

Outdoors



OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO SPORTSMEN'S ALLIANCE



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**NOSA Director
Jesse Fisher lands a
heavy winter walleye**



Winter Walleye Fishing

By Rich Brochu, NOSA Member

Like many anglers, I prefer to fish walleye during the spring / summer months and right into fall. Despite this, I do love catching a feed of walleye during the winter months to tide me over until spring returns. Unlike trout - a more note worthy fish to target in the winter, walleye can offer some great fishing and awesome table fare during those long winter months. Finding the right type of lake that hold actively feeding fish is the key to success.

Fortunately, here in Northern Ontario there are a few go-to lakes that offer that opportunity with good success. Lakes that come to mind include Lac Des Mille Lac and Whitefish Lake to name a few. It is to be noted however that despite having many lakes loaded with walleye during the summer does not equate to great walleye fishing in the winter. It's interesting that in many of these lakes the walleye seem to go dormant during the winter months and you are lucky if you can catch one or two in an outing. Even catching a few can be considered a success in many lakes that you would think the bite should be incredible.

The lakes in question from my experience are usually clear water lakes. It does not mean it is a given that the pickerel wont bite in most clear water lakes, but I would say the odds are not in your favor. My personal experience has taught me that those lakes offer less success when it comes to walleye despite the northern pike bite being average. The lakes I usually target for winter walleye with success are often tea-stained lakes or have in general darker water. These lakes appear to produce more advantage for the angler and the bite more predictable. I have also found that certain months in the winter will dictate whether the bite will be negative or positive. Early season and late season appear to be the best bet on filling a limit in comparison to mid season.

I tried a similar lake in December that I discovered during the summer to test this theory. The lake was tea stained and I had done very well during the summer and fall catching some nice size, Pickerel. My friend and I were hunting early December and I asked him if he wanted to try ice fishing the lake. We put off hunting for the afternoon and headed to the lake to try our luck. Sure, enough we started catching a few nice size walleyes and we were able to add another lake to our list of winter spots. I look forward to trying this lake again this winter but later in the season.

Once I find the type of lake I'm looking for, I often target weedy shores with five to six feet of water. I also try summer haunts that I know hold fish with depths of five to eight feet of water. Points or narrows that funnel fish as they target bait are also go to spots. If it is later in the season, I look for river entrances and fish off either point of entry. These areas can hold a good number of fish that are gathering for their trip up the river once the spring spawn begins.

The tackle I use is simple, a jig and a minnow, a treble hook hooked onto a sucker minnow and you're good to go. Keeping it simple does the trick. This year a friend of mine put together a new line of "Jim Dandy" jigs that I tried on my first ice fishing outing. The jigs have a sucker minnow look to them and I have to say they worked very well. Like most anglers targeting walleye, sucker minnows are a staple in catching them on Lac. Sucker minnows can be costly but with these jigs you can add a minnow to them, and they imitate a sucker minnow at a fraction of the cost.

I am looking forward to some great walleye fishing during late March and early April. In my opinion, these months offer some of the best walleye fishing. It's great to feel the sun heat up the environment and to know that within a few short months, spring will arrive. This means summer walleye fishing is right around the corner! Stay safe on the ice and enjoy what we are so blessed to experience here in the North.



**Jim Dandy jig
heads are the
author's go-to
tackle for winter
walleye.**

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Keegan Engstrom with a typical brookie caught in one of the region's MNRF stocked lakes

Stocked Trout Lakes: Ice-Fishing Opportunities Abound!

By Keegan Engstrom

The snow and cold that our Northern Ontario winters are known for has officially arrived. Most of our larger lakes are now frozen over and will start to see anglers venture out onto their frozen expanses. These new opportunities lessen the pressure on many smaller stocked lakes that are frequented during the early ice period. These lakes still provide excellent fishing throughout the winter months and are also a great way to get kids or new ice anglers into the sport as they can have walk-on access and action-packed days.

