

Cool ideas for a colder winter

by Hank Parker

Watching the news the past couple of weeks got me thinking. It seems that most of the country is getting a little more winter than they're used to -- even places that normally don't experience the typical "winter" are getting pounded. With a surplus of ice and snow and painfully low temperatures, a lot of people are ditching the idea of trying to catch bass for the moment and focusing on keeping warm. A two-time champion of the Bassmaster Classic, Ranger Pro Hank Parker is the host of "Hank Parker's Outdoor Magazine."

By now, most of us are familiar with some options when it comes to catching bass in the winter. We fish jigs in deep water, maybe throw a spoon -- it all depends on where you are and what the lake is like. But honestly, when the wind chill is in the teens (or lower) how many of us are fishing? So instead of sitting on the couch and watching TV and waiting to stoke the fire, I came up with two things anglers can do to get their fishing fix that don't include extra pairs of thermal underwear and numb extremities. Some friends of mine were in Florida recently and took the opportunity to go fishing. Their reports said it was 85 degrees, sunny, and the bass were already coming up into shallow water preparing to spawn. In fact, they caught and released several nice bass off of beds in the short time they were able to fish. Those Florida bass get mighty big down there in the Sunshine State, so my suggestion to any angler tired of shivering would be to cash in some of those paid days off that you get at the beginning of every year and take the family or some buddies to one of the many historic big-bass lakes in Florida. Of course, everyone's heard of Lake Okeechobee and Lake Toho (where my fellow Ranger Pro Luke Clausen won the Bassmaster Classic last year), but there are hundreds -- if not thousands -- of quality fisheries in that great state. And this time of year, those big fish are beginning to spawn and can present some great fishing opportunities. Many members of the Ranger Pro Staff work as guides during the off season in that part of the world, so finding someone that knows the area and who can put you on big fish shouldn't be a problem and doesn't have to cost a lot of money. You might be able to find the same quality fishing opportunities this time of year in places like South Texas, Mexico or California. Get on the Internet or make some phone calls and I'm sure you can find a place where the fish are biting and you won't need a parka. Another great opportunity for anglers this time of year has little to do with being on the water but can be very important. This time of year is boat and tackle show season. Check your local paper or call your local Ranger Boats dealer and ask about boat shows that will be coming to your area. These are great places to see all the new models for the coming year and a chance for you to ask questions to experienced sales staff. And while you're there, check out some of the new tackle selection for this year to see how the pros will be catching the big ones. I wouldn't trade time on my home water fishing out of my own Ranger boat for anything, and I am sure that many of you feel the same way. But sometimes the elements keep us from participating in the sport that we all love so much. Instead of letting it be a bad thing, just look for other ways to feed your fishing passion and wait for the warm weather to head to your way.

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