

## **Girl Scouts Learn More Than Catch and Release During Ice Fishing Event**

Sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program

By: Trent Liebich, USFWS

A small lake north of Anchorage, Alaska was buzzing with activity as the sun began to rise over the mountains and nearly two dozen volunteers from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and Bass Pro Shops prepared for the arrival of members of 16 Girl Scout Troops from Anchorage and nearby communities of the Matanuska-Susitna Valley. By 9:00 a.m., holes were drilled in the ice; tables were loaded with fishing equipment, and warming tents with hot cocoa were ready for children looking to take a break from the cold.

The Girl Scouts circled around to listen to lively presentations about fishing ethics and safety on the frozen lake and everyone could feel the anticipation and excitement of the kids hoping to be the first one to yell “FISH ON”. With more than 18,000 fish stocked into this small lake over the past 8 months, a successful fishing outing for the 48 Girl Scouts marching onto the lake seemed almost inevitable. But, as we all know, fish can be finicky. In fact, I’m not sure if I ever did hear those two words, “Fish on,” spoken on this cold February morning; I guess we call it fishing and not catching for a reason. Everyone gave it their best shot at finding some fish, including the use of an underwater video camera that gave the kids a chance to see what was lurking beneath the ice. Fortunately, catching fish is just part of the fun and there were still plenty of smiles on the ice that morning.

Within the warming tents, the kids participated in several educational activities about conservation actions carried out by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. The Scouts learned about exciting careers in the Service, how anglers and boaters pay for conservation in this country, and fisheries conservation. Every participant was given a new ice fishing rod and reel to take home for a future fishing trip with family and friends. These rods and reels were provided through a grant from the Department of the Interior’s Youth in the Great Outdoors Initiative.

*“Ice fishing is a great way for girls to get out and experience the outdoors during the winter months. Judging by the girls’ enthusiasm I’m sure that some of them will definitely try fishing again in the near future. This event did a great job of exposing girls to the sport,” said Tasha Nichols, Girl Scouts of Alaska*

Photo set from this event available on Flickr:

[http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfws\\_alaska/sets/72157641813609924/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfws_alaska/sets/72157641813609924/)