The Ministry of Natural Resources stocks 5 species of salmonids in our area; brook, brown, lake trout, rainbow trout, as well as splake (a hybrid that is derived by mixing male brook trout milt with the eggs of female lake trout). The two most commonly stocked species in the district of Thunder Bay are brook trout and splake. These lakes are designed on a put-and-take system to help alleviate pressure on natural populations. These lakes also have a higher possession limit, thus allowing anglers to add a bit of variety to their omega-3 consumption! The Ministry has a handy website called Fish On-Line, which allows anglers to search by species and see how many fish were stocked in previous years. It is a very useful tool to see what lakes were heavily stocked in the past few years to see what lakes will have the larger fish.

Each species relates to shoreline and bottom structure (rainbow trout to a lesser extent). While walking out onto a lake any prominent fallen tree in the water or rocky shoreline are easy clues as to where fish may be holding. It makes it easy to explore new lakes or quickly move spots during the day. Another thing to note is all salmonids are roaming fish, they will cruise the shorelines or a certain depth, the action will be sporadic, but anglers can typically stay in one spot instead of hole hopping. Since one spot can be productive throughout the day a very fun technique is sight fishing. Now sight fishing can be as simple as a single hole and laying on the ice with something over you to block out light or it can be as elaborate as a large square hole inside a pop-up shelter. Being inside a shelter is obviously more comfortable if you are doing it for multiple hours on end, but it also lets you see a larger area under the water and gain a better sense of how the fish react to your presentation or technique. It can be a very exciting way to visually fish instead of relying on electronics or the actions of your rod tip to help you understand what is happening underwater.

The lures and presentations for stocked trout are really quite simple. You are allowed 2 lines per angler in Ontario while ice fishing. This two-line method usually leads to a form of setline and then an active lure. For the setlines, a small minnow on either a hook or a jig works wonders. I have also used worms on setlines for brook trout with success in the past. Stocked trout have a nasty habit of hooking themselves deep if the hook is not set right away. Bells are a great and cheap method to alert anglers that something is biting. A more expensive method is something like a Jawjacker which creates tension on the rod so when a fish bites the rod sets the hook for you, the same way a downrigger works. With regards to lures, small jigging spoons such as Swedish pimples or little cleos are classics. Small jigs around that 1/16th oz are also a great choice. Jigs made with tungsten are more expensive, but they allow anglers to have a heavier jig with a smaller profile, since tungsten is denser than lead. My favorite colours are orange, pink, gold, blue, silver or a colour combination of them.

Safety is always the number one priority while out on the ice. The adage of "no ice is safe ice", stands true. These small trout lakes can be spring fed or have beaver lodges and the ice can change rapidly when in their vicinity. Make sure you have ice picks and a throw rope handy if the worst happens. Good luck on your next stocked lake ice-fishing adventure!

*Jenna Panontin lands
a chunky winter
smallmouth bass*



Ice Cold Smallmouths

By Samantha Boyce, NOSA Member

I was recently on a walleye ice fishing trip with a friend this winter when to my excitement she pulled up a giant Smallmouth bass. This was the first bass I've seen iced in my 30 years ice fishing. To her – this wasn't anything much out of the ordinary on this particular lake. Seeing one come up through the ice fascinated me and left me with so many questions. I decided to do a little research into Winter Bass. After bringing up this topic to many anglers, I know I'm not the only one pondering the same questions. Many other anglers have also not caught nor witnessed a bass come through the ice during the winter. On the other hand – there are also anglers who have caught, and also targeted them during this time of year. Where do they go during the winter months?

Most lakes in Northern Ontario, Smallmouth bass go almost dormant and become very slow and lethargic during the winter. They are known to cruise or just hang out in big groups during the winter. Like summer Smallmouths, they will stick to structured areas like rocky and weedy humps. The deeper spots of the lake where the water tends to be much warmer, is where they can be found. The warmer the weather – the more chances they will be active and the better chance of finding them. Underwater cameras and ice sonar are the most successful way to nail down where they're hiding.

