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A Note on the Capture of Smallmouth Bass by Angling Through the Ice ✓

by

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Although the smallmouth bass (Micropterus d. dolomieu) is famed for its pugnacity when taken by angling during the warmer months of the year, many fisheries authorities have held the belief that during winter in northern latitudes the species "hibernates," or at least sinks into a state of profound lethargy where its instincts for feeding and combativeness are stilled. There have even been reports of specimens being brought up, by mechanical dredges, from resting places among rocks or in the mud bottoms of lakes during this season.

Within recent years rumors have reached the Michigan Institute for Fisheries Research of catches of smallmouth bass being made by ice fishermen on Elizabeth Lake, Oakland County, and elsewhere in the state, but no substantiating facts were available until early March of 1946, when the writer, while supervising a winter lake mapping party on Walled Lake, Oakland County, chanced to observe that a nearby angler seemed to be catching and returning to the water a number of rather large fish. Closer inspection revealed the fish to be smallmouth bass, and two specimens, 10 and 12 inches in length, were obtained for the Institute's collection. This fisherman, and others on the lake interviewed later, were agreed that on certain days during the winter smallmouth would take

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↓ Contribution from the Michigan Institute for Fisheries Research.

the hook more readily than the yellow perch which were the anglers' objective; and it was further maintained by them that on Walled Lake the smallmouth bit more readily in winter than in summer.

The two identified specimens were taken on minnows (Notropis atherinoides) from water 15 to 20 feet deep, within 1 to 3 feet of the bottom, at a point about 400 feet off shore near the northeast end of the lake. Beneath the ice cover the water was clear, and the immediate bottom was composed of pulpy peat. Anglers on the lake also reported that smallmouth bass had been taken in large numbers through the ice from water of similar depths off the south shore, near the southwest end of the lake.

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