



CHAPTER 6

WHITE ICE IS NICE (ethics)

Nate could hardly hold in his excitement while driving with his father to the river cove where last year he did so well. Thinking back, he recalled how the fish seemed to never stop biting. Nate's heart beat faster just remembering how proud he was when he held up that five-pound trout for the photo. He thought, "With the new rod I got for my birthday and all I've learned from reading books and fishing magazines, this year should be even better!"

His first thought on seeing the gate was: "We must be at the wrong place." But after a closer look, he recognized the big boulder where he had caught so many fish just one year ago. Nate then saw the bright red "NO TRESPASSING" sign.



"What's this?" Nate asked his Dad. "We could fish here last year. What are we going to do now?"

"I don't know," Dad muttered. "I guess we'll go back toward home and see if anything is biting at Town Park."

"We never catch anything there," protested Nate. "This just isn't fair!" As they started to pull away, a rickety old pickup truck pulled up, driven by a man Nate guessed was even older than his grandfather.

"Good mornin', fellas," he said. "Can I help you with something?"

"Hi," replied Nate's father. "I'm Bill Francis and this is my son Nate. We just drove a couple hours from Anchor town to fish this spot, only to find that somebody put up this fence and the no-trespassing signs."

"Well that somebody is me," said the old man. "I put them up last year about a month after the fishing season ended!"

"How could you do that!?" blurted out Nate. "This was the best fishing spot I've ever been to!" His father's icy stare let Nate know he shouldn't have been so disrespectful. The old man let Nate squirm for a moment before he began his reply.

"Son, I can understand your disappointment. The land around here has been in my family since my grandfather was your age. We've hunted and fished here all that time. It was right over there where I caught my first fish. I took my first moose just down the road. I can't begin to tell you how much joy and satisfaction I've received from this land."

As the old man continued, Nate could see his eyes light up and he began to realize that the old man had stronger feelings for this land than even he did.

"We've never minded when somebody stopped by and asked for permission to hunt or fish or picnic by the river. We met many a fine person over the years and always felt proud to share our beautiful land."

A frown came upon his face as the man went on: "With the passage of time, we started to see a change. As the population around the state increased, more and more people started coming up. We never minded too much when we had to pick up a bait container or hook package, but when we started to have to pick up cans, bottles and all sorts of trash it began to really bother us. How could they see the beauty of this place and still trash it?"

The old man looked even older as he continued. "I'm getting up in years and I just can't be cleaning up after people who misuse my property. I just can't understand how they can treat it this way."

"The final straw came last year about a month after fishing season closed. I was driving by and saw a group fishing over there. I was more concerned that they were fishing out of season than that they were on my land. Sometimes people just don't know the law, so I went to tell them and they told me to mind my own business and get lost."

"I made up my mind right then and there. I knew that it would affect **responsible sportsmen**, but I didn't know what else to do."

It was quite a while after they left the old man before Nate finally talked. "You know, Dad, I've been thinking about what happened back there. He certainly had a right to do what he did, but I sure wish it hadn't happened. We lost our **privilege** to fish on that man's property because of someone else's actions."

"You're right Nate, too many people think they have a right to do what they choose. When we are guests on private or public property we are responsible for our actions, both legally and socially. Do you understand?"

"I sure do. No matter where we are, we should honor the law and behave with respect to other people and the spot we're visiting."

Unfortunately, scenes like this are becoming more and more common. With the ever growing population, the demand on a limited resource becomes greater. If anglers are not careful about the way our resources are used they could see them continue to be lost. *Very rarely does a fence come down once put up.*

THE FOLLOWING ARE SOME DIFFERENT PROBLEMS AND COMMON SENSE RESPONSES TO THEM.

Where can you fish?

Alaska is blessed with many lakes, ponds, rivers and streams that hold a variety of fish species. Most waters have **public access** points, but many are surrounded by private lands. If these are posted, they should not be fished, no matter how tempting they look. But you might get permission to fish them, if you ask.

How do you go about asking?

Most people would have a hard time saying no to a neatly dressed person who politely introduced him or herself and asked about the water body, if it had fish in it, and would it be all right to fish it. If they say no, thank them for their time and leave. If they say yes, you might have found your best honey hole. A time-honored tradition is to volunteer some help with a chore in return for the privilege of using their property.

What are your responsibilities?

The way another person perceives you is most often from your appearance and your actions. If they see you acting in a manner they think is correct, they usually will think kindly of you. If they see you honoring the laws, respecting the resource and other outdoorsmen, they have no reason to be concerned about you.

What can you do to help?

There is an old saying that goes something like this: "Be part of the solution, not part of the problem." Even if you always follow the rules and always act politely, you can still do a little more to make your outdoor experience even nicer. If somebody else littered, pick it up. If you see someone with a problem, offer to help. When you go somewhere that is already crowded, make sure you don't intrude or get too close to the early birds.

How close is too close?

When fishing on a trout stream the distance between fishermen can be much greater than when ice fishing. When casting to spooky trout

in shallow water, it is important to be stealthy in your movements. If someone charged in making a big racket, they would scare the fish, making the fish uncatchable. On the other hand, with a layer of ice insulating the fish from surface noise, it is not necessary to keep such a distance. In any case, if you are not sure how close to fish to your fellow fishers, show respect by giving them plenty of room, or ask them. Many anglers don't mind having some company, especially when ice fishing.

Is conservation and preservation the same?

Conservation and preservation are often used interchangeably but they have subtle but important differences between the two. Conservation is the responsible use of resources by multiple users. Preservation attempts to keep resources in its current state with limited or no-impact from humans. Both preserving and conserving care about protecting our resources from injury, harm or destruction but preservation tries to preserve resources at their current state. Conservation is done with planned management to protect against abuse or overuse. The limits on the number of fish you can keep and how long the fishing season lasts are examples of how fisheries resources are conserved. These rules and regulations are designed by scientists and biologists to prohibit the over **harvest** of any species. If too many fish of one species are caught and kept, there might be too few fish left to reproduce. This could lead to that species' extinction. For a conservation program to work, it takes both well planned management and **ethical** behavior on the part of the users. If a lake is closed to all users and there is not plan to open this lake, these waters are being "preserved."

What is the most important tip?

Have fun and be safe! It has been said that half the fun of a trip is the planning. It's the same with a fishing trip. Reading mail order and fishing magazines, shopping for lures (even if just to look) and organizing your equipment are all part of the fishing experience.

When we finally get to the water (or ice), that is the topping on the cake. If you try hard to learn all you can, obey the rules, use **common sense**, be safe, respect the resource and your fellow anglers, you will develop a hobby that will give you a lifetime of joy and relaxation.

Possible extension activities:

- 1) (Critical Thinking Exercise) Define what it means to be an Ethical Angler? What does it mean to conserve vs. preserve? What can you do to help keep a fishing area nice?
- 2) (Outside activity) Go to a local fishing spot and describe what you find? Clean up the area.