The metabolism of a Smallmouth slows down majorly during the winter months lessening their need to feed. Their stomachs decrease in size while other species like Lake Trout and Walleye actually gain weight and bulk up in the winter. During the winter they have the same diet – just way less of it. Their bodies chip away at their fat reserves to stay alive.

Downsize your tackle and take a slow approach - similar to what you'd use for Perch and Walleye fishing. A 3/4 ounce Jig tipped with a minnow, jigging Rapalas and Chubby Darters have been known to entice and hook up a winter Smallie.

Something to keep in mind - pulling up Bass from water deeper than 25ft during the winter can be extremely hard on them and because of what is known as barotrauma – from bringing them up too fast in many different atmospheres of pressure.

Finding Smallmouth Bass in the winter is not easy, rare on some lakes and a challenge for most in our neck of the woods but it is worth it if you can find where they're hiding and hopefully meet one on the ice. No different that summertime smallies, when caught on the hard water, bronze backs will entertain with a heck of a fight! Give bass the ice fishing challenge this winter! Stay safe and have fun!

*Smallmouth when caught
through the ice present a fun
winter ice fishing challenge*



Three BIG Days FEBRUARY 8-10, 2024

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THIS MONTH'S NEWS

MNRF Moose Hunter Survey

NOSA encourages moose hunters to reply



Moose hunting is a valued family tradition and important socioeconomic contributor to Northern Ontario

In early January of 2024, some 4000 randomly selected resident and non-resident moose hunters will receive the 2023 Ontario Moose Hunters Survey. MNRF is inviting those moose hunters who receive the survey letter to assist them by voluntarily responding to the survey process. The survey is separate from the mandatory Moose Hunter Report that was due in Dec. 2023.

The Northwestern Ontario Sportsmen's Alliance is in support of the 2023 Ont. Moose Hunters Survey, and we encourage moose hunters to partake in it as it will hopefully provide MNRF with important perspectives held by moose hunting stakeholders. In particular, NOSA will be interested in learning from MNRF what sort of general feedback hunters and outfitters provided to the survey, concerning moose management in Ontario and hunter perspectives surrounding moose population dynamics. NOSA believes it is positive that the Ontario Government through the MNRF is embarking on this survey to collect hunter feedback and opinion on various aspects of moose management.

Moose hunting is an important socio economic driver for all of Ontario, especially for the north, and NOSA recognizes that not only is moose hunting important to local indigenous and resident Ontario hunters, but also it is very important to the Tourism Industry, which has been negatively impacted in the recent decade by large reductions in their tag quotas in addition to being hurt by the restrictions placed on non-resident travel during the COVID pandemic.

Hopefully this survey will shed some light on the "state of moose management" in Ontario, as viewed through the eyes of the stakeholders who are surveyed and provide some direction to MNRF on where they may need to go with the future of moose management and research/monitoring in the near future.

The Northwestern Ontario Sportsmen's Alliance wants to encourage all moose hunters who receive the survey by invite, to respond to it with their input. A high response rate will ensure that a broad cross section of respondents and their input, are collected and analyzed by the MNRF team conducting this survey.

UPCOMING EVENTS

**THUNDER BAY BOAT SHOW: FEB. 8-10 -
AT NORTH COUNTRY CYCLE & SPORTS**

LAKEHEAD ARCHERS CUPID FUN SHOOT: FEB. 10

NWFTA TRAPPING CONVENTION: MARCH 1-2 AT CLE

THUNDER BAY GUN SHOW: MAR. 9-10 AT SLOVAK LEGION

NORTH SHORE STEELHEAD ASSOC DINNER: APRIL 5

LAKEHEAD ARCHERS INDOOR FUN SHOOT: APRIL 13

NOSA MEMBERSHIP DINNER: APRIL 19

LAKEHEAD ARCHERS RUBBER BOOT 3D: MAY 25-26

LAKEHEAD ARCHERS OUTDOOR 3D: JUNE 22-23

Fisheries Management Zone 6 and Zone 9 Updates

By John Hay, NOSA Director and Co-Chair of FMZ6 and FMZ9



Fish conservation reps fear that consequences of aquaculture will impact native species along Northshore

Greetings anglers and NOSA members. This is an update to the membership and the district's angling community, about NOSA's activities on your behalf on FMZ6 and FMZ9.

