

Flood Control Lake Presents Opportunities

By Steve Welch

Lake Shelbyville, the lake I have guided on now for 21 years, is an Army Corp of Engineer flood-controlled lake. This means they will drop the lake in December six feet in preparation for the spring rains.

Once the ice comes off in late February or early March we have a much smaller playing field. The fish that were back in the deeper coves have moved out to the mouth of them and suspend around both down trees and standing trees.

While other crappie will migrate out to the old river channels on the main lake and still other crappie will move out to the ends of main lake points or just off big feeding flats on sharp drops.

Heavy wood is the key in winter and even though it is March you are still in that winter pattern which has crappie looking for any heat they can get from Mother Nature.

Crappie will suspend under a horizontal branch of a standing tree and will get as high in the water column as the clarity of the water allows. A warm full sun day with no wind will get plenty of light penetration to warm up the water.

I have plenty of patterns that I like to fish in March and during the day we touch on all of them. I actually like fishing in March better than early April if you can get a couple days in a row that the sun shines and we have warm nights.

April brings cold rain and plenty of cold fronts followed by hints of spring. For this reason and the fact that the lake has been drawn down I concentrate all my efforts on fishing deep structure looking for bunched up fish.

Yeah those patterns I talked about earlier can really help you but you need the sun to make them work. In my business you just go about your day fishing for the more predictable deep fish. Those shallow suspending fish are here one day gone the next. Not to say we won't stop at a few spots and get some but you need to be versatile and be able to bounce back to your deep fish.

I have been doing this so long I have trees that I know as soon as the ice is off they are loaded so we fish them every day.

During the course of the day you will see me fish a horizontal branch on a standing tree in forty-feet of water with the branch about 15-20 feet down. Then go to the next spot and fish a stump on a point right on bottom 20 feet or even deeper. Then as the sun warms things up put on a cork and fish trees with very high branches close to the surface. All three patterns in a single day.

It is the winter months that my heavy 1/4oz. Deep Ledge Jig shines. We can measure out the right amount of line to bump that deep horizontal branch and create a reaction strike from a hungry crappie. We swim it back and forth rather than pop it up and down as most do with the slow falling lighter jig. The big profile I think is easier for them to see and they just hammer this jig. We fish it the same way on a deep stump bouncing it right into the stump. My jig has a small hook on it which allows it to get into some nasty stuff and not get hung up.

Since we are fishing so deep we don't need ten to twelve-foot rods like I would use in shallower water whereas the fish are spooked and you must stay back. We use shorter eight-foot rods so your jig stays in the cone of the sonar. This is important so you know you are right on top of structure and you can see the fish on the screen coming up to hit your bait just like watching a video game.

I rigged my boat with three seats up on the nose so my two clients and myself can all fish vertically right over the nose of the boat. This way we all have the same opportunity to catch the fish. I tell my clients when you feel a hard pop on your rod you have a half second to pop him back. This is not live bait fishing so the crappie will not hang on to the jig very long.

We use primarily Midsouth crappie tubes but also use solid bodied baits as well. I get asked all the time what colors do you like. My answer is simple "what's the water color of the lake you fish". Dirty, stained or very clear. You will see all three at one time or another so don't get into a habit of having a favorite color plastic. I tend to use a lot of chartreuse in many water color situations but also like pearl colored baits in clear water. I always carry about ten colors with me and those ten will even get tweaked as the season goes on. There are times I like to use a larger bait but not normally in March. The crappie have been feeding on microscopic bugs all winter so I keep my baits small. I also have a Deep Ledge jig bug imitation that really shines in the winter. We call it the Brush Bug and I have caught a lot of big fish with it. We carry it in about ten colors so you are covered.

I still have plenty of spring openings to crappie fish in both March and April so just go to my website at www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.Com and scroll down on the front page to my available open dates or you can just call me at 217-762-7257.