



[LOCAL NEWS](#) | [FEATURES](#) | [SPORTS](#) | [WEATHER](#) |
[CLASSIFIEDS](#) | [T.G.I.F.](#) | [AP WIRE](#) | [BUSINESS](#) | [SPEAK OUT](#) |
[HEALTH](#) | [REAL ESTATE](#) | [HOME IMPROVEMENT](#) | [SEARCH](#) |
[ABOUT US](#) | [SITE MAP](#)

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- ▶ Baseball
- ▶ Basketball
- ▶ Football
- ▶ Other Sports
- ▶ Mike Nadel

Plethora of winter outdoors shows to choose from



Mike Norris
Outdoors

Taking in a winter outdoors show isn't that simple anymore.

Years ago, the choice was rather easy when Chicago's one and only outdoors show was held at the

International Amphitheater down by the old Union Stockyards.

It was here that sportsmen and families were introduced to new lines of fishing tackle, talked to resort operators about vacation plans, or were entertained by lumberjacks and dancing bears. There was something for everyone.

Today's modern outdoors show leans toward specialization. For example, the All-Canada Show, which opens today at the Pheasant Run MegaCenter in St. Charles, specializes in experiencing the Canadian adventure; more than 200 of Canada's top lodges, resorts, outfitters and vacation destinations are there to help you make a decision.

At the Inland Expo Center in Westmont this weekend, the Chicago Muskie Show will lure that special breed of angler who breaks into a cold sweat at just the sight of a muskie following a lure. More than 100 exhibitors will be on hand, hawking anything from guide trips, vacation resorts, and the latest in muskie-catching tackle to help you catch that trophy fish in 1999.

Between the two shows, there certainly will be a lot of choices to make. And attending the shows, talking to the resort operators and fishing guides, and reading the handouts and brochures will require considerable effort.

As I watched the snow pile up during the past two

[All-Canada Show at Pheasant Run this weekend](#)

[Big shoes to fill](#)

[Hot shots](#)

[Plethora of winter outdoors shows to choose from](#)

[Runners to honor Bilandic](#)

weeks, I spent time organizing my fishing photos from 1998.

It was a good year for me fishing-wise -- northern pike to 46 inches, muskies to 52 inches, both large and smallmouth bass to 21 inches and walleye more than 30 inches. All these trophy fish were photographed and released.

I thought back about how fortunate I was to have had such a good fishing year and reflected on how my good fortune was by no means an accident. It was directly attributable to going to good fishing destinations and sharing boats with knowledgeable guides.

Yet, with so many choices facing the outdoorsman this weekend, how does one know what's good or not? A few simple rules apply. ■ Talk to friends and listen to their experiences. Listen carefully and make sure it parallels what you're looking for. Roughing it in an outpost cabin for weeks might not match your personal tastes and style. ■ Pay careful attention to the photo albums displayed by the various resorts. Are the pictures of recent vintage or out-of-date? Old photos reflect a period long gone. ■

When discussing trip plans with a lodge or resort operator, make sure you have a full understanding of what is and isn't included in paid package trips. Surprise expenses can sour what otherwise was a good fishing vacation. ■ Ask for references and follow up with them. Call the references and ask questions about their trips, including past experiences, best times to go, total costs and fishing highlights.

Speaking of references, here's a couple from this winter to help you through the weekend's shows.

If you're looking for a fly-in Canadian fishing adventure, I'd recommend you stop in the All-Canada Show and see Brian Elder of Wollaston Lake Lodge. Brian and his wife, Sharon, have owned and operated the lodge with the belief that a wilderness setting combined with modern conveniences and friendly service make a great fishing experience even better.

My trip to Wollaston Lake Lodge far exceeds any other fly-in adventure I've experienced. Huge northern pike (up to 50 inches) are the main attraction at Wollaston Lake, with arctic grayling, walleye and lake trout rounding out the action. My personal best northern pike: 49 inches.

If you are not attending the All-Canada Show and would like information about Wollaston Lake Lodge, call (800) 328-0628.

If you're attending the Chicago Muskie Fishing Show, stop and see Don Miller from the Lake St. Clair, Minn.-based Miller's Sport Fishing Charters.

Miller averages about 325 muskies a year guiding on Lake St. Clair, a mere five-hour drive from the Fox Valley area.

Miller and I landed and released six muskies, including a 48-incher, a 48 1/2-incher, and a 52-incher, during a single day of fishing at Lake St. Clair last summer.

If you miss Miller at the Chicago Muskie Show, contact him at (734) 429-9551. *Mike Norris can be reached at wallimike@aol.com*

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