To briefly recap since the last update. FMZ's are committees that are broadly represented by members of interested non-government organizations (NGOs), fish clubs and individuals with specific angling interest and experience, facilitated by support staff from the province (MNFR). NOSA continues to be involved with representation on both zone councils. I also represent NOSA and serve as the Co-Chair of a "working group" tasked with the development of a separate Fish Management Plan for Black Bay Lake Superior.

FMZ6 has recently conducting a meeting, whereby walleye dominated the agenda. The council recognizing the importance of the area walleye fishery, decided that Walleye will be the first species to be addressed by the council. The latest fish monitoring data provided by MNRF has not raised any major concerns. Since walleye is so important to northwestern Ontario the consensus was the committee wanted better and more current data to make informed recommendations on sustainability, angling opportunity and socio-economic stability or improvements. The OMNRF staff provided that data and analysis. The result is an opinion that walleye populations are generally stable and sustainable. The discussions will continue on walleye, as there are other opinions and possible changes could be recommended.

Due to the temporary re-assignment of the OMNRF co chair. It was the consensus of the FMZ 6 that we will waiting until the spring of 2024 to meet again. We will be working on establishing a schedule of meeting dates with appropriate frequency as soon as possible.

FMZ9 has been meeting since last report. Council discussion has centered around possible concerns about stocking lake trout in western Nipigon Bay, the noted decline in steelhead populations along the north shore and also the council's growing concerns about aquaculture (growing fish in pens in Lake Superior) projects that are either currently in operation and/or new aquaculture operations planned for future.

A final report from the Ombudsman as a result of the Camp 43 dam removal debacle identified the failing on the part of the province to fulfill its duty to consult and inform stakeholders. The Office of the Ombudsman continues to monitor the activities of FMZ 9 and by extension, the Black Bay Fish Management Plan working group.

As FMZ 9 moves forward it has been recommended and accepted by the government that two sub-committees to be established to resume the work of FMZ9. Since FMZ9 encompasses all of the Canadian waters of Lake Superior, it is recommended by the committee that FMZ9 East and FMZ9 West working groups be established. The two Sub-Committees would be able to meet separately and still be coordinated and share information in a transparent and efficient manner.

The Northwestern Ontario Sportsmen's Alliance (NOSA) is proud to note that we are once again taking leadership roles in both FMZ6 and FMZ9, as we continue to co-chair FMZ6 and now co-chair FMZ9 West. Additionally, NOSA has a leadership role with the Black Bay Fish Management Plan working group.

That working group has met frequently and productively dealing, with a large number of species. As we have now moved on to walleye restoration, there will certainly be longer and more passionate debate on how to facilitate increasing the population to a sustainable level that is ecologically viable and appropriate given the large carrying capacity of the bay.

There are encouraging results that the walleye populations are improving. Spawning habitat will become an item for discussion, which will bring once again bring the Camp 43 dam removal back into the scope of planning.

On a much more positive note, the elimination of 2 rod trolling restrictions have made to the Gazette. That was the final hurdle to allow 2 rods per angler while trolling on Lake Superior. So as of January 1. 2024 the restriction is gone. Thanks to all who lobbied for this regulation change!



THIS MONTH'S NEWS

A Message from the Canadian Coalition for Firearms Rights

***Deer Hunters: we need you...
because you're next!!***

Submitted by Tracey Wilson, CCFR VP, Public Relations, Club Outreach



Tracey Wilson of CCFR is a hunter and she has an important message for Canadian Firearms owners.

It seems like no matter what law-abiding gun owners do; the Trudeau Liberals continue their assault on the lawfully licensed Canadian firearms community. Back in 2020 they started off hard with the attack on “black gun” (“black guns” are generally any non-restricted firearms that appear to resemble a military type firearm, despite having the same type of action/chamber and magazine capacity as most non-restricted hunting type firearms) owners, with their big Order In Council (OIC) gun ban, and quickly moved on to the handgun owners with Bill C-21. But you likely already know this if you’re reading this publication. And if you don’t, then you need to catch up!

