

## **Dog Days Crappie Fishing**

By Steve Welch

Even though July was the hottest and driest I can remember we still caught a ton of deep crappie. I told my bait shop owner the other day I was his best customer since I spend 175.00 a week on minnows and ice. I buy twelve dozen every day and believe me it takes that many for three anglers to get their limit. It is non-stop action and you have to catch ten crappie just under ten-inches to get a crappie over ten. Hey that is summer fishing tons of action and tons of black crappie and all on minnows. You can catch them on a jig but I hardly ever get a good fish.

The fun thing about thermo cline fishing on river channel trees is all the other species of fish you tie into. I routinely catch channel catfish in the fifteen to twenty-pound range and largemouth bass anywhere from two to six-pounds. White bass are cruising these channel banks as well and they put a pretty good bend in your pole.

Each summer Lake Shelbyville sets up a thermo cline about fifteen to eighteen feet and we target both standing and down trees with branches in that depth range. Bottom depth means nothing since we routinely fish in water as deep as fifty-feet.

We locate these trees using my Lowrance HDS side-imaging unit. I can drive along a shoreline and pick out every down tree on it and only stop and fish the best trees that I can see the fish holding within the branches. I have four Lowrance HDS units on my boat and I have down scan and side imaging on both my trolling motor and the rear of the boat and all four systems are networked together. This way if I want to add a GPS waypoint or take one away it is done on all four systems at once.

After I determine which trees have fish on them I then go back and mark them with a marker buoy. We set up our slip bobbers to the exact depth they are holding in that particular tree and just stay back twenty-feet and toss over to the tree. I try and keep the boat back so as not to spook these fish, because even fifteen-feet down the big fish spook easily. The fish that are ready to feed are normally on the highest branches so we line up with those branches especially if they lie right in the thermo cline.

The rig that I use is a twelve-foot heavy action Wally Marshall crappie rod. I want a rod with good backbone because like I said I will tie into a big channel cat from time to time. I can lean on them very hard with this set up. I use twenty-pound Fireline Crystal braided line down to a quarter ounce weight and then a barrel swivel with a foot long leader of seventeen-pound Stren Fluorocarbon and then a number four aberdeen hook and of course a slip bobber big enough to hold everything up. This is my go to summer rig I use a long rod for two reasons I can measure out my depth easily with a long rod and the less eyelets you reel the bobber stop through the less likely it is going to move. The second reason is that once you hook up on a fish you are pulling them straight up and out of the branches not through them like you will with a shorter rod.

I keep some poles rigged with drop shots and circle hooks to probe the ledges for white bass and of course a jigging spoon for them as well. They can be very elusive so I am always ready to go get a stringer of summer crappie.

Wind is the key on both these patterns of chasing deep summer crappie and white bass. The wind will blow the bait on a certain shore and the fish will follow. Side imaging really helps me all summer for keeping track of the bait.

For the first time in 2012 I am finally caught up enough on guide trips that I can say you won't have a three-month wait. I am already booking a bunch of fall crappie trips but it is the summer crappie bite that folks either aren't aware of or just have other plans. Last summer we limited out every day for nearly three months on the summer crappie and everyone knows how good the fall

crappie fishing is. You can just go to my website for availability and we can get you right in or give me a call at 217-762-7257 home. 217-840-1221 cell.