

Better Get Your Spring Trips Set Up Now

By Steve Welch

I have been doing in-state fishing shows every two weeks since start of January and a bunch of my spring trips are already booked. I guide seven days a week once the weather breaks or beginning of March and stay at it until mid-December or 9-10 months and in that time frame I will do 200-225 trips.

In recent years I have been jump starting my season by guiding down on Kentucky Lake or more precisely at the Big Sandy near Paris Tennessee. Kentucky Lake runs south to north so you get that warm water coming up from Alabama. It has deep river channels to catch those big white crappie that live on the ledges out in the middle of the lake. It is the winter months that all the locals will tell you are the best. Just get a mild wind forecast and hover right over the top of those big white crappies.

I will be there from March 20th on through April 20th so this year I will see the entire winter to pre-spawn to spawn period.

For the winter pattern you need a good map on your depth finder and I use the Navionics map. This allows you to track the off shore river channels. Then you need today's side imaging to locate your fish. I have two Lowrance HDS Gen.3 twelve-inch side by side on the back with GPS mapping, sonar, side imaging and down scan. Then on the front I have two Lowrance HDS Gen.3 nine-inch with all the listed options and then all four of them are networked to share all info.

This makes fishing so much easier. I can see a brush pile from a hundred feet out and even count how many fish are hiding in it. Put a GPS waypoint on the brush and while you are at it check the depth of the fish and go catch them.

For the winter pattern I use a Norm's custom rod 8ft. in length and my Deep Ledge 1/4oz. jigs. We travel along the river channel ledges no faster than .3mph and try and hit the stumps or brush located in 20-28ft. We use the shorter rods so we can see our jigs and make it easier to park it right on a stump. Once the water temps hit about 58 these big white crappie will just disappear so we get out our 12ft. BnM rods and my 3/32oz. Deep Ledge Jigs and then target the top of the ledges in about 12ft. of water.

This pattern is hover, hover very still and try and get those big blacks. Some of the rods I use a small weight and a lively minnow on a number two Tru-Turn hook. My boat has three seats up on the nose so we all use the long rods and simply lift the fish up and never reel once they hit. I have a net on a very long handle to get the big fish in on the very wimpy rods.

The trips down there are a blast you can catch some of the biggest crappie you will ever see plus the food and night life are a blast. Kicks off the spring fishing and for me I get to rub it in to my buddies up home about the 70 plus degree weather that they haven't seen yet.

I tell my clients that if I don't see at least a dozen fish over thirteen-inches and a half dozen over fourteen-inches and four or five over fifteen-inches every day along with forty more good fish. I am disappointed.

I will be back up on Lake Shelbyville just in time to hit the pre-spawn to spawn period for those tasty crappie and of course my five to six weeks of walleye fishing as well as my summer slip bobber trips for

more crappie. So I hope the high water is gone but if not I have fished many times in high water and have many years of experience to fall back on.

I love that pre-spawn and spawn period you can load up on them and get a three person limit very quickly. We use a slip bobber and minnow for the most part because I don't want to put the fish right on top of those shallow pre-spawn and spawning fish. For this pattern you need 55-68 degrees which covers pre-spawn and the male crappie turning those deep dark spawn colors all the way up to the spawn and post-spawn.

Once we start to see water temps in the seventies you will start to see some walleyes being picked up on the flats. I just switch my boat over on May 15th and start pulling spinners. You can kind of tell when you need to switch because your spawn spots are holding less and less crappie.

Then for five weeks my focus is walleye/sauger. Not talking to my crappie buddies and start hanging with an entirely different crowd. For some reason the crappie guys just crappie fish and vice versa. Me I love to catch both but I know my walleye window is small.

I make my own spinner rigs to troll with and we use line counter reels to ensure my customers are on the bottom for the walleye or at the depth we need to catch those past spawn crappie. We pull the flats and right through the standing timber for both walleye and crappie but I am also looking for the first signs of busting white bass. Once you hit June 18th. You better have your Candystripers, another bait I make to throw at the surface busting white bass. I chase them for about three weeks busting top then switch to jigging for them on bottom the rest of the summer along with the crappie trips.

Once we get into that mid to low eighty surface temp. I get out the slip bobber rigs to start fishing all the deep brush that the crappie use in the summer. You can catch crappie pulling spinners all summer but not nearly as fast as the slip bobbers.

Then I am back on Kentucky Lake for the early fall bite on those big crappie and lastly back on Shelbyville for the tight line jig bite of October on through December.