

Technology in Fishing: Have We Gone Too Far?

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Introduction: Increased use of underwater cameras and other technology in ice fishing is raising ethical and policy questions. There is debate on whether or not the use of underwater cameras give anglers too much of an advantage over the fish species that they are targeting. In 1998 the Minnesota state legislature considered but rejected a ban on the use of underwater cameras. I am raising the question of whether or not there is still currently a need for regulation regarding the use of these devices along with a change in ethical mindsets regarding underwater cameras. Many anglers are against the use of underwater cameras while fishing and support regulating their use. Furthermore, DNR officials were also originally against the use of underwater cameras while fishing when these underwater cameras hit the market and were in favor of regulating their use. Based upon these findings, I argue that underwater camera use should be regulated and a change is needed in ethical mindsets of ice fishing.

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Pictured is an underwater camera used for ice fishing. This device allows anglers to drop the camera to the bottom of a lake and see exactly what is happening below the ice surface. With the aid of this device, anglers are able to see bottom structures and find high probability areas to fish, along with physically see the fish enter the area and bite the bait/lure. These devices give anglers an advantage over the fish that they are targeting.
Picture source: http://image.sportsmansguide.com/adimgs/1/1/192442_ts.jpg

Pictured is a traditional sonar device used for ice fishing. The device works by placing the unit's transducer into the water, and then the device displays the depth of the water, location of the bait/lure, and whether there are any fish between the bottom and the surface. The angler can fish more effectively by knowing what depth fish are at in the water column.
Picture source: Vexilar.com

Ethical Concerns:

Underwater camera use brings questions of ethics along with their use including:

- Fair chase issues
- Anglers having too much of an advantage over the fish they are targeting
- Changing the culture of fishing
- Creating a gap between fishermen who can/cannot afford these devices
- Potential for technology having negative impacts on fish populations with increased harvest rates
- Decrease in sportsmanship and skill



Pictured is an example of the type of view an angler is able to experience with the aid of an underwater camera.
Picture source: <https://i.ytimg.com/vi/1SHfDFQPClw/maxresdefault.jpg>

Key Quotes from Anglers:

- "Technology is taking the sportsmanship out of fishing"
- "The outdoors is supposed to teach patience, persistence and just the beauty of being outside, not always be instantly rewarded and having the need to catch all the fish that is allowed"
- "Fishermen are much more able to be able to pinpoint high probability areas to be more successful"
- "Half of the fun is going out and attempting to find the fish without the unnecessary aid of technology"

1998 Legislation:

- The major concern of underwater camera use was anglers being able to selectively target trophy fish in lakes which could have negative implications for the health of fisheries. Additionally, there were fears that underwater camera use would result in the overharvesting of fish in general .
- On March 11, 1998 the MN Senate voted 51-9 to approve an amendment banning underwater camera use for fishing. Additionally, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources urged the approval of this bill.
- Governor Jesse Ventura was reluctant to sign off on this bill, and ultimately in April of 1998, the MN Legislature adjourned without acting on this bill containing an underwater camera ban.

Methods: I did extensive review of articles related to the fishing industry and popular newspaper articles surrounding controversy over underwater cameras when they were initially hitting the market around 1998. I conducted a scholarly review of articles related to environmental ethics to gain an understanding of how these devices align with environmental ethics perspectives. Furthermore, to understand the viewpoints of people related to the fishing industry, I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with both Minnesota anglers and DNR officials. These methods allowed me to gain a wide variety of understanding of various viewpoints regarding the use of underwater cameras while fishing.

Conclusion:

- Technology is an ever emerging practice that cannot necessarily be halted or limited as a large group of anglers will always be in favor of the use of technology. However, there still remain anglers who view the use of these devices while fishing as unethical, who feel they give anglers an unnecessary advantage over fish species, and who also desire regulations.
- There is a need for some type of regulation of underwater cameras. This is especially necessary in times where overharvesting of fish is made more likely with the use of underwater cameras.
- Anglers must change their ethical viewpoints towards the use of underwater cameras when making decisions about the types of equipment that they use while fishing. Doing so will add an increasing amount of sportsmanship in the sport of fishing.