

2000 Marine Electronic Buyer's Guide



Fisherman[®]

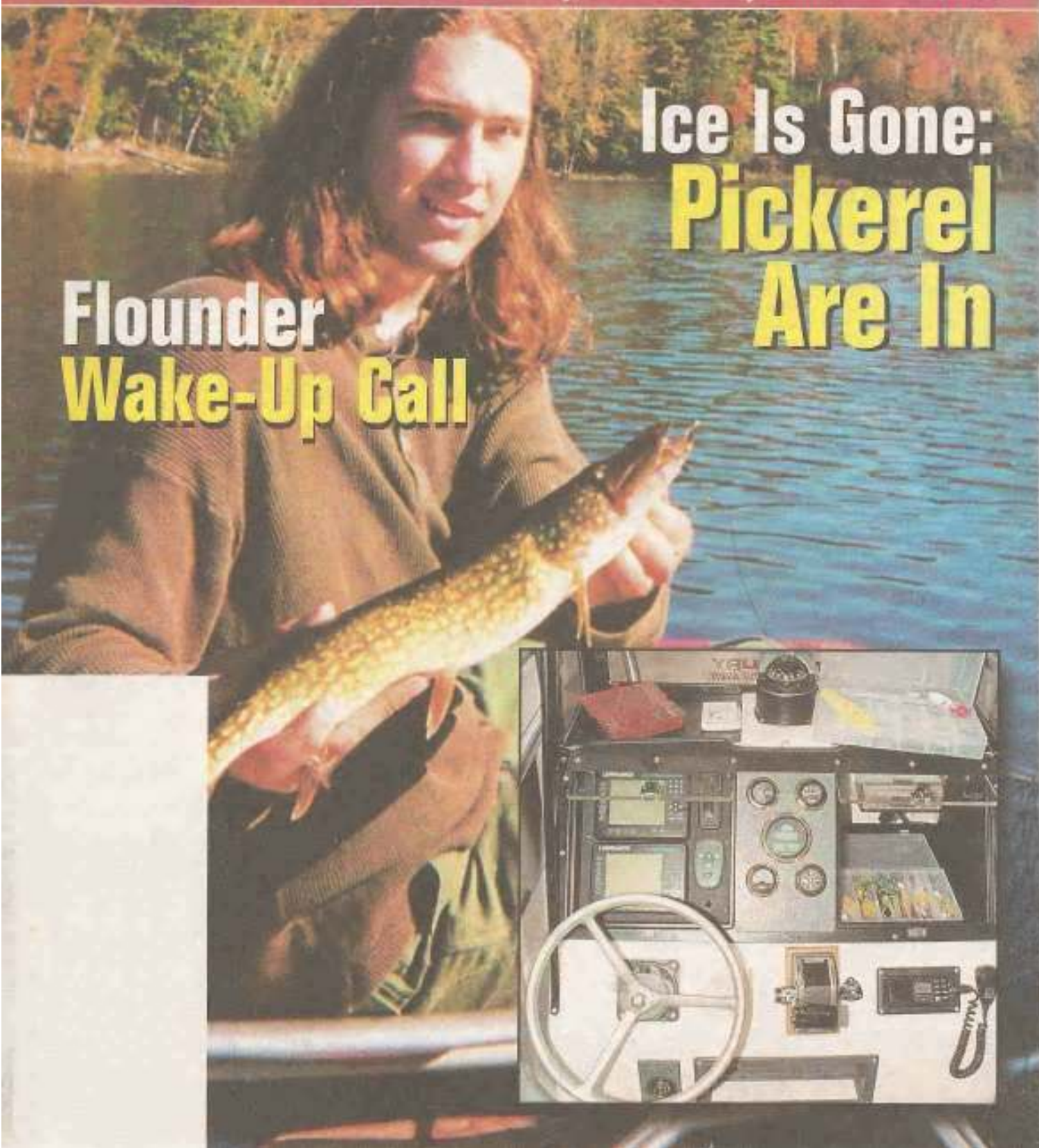
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\$1.50

**Flounder
Wake-Up Call**

**Ice Is Gone:
Pickerel
Are In**



WINTER FLOUNDER

If I was going to pick a fish that stands out when it comes to the dinner table, I would have to say that the winter flounder ranks close to number one. After a long winter of either not doing much fishing or paying your dues if you did, flounder are a welcome sight. Another thing that I have also found out is that not only being great to eat but winter flounder also put up a pretty good fight when caught on light tackle. Let's see if with a few good tips, we can put a few more fish in the boat.