You also know they attempted the largest hunting gun ban in the history of our country, with amendments that would also include the banning of many firearms that everyday Canadian hunters use to enjoy their favourite pastime. This despite almost every single Liberal MP promising their constituents that they would not target hunters! Not surprisingly, the opposition to these amendments, by Liberal riding constituents, proved to be significant and the Liberals had to withdraw on this attack. But that didn’t mean they were finished with their goal of disarming law abiding firearms owners in Canada. In fact, Trudeau and his Government have doubled down on their gun control objectives.

Right now, as you read this, there are a group of anti-firearms lobbyists in Ottawa working relentlessly to resurrect CFAC, the Canadian Firearms Advisory Committee. This group will be tasked with reviewing those lists of hunting rifles they tried to have banned through legislation. It is they and they alone who will select which guns (maybe all of them) to ban through use of an OIC (Order in Council), just like they did with our “black rifles”.

No debate, no vote, no democracy. No chance to stop it once they do it. Seems to be how the current Liberal government, with the help of their NDP coalition partners like to treat Canadians!

Which is why we have to do something now. We need your help. The CCFR has been busy engaging our advocacy partners in the hunting community, like the Northwestern Ontario Sportsmen’s Alliance (NOSA) to motivate a more united opposition to the Liberal Government’s plan to take more firearms away from law abiding licensed firearms owners, hunters, trappers and sport shooters. They’ve intentionally divided us, so we have to come together.

This is an all-hands-on-deck effort to unite all regions of our Canadian firearms community, for a symbiotic, unified, proactive endeavour. Unfortunately, the days of enjoying a relatively comfortable assurance that at least hunting was safe, is over.

There are 3 main things you can do right now to help the fight to save our lifestyle and sport:

- 1. Join the CCFR if you’re not already a member at then join us! Visit CCFR.ca**
- 2. Take someone new out hunting or shooting and encourage them to become licensed to hunt and to obtain a PAL. This grows our numbers!**
- 3. Contact your federally elected MP and tell them you won’t vote for them if they support bad policy for hunters, as they did with Bill C-21, in fact inform them that you’ll help their opposition to defeat them.**
- 4. At election time, SHOW UP...that is where it counts, at the polls!**

I’m heading to Nashville at the end of January to attend the SCI Convention where I’ll be meeting with Canadian delegates and networking with leaders in the hunting community to coordinate an offense. CCFR CEO Rod Giltaca will be heading to the Wild Sheep Society of BC conservation expo at the end of February to do the same. We’ll be attending in person at Sportsmen and Outdoor shows from coast to coast beginning in March.

In the coming weeks and months, please make an effort to talk to your hunting buddies and family and please support the efforts of the CCFR.



