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Export date: Sat Oct 31 18:50:49 2026 / +0000 GMT

Island Lake Ice Fishing Derby officially gets underway at Island Lake Conservation Area

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There is about 11 inches of ice on the lake at the Island Lake Conservation Area, making for a perfect setting for the 16th Annual Ice Fishing Derby.

Anglers braved one of the coldest days of the year on opening day on Saturday, Feb. 7, to venture out on the ice in hopes of reeling in a prize-winning fish.

While the walk out to the middle of the lake required some warm winter wear, once out there, anglers enjoyed time in a heated fishing hut, making for a comfortable day on the ice.

The Derby will run through to Family Day on Monday, Feb. 16.

There are prizes for the longest Northern Pike, Black Crappie, and Yellow Perch.

For the kids' division, there are prizes for the largest fish.

Once an angler reels in a fish they think is a possible winner, they notify park staff by phone, who will quickly arrive by snowmobile to measure the fish and record its length.

?Today is the opening day for our Ice Fishing Derby, and it's running for ten days,? explained Alyssa Heimbecker, lead hand at Island Lake Conservation Area. ?It's our 16th annual tournament. It's one of my favourite times here because everyone wants to come out here for the cold weather.?

Depending on the weather conditions, some anglers prefer to be in a hut, while others enjoy being outside and dropping their line into a hole drilled in the ice.

?We rent out huts ? we have 12 out there,? Alyssa explained. ?Those stay out there all the time. People can rent them and there is heat inside. People can bring their huts to set up on the ice. You can also bring your own auger equipment to drill through the ice. We also offer that service so if you don't want to lug a big auger out onto the ice, we'll do it for you.?

You have to register to take part in the derby, and you can do that either online or in person. You will receive a pass showing you are a registered participant.

?The ticket has our staff phone numbers on it, so if someone catches a big one, something they want us to measure, we'll come out as soon as we can,? Alyssa said. ?During the winter, it's easier for us to go out to them, rather than in the summer tournament where people bring their fish to shore in a live well. We measure in millimetres. This contest goes by the length of the fish. For Northern Pike in the adult category, we have first, second, and third prize. We also have prizes for Black Crappie and Yellow Perch. For the kids, it doesn't matter which species the fish is, it goes by overall length. First prize for the Northern Pike is $1,000, $500 for second place, and $250 for third place.?

The Island Lake Ice Fishing Derby is a fun way to enjoy a winter day with the added bonus of a cash prize and bragging rights if you happen to be lucky, and skilled, enough to catch the biggest fish.