

Life As a Part-Time Guide Can Throw Curve Balls

by Steve Welch

Well, after a stellar spring of crappie guide trips and two big tourney wins, back to back, I readied myself for the upcoming white bass season. Then Mother Nature set me straight.

Guiding on a huge Army Corp of Engineer Lake as I do, Mother Nature can leave you hanging on a three-two inside curve ball and have you take a seat as I have done now for over a month. In early June, we got hit by fifteen inches of rain in just ten days and just about a week after that Wisconsin got some of the same. We hold Lake Shelbyville up so as to not hurt the Mississippi anymore than it already is. Now we are into mid-July and the lake is still up nearly fourteen feet after cresting at sixteen feet and now it is falling about three inches a day and we are expected to be back at normal summer pool sometime in September. What do you do? I have seen this before back in 1993 and we just fished the willows on the north end of the lake and the crappie fishing was just incredible. This year, however, as soon as the north end starts to clear up we got another big rain and we had to start all over again. All of my best white bass spots on the flats and river channel ledges are way too deep. My best buffalo jigging spoon spot is now in fifty feet of water. No fish - they're too deep. I have gone down for a month on Saturdays and looked all over the place for fish so I don't have to cancel my Sunday and Monday trips, as I only guide Saturday through Monday then go back to my normal job on Tuesday through Friday. I have had to cancel about fifteen trips spanned over the last five weeks. This was supposed to be my best season as my white bass trips were all booked several weeks in advance and I still had to turn down as many trips as I had booked, so business was to be very good for this summer.

I will not take people's money for guiding if the fish aren't cooperating and for me, they have to really be biting, I'm not sending my clients home with only a dozen fish. We normally catch close to a hundred white bass on every trip during the summer and that is why I get so much work and repeat work and I will not compromise that reputation just because Mother Nature decided to take about six thousand bucks of lost income from me. I'm glad I have another job to fall back on. Hopefully August will be kinder to me than June and July have been.

So what does a part-time, out of work fishing guide do to keep his skills honed? Why...go fishing that's what I do. For me, that means ledges down at Paris Landing on the south end of Kentucky Lake. I tell people that I only get to go down when the fish are on the ledges as the fall and spring fishing has me home guiding. This summer, the winter pattern of fishing deep river channel ledges is my favorite way to fish. My boat is set up to hover over brush. I have two-seats up front so my partner and I sit side by side and fish vertically over deep brush with medium-heavy spinning rods. I spool one with ten-pound mono and on that rod I tie on a drop-shot rig. I tie a small loop knot about two-feet above a half-ounce weight and on the small loop knot I put on a small circle hook and tip it with a lively minnow. This is my wife's rig and believe me, she can fish this thing. I like fishing a jig and still believe you will get bigger fish, even though she usually out-fishes me two to one. I stay on the jig and at the end of the day, I have the biggest fish in the cooler. My spinning outfit is spooled with eight/three Fireline crystal. I love the feel of the braid in deep water and the crystal is easy to see. My rig has a quarter-ounce Big Head jig and a Midsouth tube on it tipped with a minnow. Usually in the summer you are faced with very clear water so I use some variation of white or pearl tubes. I love fishing down there in the heat of summer, just like in the dead of winter, nobody is fishing and I have all my spots to myself. Everybody down there are bass fishermen and they hang up the crappie gear until the fall.

I have a new endeavor and soon it will be for sale on my web-site. A friend of mine approached me with the idea of putting together a DVD about Lake Shelbyville crappie fishing and a how-to approach at spring crappie fishing anywhere you are. I have just seen the final product and it looks good. It is as packed with info and the quality rivals anything you will see on cable TV without the commercials. It will be for sale soon and I hope it takes off, as I want to make a couple more. I plan on keeping it simple though, I'm not getting involved with credit cards. Just mail me a check and I will mail you a DVD.