated aerator helps keep the water oxygenated.** Cold water holds dissolved oxygen well. A lid will help prevent water from splashing out during transport.

 **Fill your bucket with water before you catch your first fish.** If you wait to fill the bucket with water until after you catch your first fish, that fish has a lower survival rate. A 32-ounce plastic cup from a convenience store works well to draw water from an ice hole. Some anglers make a “water on a stick” device, screwing a handle to the inside. This can be plunged quickly down the hole to draw water without soaking the angler.

 **Add a teaspoon of Sure Life to the bucket.** Adding Sure Life to the water will help keep the fish live, healthy and vigorous.

 **Healthy fish are winning fish.** In derbies, fish are typically caught, rushed to the weigh-ins, weighed and released. In this scenario, a bag filled with water or a bucket of water is all that is needed to keep the fish submerged through weigh-ins. Fractions of an ounce can mean the difference between winning and losing, and fish lose weight out of water. Live, healthy fish brought to weigh-ins in water give you the best chance of a winning finish!

Hyper-Buoyancy & Fizzing Even Fish Get the Bends

Part of ice fishing for some people means fishing deep water – depths of more than 20 feet. Just like a human diver can suffer “the bends” from coming to the surface too quickly, fish can suffer “barotraumas,” or “hyper-buoyancy.”

Fish have swim bladders that allow them to trap air to maintain their depth and balance in the water. This regulation of air takes time. Bringing a fish up to the surface too quickly can cause severe physical disruption within the fish's body and ultimately cause them to die after being released.

This is avoidable. The best way is to fish in less than 20 feet of water. Even when there is a good deepwater bite, somewhere in shallower water, there are actively feeding fish. A good steward is going to go find those fish.

However, if you're bound and determined to fish in deep waters, bring fish to the surface slowly. Often these fish still have high post-release mortality rates, even if they swim away. Fish caught from deep water are a great choice for harvest, if legal to keep.

If a fish portrays signs of barotraumas, “fizzing” or “venting” can eliminate trapped air within the swim bladder. Basically, the procedure involves taking a hypodermic needle (a 16-gauge needle is recommended) and inserting it into the side of the fish approximately 1.5 inches behind the pectoral fin. This relieves the excess air trapped within the swim bladder. There are tools for this, such as the Ventafish Tool (www.ventafish.com). The “fizzing” method of inserting a needle through the fish's throat is no longer recommended due to the chance of puncturing vital organs.

Stewardship Tip Recognizing Hyper-Buoyancy

Signs of hyper-buoyancy include:

- A bloated stomach cavity area
- Struggling at the surface, unable to swim back down into the water column
- Bulging and even bursting eyes
- Distended stomachs, sometimes appearing in their throat or mouth as if “the fish is sticking its tongue out”

This walleye was caught from over 40 feet of water. Bulging eyes are clear in this picture, and inside his mouth, his stomach is distended. Fish in this condition are a smart choice for harvest as post-release survival chances are low. Any chance of living would depend upon successful “fizzing.”



A white aerated bucket is a good way to keep fish alive. A cooler works even better.




Trash Cleanup Restoring Dignity to Our Lakes


This place was never meant to be a trash dump.


It's a letdown to leave home excited to connect with nature, only to be confronted by trash.

You know this: whatever you pack onto the ice, be sure to pack it off. It not only shows respect for nature, but other people as well. A snow and ice-covered lake shimmering at dawn is a breathtaking scene: white, pure, and pristine. Help others have the same experience. This is what good stewardship is all about.

The truth is, trash at the lake comes from three places:

 **Accidents.** Trash accidentally escapes even the best of us on windy days. Make sure that anything that might be blown away is contained.

 **Post-modern life.** Lots of the pollution we find at the lake didn't start there. Our lifestyle runs downstream. Most trash that started in a parking lot at some mega-store will eventually find its way to a body of water as gravity does its job. When you pick up trash from a ditch, miles from your favorite lake, you are, in turn, cleaning up the lake.

 **Dirtbag humans.** There are, and always will be, people who don't know, and don't care. If you went to their house, it would look just as awful as it does when they leave the lake. They will never read this booklet.


Sadly, as long as there is selfishness, or substance abuse, or homelessness, or wild teenagers ... there will be trash in our lakes. The only solution is to "make up for the other guy." Don't just take out what you bring in. Bring an empty bag and take out any trash you find, too. That's the mark of a true steward.

Bring back everything you take out onto the ice – along with any trash you find. This angler has thoroughly secured all of his gear to prevent it from blowing away.

Augers, ATVs & Snowmobiles Our Chemical Footprint

What is our "chemical footprint?" It is the amount of chemicals introduced into the environment based upon our personal choices. If you chose to live an all-natural, subsistence lifestyle like the people of 100 years ago, your chemical footprint would be very, very low.


If you live like the rest of society, then some chemicals that are bad for the environment – and therefore bad for fisheries – happen as a result of your life. Good stewards keep that footprint as small as possible.

 **Augers are one source of chemical pollution.** Use a hand auger when it makes sense. Early and late ice are good examples. Two anglers holding the same auger can drill through ice with little effort at incredible speeds.

