

Cold Weather Fishing

By Beth Jappay



Hi,

My name is Beth, and I'm an addict.
I'm addicted to fly fishing.

I confess, after 30+ years of fly fishing I am now at the point that I can't go longer than 3 weeks without fishing or I have withdrawal symptoms. So I've had to learn to fish through the winter months (mostly stillwater). I figure this is a good time of year to pass on what I have learned about cold weather fishing.

I have learned to love fishing in the rain. For one thing, I often have the lake to myself, but I have also found that the fish are much more likely to bite. I think they feel safer from predators when it is raining, and I have sometimes caught 2-3 times as many fish as on sunny days.

One day last winter I was fishing at Blue Den lake, which is near Scio. It was cold and rainy and the water temp was 49 degrees. There were two guys who fished for about 2 hours, caught a few fish and left. I stayed for about 5 hours and caught almost a dozen. Am I hardier? I doubt it. I think I was just better equipped.



I have learned from personal experience that the key to comfort is warm feet. About 25 years ago I joined an April lake fishing trip in Montana with Denny Rickards and Jay Fair. The trip involved standing in thigh-deep water while there was still snow on the ground, casting for hours to cruising fish. I bought a pair of neoprene boot-footed waders on their strong recommendation. My assigned roommate did not, using her usual neoprene stocking-footed waders instead. She ended up spending half of her fishing time warming up in the rental car, whereas I was able to fish for hours comfortably.

Over the years I have found that strategies to keep my feet warm were more effective in keeping me comfortable than wearing up to five layers elsewhere. Neoprene boot-footed waders are the best way of keeping feet warm. Keep in mind that most neoprene boot-footed waders in the stores are rubber-soled duck hunting waders. They are fine if you are going to strap on flippers, but for wading, felt-soled waders are better. However I stillwater fish from my pontoon with scuba fins and scuba boots and have had to come up with a different solution, which I can summarize in two words: electric socks.

25 years ago I bought (for that same trip) my first pair of electric socks. They ran on 2 D batteries, and had wires that ran down the legs. These days electric socks have small rechargeable lithium batteries and multiple warmth settings. Unfortunately, I am finding myself buying a new pair every year; fortunately the technology continues to improve. I bought my first modern pair 5 years ago. They even had a remote control (which didn't work with my waders as a barrier) but I found the battery only lasted 3 hours on the medium setting.

The next year I bought a pair with a stronger battery (Action Heat 5V). I was anticipating I would be able to fish longer, but was disappointed that I only had about an extra hour of warmth. I also discovered that the button controller on the outside of the calf could be pushed when my leg bumped against my pontoon. I would shift around in my pontoon and suddenly one foot would get overly hot, or one foot would get cold and I would later find that I had accidentally shut the sock off. Then they accidentally went through the wash, and the left sock stopped working. I decided to make the best of the situation, though--extra batteries! I fished the rest of the year with the first year's sock on my left foot, and the second year's sock on the right. Half way through my day I would get off the water, pull down my waders and change my batteries. Yes, that felt almost as weird as it sounds, but it worked.

The next year I discovered those lithium batteries weren't working anymore, and upgraded to a [Volt 3.7V](#) sock liner with a supplemental battery, which I found gave 6-8 hours of warmth on the low-medium setting. I used them with a pair of woolen sock

liners underneath and with thick [Alpaca socks](#) on top, and the combination worked great.



This past winter Shandy talked me into adding a battery-warmed vest liner. The one I ended up buying has bluetooth and allows adjustment of heating on the phone app. It cracks me up that one of the heating options is for a dog.

Needing new socks, I went with the same brand and though I am happy with the battery's duration, I was disappointed that the socks could not be adjusted on my phone as well.

If you are looking to buy battery-warmed apparel, I recommend you check out TheWarmingStore.com.

When I fish in my pontoon I have a large dry bag, in which I keep multiple options of clothing, and when I find I'm getting a little chilled (despite my expedition-weight wool base layer) I next reach for

a warm hat. I love, love, love the sheepskin hat my mother gave me four years ago. It is probably 3 times warmer than a wool cap.

Also in my dry bag I keep:

Year-round:

- K-100 hand pump
- wool sweater
- fleece neck warmer
- Leatherman tool
- lighter
- temporary patch made from Flex Tape
- tube of Aqua Seal
- Life Straw
- Kleenex pack
- sunscreen.

Winter:

- sheepskin hat

- 3 pairs of gloves, including a wool mitten-glove and a neoprene kayaking glove
- packable down vest or down jacket
- chemical hand warmers
- Spare pair of wool socks

Summer:

- packable raincoat
- fingerless gloves

The last thing I find very helpful to keep me warm on a cold day is to sip on something warm. I keep two thermoses on my pontoon—one with mint hot chocolate and one with Tuaca-spiked hot cider.

So, don't give up on winter fishing, just get better equipped!