**Showcasing the DNR: Making family ice-fishing memories**

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When I first decided to write this story, I wanted to describe how I bring my daughter, Rhiannon, ice fishing and the amazing bond that comes with it.

However, that would be telling only part of the story.

I am the fisheries biologist for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Fisheries Division’s Northern Lake Michigan Management Unit. I work in Norway. My husband, Andy, and I both grew up in Dickinson County.

Every day I am thankful for being able to go to work and help take care of the lakes and rivers we grew up swimming and fishing in. It is this love for nature that I want to pass on to our three children, Amara,15, Rhiannon, 10, and Xander, 7.

One activity I love to do is ice fish – there is something about the quiet stillness and the raw nature around you that is appealing.

As a fishery biologist, I realize the importance of recruiting the next generation of anglers. As a mother, knowing how quickly the years pass, I just want to spend time with my kids and have memories that will carry them through adulthood.

Some days, these seem like easy goals. Other days, not so much.

When I started my job in 2015, my kids were 10, 5 and 2. Those first couple ice fishing seasons had some growing pains.

There was one time we packed all the kids and gear in the van and drove about 45 minutes to Twin Lake in Marquette County. We just set up our tip-ups and ice shanty and were ready for an awesome day of fishing.

Not five minutes into our adventure, Xander, who was 3 at the time, put his leg though a fishing hole and was soaked to his hip. Our plans that day changed quickly. Lesson learned: always bring back-up clothes for your kids!

We weren’t discouraged though.

We go to Twin Lake at least once a winter season to ice fish. Another time, the results were different. We had our friends Mary and Bruce with us and just had a fun day. The fish were biting, the kids were playing and fishing, and we got to visit with our friends.

My daughter Rhiannon really enjoys ice fishing.

I asked her once why she likes it so much.

Her response was, “I get to spend time with you, mom!”

Obviously, that melted my heart and made all the effort worth it.

Ice fishing is a different pace. It allows time for talking and asking questions – just getting to know her better. We also play cards, draw pictures and, of course, have snacks.

She loves catching fish and isn’t afraid to hold them for the obligatory photo either. She isn’t up to running the auger yet, but she is my go-to ice scooper, which is my least favorite job. She also picks out the perfect bait for the tip-ups.

Like me, her favorite fish to catch in the winter is northern pike. Unlike me, Rhiannon is an avid catch-and-release angler. The rule is anything she catches gets put back in the water. Although I do love pickling pike or frying up bluegill, I’d rather have a life-long fishing partner.

Our fishing experiences aren’t strictly on the ice. We have a “super-secret” spot where we catch nice smallmouth bass in the summer. Rhiannon is also getting her first pair of waders this year, and we are going to venture out for some brook trout this summer.

For my daughter Amara and son Xander, I often need to use my powers of persuasion (i.e., no phone or video games) to convince them to come fishing.

Amara started out having fun, but as she got older and the teenage years settled in, smiles were less and less, and complaints were more and more.

Recently she told me, “I just don’t like ice fishing. I don’t get why you make me go.”

That stung a bit, but fortunately I’m more stubborn than she is and I still make her go fishing with us often.

Even if she doesn’t develop a life-long love for ice fishing, she will – at the very least – have some memories of spending time with her family. That’s something that often isn’t appreciated until later in adulthood.

I do have a picture of her smiling, holding a pike she caught on Stager Lake in Iron County, one of our favorite spots. I hope to get more of those in the future – pictures and pike.

My son Xander is a pretty plucky kid. However, it’s about a 50/50 proposition whether he wants to come along fishing. At this point, Xander fishes for about 10 minutes and then convinces his sister to go play on “Spooky Island” on Stager Lake or in the nearby woods to make a fort.

I think that’s all part of the experience. He is going to have good memories not only with me and his dad, but with his sisters too. Reality check, though: sometimes there are tears and he’s “really cold, ma!” Luckily, we have a shanty with a propane heater ready for him (another lesson learned).

Last, but not by any means least, is sharing the love for ice fishing with my husband, Andy. We ice fish for “date night” sometimes. Spending 10 bucks on bait is a lot cheaper than dinner and a movie.

Sometimes we talk a lot and other times just revel in the silence. It is nice to have a hobby we both equally enjoy. One day all our kids will be grown and out of the house, and it will be just the two of us again.

I know we will miss them terribly but going ice fishing together will likely bring up many memories from long ago and make us miss them just a little less.

For families with young children new to ice fishing, I would stress the importance of having an ice shanty or other type of warming shelter, bringing extra clothes, games and lots of snacks and being flexible.

There may be some not-so-fun experiences, and that’s OK.

However, I look back and remember way more smiles than tears. Hopefully, my kids will too.

Maybe families already ice fishing can relate to my story. I hope it also encourages inexperienced families to just get out on the ice and create some magical memories.

Find out [where to find family-friendly fishing waters](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79119_79146_81198_81199---,00.html) that are easy to access, with a high likelihood of catching fish.

For more tips on how to fish, rules and license information and more, visit [Michigan.gov/Fishing](http://www.Michigan.gov/fishing).

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