Photo Courtesy of K. Ball - Silver Cedar Studio

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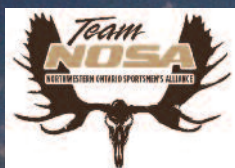
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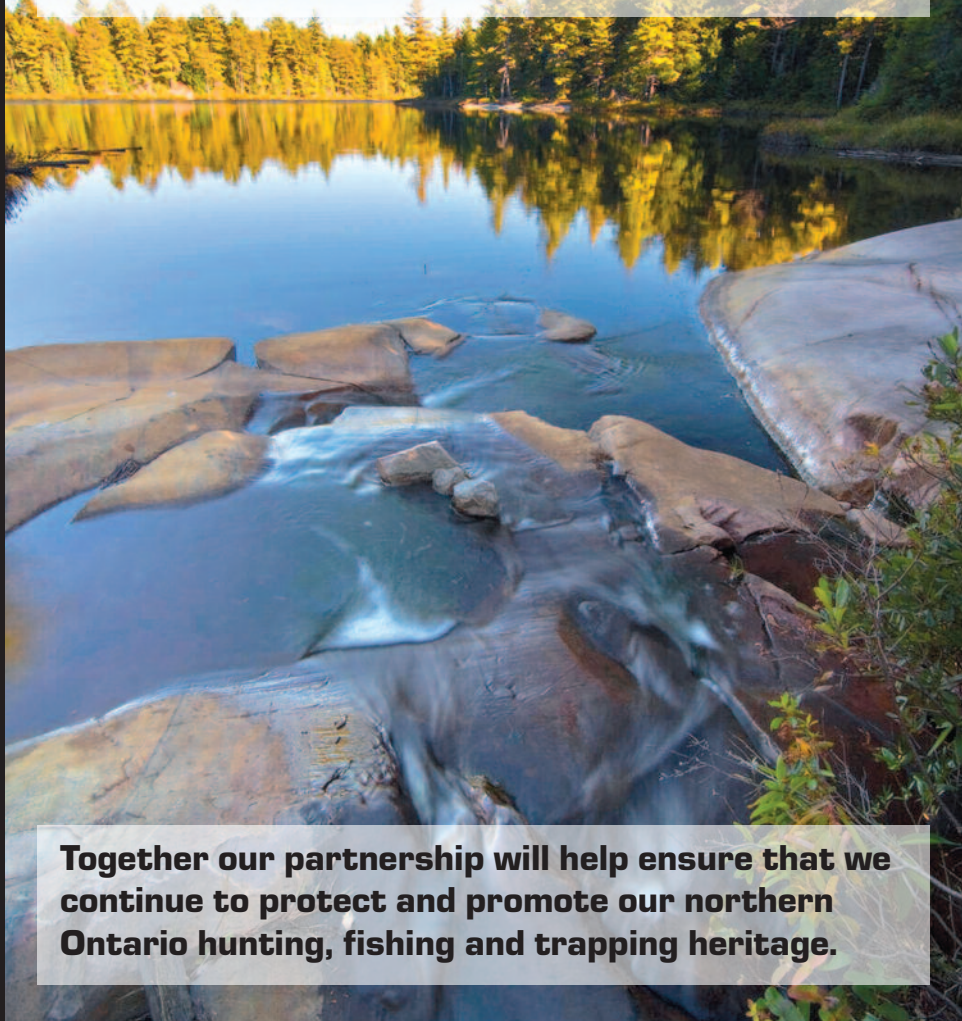


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For his 10th birthday, Rebekka Redd's nephew Chris is rewarded with this big Lake Trout



Turning 10 and Tackling Big Lake Trout:

A Kid's Ice Fishing Adventure

By Rebekka Redd

We set out on a wintery morning, bound for the picturesque Clearwater Lake in Atikokan. Brown's Clearwater Lodge warmly greeted us, and we quickly packed up the snow machines and sleighs. My nephew, Chris, just about to hit the big "One Zero" for his 10th birthday! He could barely contain his excitement for the upcoming adventure!

The drive over was a mix of anticipation and trout tales, a topic that kept us engaged throughout the drive to the lake. Chris had requested to go ice fishing with me back in the autumn, and it was awesome to finally see it all come together, especially for his big birthday.

First stop upon loading up the sleds was heading to our off-the-grid cabin to drop off supplies, fire up the wood stove, and make it a cozy spot for the evening.

Then came the good part – ice fishing. Brown's crew and us set up ice huts, heaters, and all the fishing gear. Chris, my little fishing buddy, set up his favourite underwater "fish TV" – an Aqua-Vu fish camera. Trout eventually showed up on that screen, and Chris was captivated watching the fish show up. First lake trout trip for the kiddo, and the excitement was awesome to see. And when Chris felt that tug on his line, reeling in his very own lake trout, wow, it was a moment to remember. We helped him out, but he held that trout like it was the catch of the day – and not just one, but a bunch of them. Landed some hefty walleye too. Brown's crew hooked us up with a tasty lunch and endless snacks. We hung around the fishing holes, swapping fishing stories, laughing, and stuffing our faces. Chris, though, he was still in the zone, working/ jigging that lure like a pro.