WHEN TO GO

Winter flounder usually start to come out of the mud as soon as the water temperature reaches around 44 degrees or so. Between that and about 50 degrees would be prime to go. When the water starts to get above 50 degrees they start heading out into deeper water. I will usually start my flounder season towards the end of March. Some flounder fishermen start earlier if the weather has been good, especially if it's been warm.

When I head out early in the season, I will try to pick a warm sunny day so that it can help warm up the water a bit and get the fish to start feeding. Because the area I fish is very shallow, my flounder season usually ends around the end of April. The water by then has become too warm and in some years the bluefish move in and chase them out. Fishermen that want to stick with the flounder have to follow them out into much deeper water if they want any success.

WHERE THEY LAY

Fortunately, there are many places that hold winter flounder during the spring. One particular area that stands out for me is the mud flats that are adjacent to the deep channels. Now don't expect to find these shallow flats out in the middle of Sandy Hook Bay but given a good chart you can pick them out of the area that you fish for flounder. If you look closely at your chart, buoys lined up on each side of the channel usually mark the deep channels. For instance the area where I fish is in the Navesink River and it has a 12-foot channel that runs through the middle and on each side of it there are mud flats that are only 3 to 6 feet deep. These flats are a place where the flounder hibernate for the winter. They come in during the late fall and bury themselves in the thick mud. There are mud flats in Shark River and also in the Manasquan River so I'm not pinpointing any one particular spot. If you fish in Barnegat Bay, it has dozens of areas similar to what I am describing.

I like fishing these mud flats because they warm up very quick during the spring especially if we get a few sunny days in a row. It might sound dumb but I found one of my favorite spots by accident and I have been fishing there for five years now. I can tell you that when I get back to the dock there are a lot of boats that don't have

near as many fish as I have on my boat. Keeping track of where and how you have a good catch this year, can help you make a good catch next week, or next year, as well.

Pay attention to the type of bottom you are fishing. Mud areas are usually the best. If the area you are fishing is a mud flat, you'll know when you haul the anchor and have to clean all the mud off. That's how I found my spot - the anchor gave it away. Your chum pot or bottom



WAKE UP CALL

by Carlos Bastos Jr.

bouncer (plunger, sash weight) will also tell you when you are on good bottom.

TIDES

When the water temperature is still on the cold side, I prefer an outgoing tide because I'd rather have the warmer water coming from the shallow creeks than the cold water from the ocean. Personally, I like the tide that is coming

from the same direction as the wind. That way my boat stays put in one spot instead of swinging back and forth.

You want to keep your baits close to your chum and that becomes difficult to do when your boat doesn't want to stay still because the current is pushing you one way and the wind is pushing you the other way. Some flounder fishermen prefer to double anchor in this situation, to prevent the boat from swinging from side to side.

BAITS AND CHUM

I know there are a lot of fishermen who bring along a few different baits when going after flounder. There are days when the flounder seem to prefer mussels over blood-worms, or clam over sandworms, however, I keep it simple and carry along a couple of boxes of sandworms and enough clam chum for the day and I'm all set.

My fishing partner Frank Vetter is in charge of the chum every year. He starts by picking up a couple bushels of clam and after shucking them he salts them down with kosher salt. After throwing in a couple cans of corn he splits up all the chum into these plastic bags and then puts each bag into a 6 or 7-inch piece of PVC pipe. If by chance you have a separate freezer at home you then stack up all the PVC pipe and freeze them until the spring. When he comes on my boat he usually has a cooler full of these sections of pipe. After opening the chum pot he simply pulls out the chum bag and places it into the pot. By having the chum in the plastic bags the chum will not disperse as quick.

RIGS AND TACKLE

I fish for flounder with my medium-action freshwater outfit. With the water being so shallow there is no need for heavy gear. I have my reels loaded with 12-pound Silver Thread and my rigs are made out of 20-pound leader. I use a rig that has both hooks lying directly on the bottom. First I will cut a 30-inch piece of leader and snell a size 2 Owner or Gamakatsu hook on one end and make a small loop on the other end. In the middle of the rig, I then make a dropper loop for my second hook and finally I run the whole rig through a small loop that I make on my main line.

I seem to get more bites when I use these small chartreuse grubs on my hooks. I also use some grubs in yellow and they also work but not as good as the chartreuse ones.

Flounder fishing is a good way to open the saltwater season, and I always enjoy these early trips that are not only fun, but which result in some very good eating fish. I hope some of the things described in this article will help you catch a few more flounder. It wasn't that long ago when I would come back to the dock with only a few small fish to show for all my efforts, but by carefully studying the tides, baits and bottom, I was able to increase my score.

Here's Eddie Yeo and a buddy with a great catch of spring flounder taken off a mud flat.