Battery-operated ice augers do have some chemical footprint, but little or no risk of petroleum spills and no emissions. That's a real benefit.

Augers with four-stroke gas engines are cleaner burning and have lower pollution risks than traditional two-cycle engines.

Finally, new propane augers are clean burning and are a consideration for reducing gas and oil spills on the ice.

 **Snowmobiles and ATVs have both mechanical and chemical implications.** Mechanically, be careful not to tear up access points when entering and exiting the ice. This can lead to access being denied for future anglers.

Electric ATVs have been introduced to the marketplace, but most ATVs and snowmobiles run on gas. Always fuel in a place where any spills can be contained, and maintain your machines so that they are running efficiently and aren't leaking as you cross the ice. In particular, antifreeze is toxic even in small concentrations.

Remember, what goes in the air goes in our water within a few precipitation cycles.



Stewardship Tip Tune Your Auger

Replace the spark plug: Check and set the electrode gap before you install the plug.

Replace the air filter: Most air filters can be replaced by uncovering and removing the old filter, then replacing it with a new one. If your engine uses an oiled-foam filter, clean it in a water-and-detergent solution.

Use the proper fuel/oil mix: Check the manual for your engine and do not exceed the recommended mix. For most augers, the ratio is in the neighborhood of 40:1.

Check your hoses: Make sure that they are secure and don't leak. Make sure your fuel cap fights tightly also. Test by setting your auger on its side to make sure that it doesn't leak.

Stewardship Off the Water Our Lifestyle Runs Downstream

Many of the best things we can do for ice fishing happen when we're not ice fishing. Catch and release and selective harvest have caught on, but our fisheries are still in trouble. Our fisheries are in trouble because our waters are in trouble. According to the U.S. EPA, 49 percent of fresh water in America is polluted to the point that it doesn't support healthy fish populations and safe drinking water, and is unsafe for swimming.

Here are some Stewardship Tips – simple things you can do to help our waters through everyday living.

- Clean up after your dog. Dog poop is a leading source of “non-point source pollution.”
- Save water wherever you can, whether that's installing a low-flow showerhead or putting in a rain barrel for your garden.
- Drive the most fuel-efficient vehicle you can. Keep tires inflated and service your vehicle regularly. Walk, bike or carpool when you can. Consolidate trips.
- Recycle and buy recycled products.
- Reusable products almost always beat disposable ones.
- Fix stuff that can be fixed. Share things that can be shared. Consumerism is bad for our waters.
- Don't fertilize your lawn, or at least get a soil test first and then use natural fertilizers if they're needed.
- Turn off the lights when you leave a room. Install energy efficient appliances and low-wattage light bulbs. Put a blanket on your water heater.
- Cheap food comes at a high cost to our waters. By eating a vegetarian diet one day a week, choosing free-range meats and purchasing organic produce, you can reduce your footprint and support sustainable farming practices.

For more Stewardship Tips visit www.RecycledFish.org/StewardshipTips. You can also sign up to receive free weekly stewardship tips by e-mail.

Make no mistake, these collective actions will have the greatest impact on our waters. Who better to lead positive change than those of us most closely connected to our waters?



Everyday choices matter as much as those that we make when we are at the lake. After all, our lifestyle runs downstream.

Recycled Fish thanks these partners in Stewardship On Ice, and anglers like you.



Additional support for the Hardwater Open Tournaments



Support the cause and help our fisheries this winter!

- Buy this year's awesome "On Ice" Tour long-sleeved T-shirt for \$20, available in the Recycled Fish Online Store, powered by GreenTackle.com
- Get a few raffle tickets for our On Ice Tour Raffle – just \$3 or (2) for \$5! Win gear from Clam, Strikemaster and Vexliar!
- Volunteer to help at an event, or to sell raffle tickets! Email us – fishrecycler@recycledfish.org – if you're willing to help!
- Fish one of our derbies, or come to an Ice Bash event. Get the schedule at www.RecycledFish.org
- Make a tax-deductible donation online, at an event, or by mail www.RecycledFish.org/donate or 605 N. 12th Street #3, Nebraska City, NE 68410



- Take the Sportsman's Stewardship Pledge as a Premium Member! Visit www.RecycledFish.org/StewardshipPledge or any of our live events



Ice fishing is fun no matter what, but it's a lot **MORE** fun when you catch fish, right? And what's more fun, a few fish or a lot of fish? Small fish or big fish? Easy answer, right? We all love to catch **MORE BIG FISH!**

That takes putting the right bait in the right location at the right time with the right presentation. Right? But there's one other part of the equation – fish have to **BETHERE**, too!

To get more and bigger fish in our waters and leave a legacy of healthy waters for our grandkids, it takes living as stewards every day, both on and off the water.

Recycled Fish Presents Stewardship On Ice gives you practical ways to be a good steward of our waters through the sport of ice fishing. Nearly all of us want to do the right thing if we know what "the right thing" is. This helpful guide covers core ethics and often-overlooked information on things we can do to steward our waters well.

Our lakes, streams and seas need not just sportsmen – but stewards.



MSRP: \$2.99