The day flew by, we packed up the gear, and snowmobiled our way back to the cabin. Chris and I cooked up some grub, recapped the days fun by the fire and finished the evening with desert - tasty birthday cake. Shortly after that, little dude was out like a light in his sleeping bag on his bed. I kept the fires burning through the night, stoking and tossing in wood to keep the cabin toasty warm.

Morning came, I was up early sipping my coffee watching the sun rise over the frozen lake. I didn't sleep much, tending to the fires all night, I'd say I napped more than slept. Got little mister up and at it, a quick breakfast and it was time to get layered up and get our mono suits on. Sleds warming, Browns arrived at our cozy cabin, and we were back on the ice for another full day. Hit a new spot a bit farther out and we set up the family sized hut, buddy heaters, holes, lines out in no time. Using white tube jigs, we hit our limit. Chris was stoked, and proud to take his catch home for a victory dinner.

A chunky Browns Clearwater Laker in the hole



Thinking back on family trips when I was 10, those memories shaped me. And I know this youngster will carry the tale of his first ice fishing birthday trip forever. Snow machines, trout galore, feasting on good food, and a team putting in work to make the whole adventure happen. I love all the adventures I take on, but watching the next generation see it all for the first time, especially seeing Chris land his first ice laker as he hit double digits was worth every mile and effort. After that day on the hard water, we rolled out with echoes of laughter, and more fish tales for the drive home, making it a memory to be talked about for days, months, and years to come.

Tight lines out there on the ice! ~ Rebekka and crew

Members In The Field



Ashleigh Kaplanis with her 2023 fall whitetail Doe



Emily Nixon with a huge Lake Superior lake trout



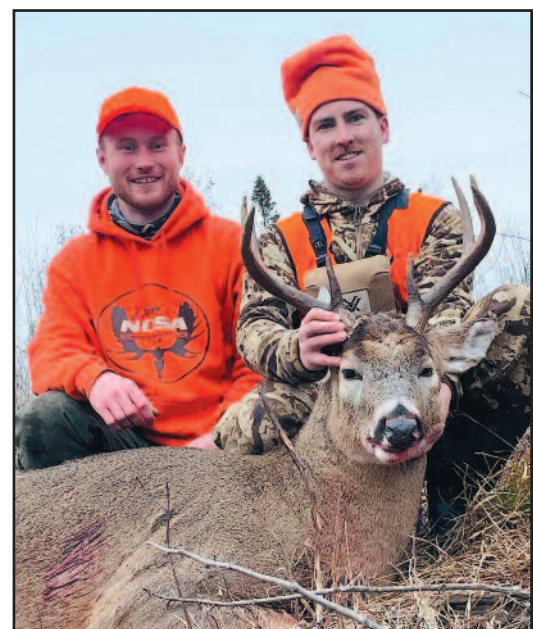
4yr old Mila Thurier proud of her Pine Marten on Dad's trapline



Nodin Campbell and Larry Kelly with Nodin's 2023 whitetail buck



Johnny Tattre enjoyed a day of ice fishing for lakers with his Dad



Landan Brochu and Justin Reid with Justin's 2023 whitetail buck



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2022 Toyota **RAV4** XLE AWD

LOW KM 25,423 km., 5256P

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2021 Mazda **CX-9** Kuro Edition

51,329 km., 5218L

\$43,998 \$298

biweekly +hst&lic. 96 mos.

Finance example: \$20,000 @ 8.49% over 96/84/72/60/48/36 mos. = \$132/\$145/\$163/\$189/\$227/\$291 bi-weekly. Total interest \$7,623/\$6,596/\$5,593/\$4,614/\$3,657/\$2,725. Total obligation \$27,623/\$26,596/\$25,593/\$24,614/\$23,657/\$22,725 plus HST and license. *Available 3-Year / 48,000 km Pre-Owned Maintenance Plan includes routine maintenance of oil changes and tire rotations at \$599 (approx. value \$1,200). No payments 'til Summer is a 6 month payment deferral program available to qualified buyers.

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