



by Bob Jensen

I just got back from a late season fishing trip, maybe my last open water trip of the year. We never know what Mother Nature has planned for us, but if this year is like other years, ice-fishing is close at hand.

Anyway, Bernie Punt and I were fishing with friend and fishing guide Joe Honer on Waubay Lake in northeast South Dakota. We were after walleyes. Joe had been on a good walleye bite for several weeks.

We were going to meet at the boat ramp, so I asked Joe if I should bring minnows. I knew that fall walleyes really like jigs and minnows, so I was surprised when Joe said we wouldn't need minnows. He said we'd be tipping our jigs with soft bait. When we got to the boat ramp I felt a little under-prepared with no minnows, but Joe knows his stuff when it comes to fishing. We arrived at some twenty foot areas that he'd been fishing, baited up, and dropped our jig and soft bait combos to the bottom. Before long we were fighting walleyes. The action was steady for the next four hours. By the time the sun set, we had caught a bunch of walleyes and perch. And we had used only a few baits. We were able to catch at least four or five fish per bait before the tail got chewed up and the bait needed to be replaced.

There are a variety of soft baits available to anglers. We were using Gulp! Alive three inch Minnows and Minnow Grubs. We tried a variety of colors, but chartreuse was the best. Gulp! Alive comes in a tub filled with a liquid attractant that really seems to turn the fish on. Additionally, Gulp products are biodegradable, so if they do come off the hook in the water, they dissolve.

Ever since the introduction of soft bait, anglers have realized that it can be good in warm water in many situations, but the thought was that soft bait was less productive in cold water. On this trip, the water temperature was thirty nine degrees. That's pretty cold, but the soft bait still did a great job.

Soft bait is becoming such a big part of fishing that some jig manufacturers are making jigs specifically for soft bait. I was using a Slurp! Jig on this recent day on the water. The Slurp! Jig has a long shank hook with soft bait holders on the collar that prevent the bait from sliding down the hook. The Slurp! Jig is an outstanding choice if you're going to use soft bait.

I believe there will always be a time for live bait. It's tough to beat a minnow or crawler on a jig or rig when fishing is tough. And there aren't many fish that can pass up a leech wiggling beneath a slip-bobber. But more and more, soft bait is becoming a staple in the arsenal of many anglers. From my experience with cold water walleyes in South Dakota recently, I know I'll be giving soft bait more exposure to walleyes. You should too!

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