Tip-Up Rigging and Spread Checklist

Companion Reference Sheet for: How to Rig an Ice Fishing Tip-Up: Line, Leader, Depth, and Flag Setup
Save this PDF to your phone or print a copy for field reference. Tip-up limits, identification, attendance, and bait rules vary by state. Check your state DNR regulations before fishing.

Key Takeaways

- Choose a cross-style or round thermal tip-up based on how you want to cover and access the hole.
- Coated tip-up line resists water buildup that can freeze; braid or Dacron works well as backing, while mono is another option for some setups.
- Use steel or titanium wire when pike teeth are a bite-off risk. Fluorocarbon suits many other leader situations, but it is not tooth-proof.
- Measure depth with a sounder or clip-on weight, then position bait according to fish location, weeds, and bottom structure.
- Match hooks to bait size and target fish. Quick-strike rigs, trebles, circle hooks, and octopus hooks each suit different presentations.
- Test the spool and trip mechanism, adjust flag tension for wind and bait movement, and space tip-ups so you can reach each flag quickly.
- Tip-up limits, identification requirements, and attendance distance rules vary by state. Check your current state DNR regulations before fishing.

Choose a Tip-Up Style and Assemble It Over the Hole

Backing line and leader choices by target species

Target species	Backing line options	Leader choice
Pike	Coated tip-up line, or braid or Dacron suited to cold-water handling	Steel or titanium wire when teeth are a bite-off risk
Walleye	Braid or Dacron backing; coated line is useful when freezing is a concern	Fluorocarbon or mono for a flexible presentation; wire if pike are also likely
Lake trout	Braid or Dacron backing, with a coating if ice buildup is a concern	Fluorocarbon for abrasion resistance; wire when pike are present
Panfish	Mono or braid or Dacron backing, selected for smooth payout and retrieval	A short mono or fluorocarbon leader for a light bait presentation

Connect the Line, Swivel, Leader, and Hook

General bait depth starting points by species

Target	Starting position	What to read or adjust

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Pike	Above the weed tops or beside a weed edge, rather than buried in vegetation	Raise the bait if weeds foul the line; try a nearby open lane if the bait is hidden.
Walleye	Near bottom, with the bait lifted enough to stay clear of sediment and snags	Adjust around a break, rock, or other structure, and test a higher position if fish are suspended.
Lake trout	At the depth where sonar shows fish or activity, which may be well above bottom	Use the sounder to track suspended fish and move the bait when their depth changes.
Panfish	Above the weed tops or near the depth where a school appears	Try a higher or lower presentation if fish show at a different level or the bait sits in cover.

Troubleshoot Common Tip-Up Problems

Problem	What to check	Adjustment
False flags in wind	Flag tension, trip sensitivity, and whether the tip-up is stable	Stabilize the base and tune the trip, then test it again by pulling line.
A minnow changes the depth setting	Whether the minnow can pull line through a loose spool or move the marker	Secure the depth marker and adjust trip tension without preventing a fish from taking line.
Line freezes or sticks	Ice around the hole, line touching the edge, or water buildup on uncoated line	Clear slush, reposition the spool over the center, and use coated tip-up line if freezing persists.
Spool does not release line smoothly	Overfilled spool, crossed wraps, frame contact, or ice obstruction	Remove excess line if needed, wind evenly, and check that the spool clears the frame and hole.

Rigging Checklist

- ☐ ☐ Choose a cross-style or thermal cover tip-up that fits the hole and conditions.
- ☐ ☐ Tie backing securely to the spool and wind it evenly without crowding the spool.
- ☐ ☐ Connect the main line, swivel, leader, and hook, then test each knot or connection.
- ☐ ☐ Choose fluorocarbon, mono, steel, or titanium based on the target fish and pike risk.
- ☐ ☐ Match hook style and size to the bait, fish, and applicable regulations.
- ☐ ☐ Measure depth with a sounder or clip-on weight and mark the setting.
- ☐ ☐ Hook the minnow without restricting its movement or injuring its spine.
- ☐ ☐ Center the spool over the hole and test payout, trip tension, and flag action.
- ☐ ☐ Clear slush, check line for ice or snags, and space tip-ups for quick access.
- ☐ ☐ Confirm current state rules for tip-up numbers, identification, attendance, and bait.

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