

## **March on a Flood Control Lake**

**By Steve Welch**

Every year is so different fishing on Lake Shelbyville an Army Corp of Engineer flood control-lake. Most years they have drawn the lake down from 599.9 ft. above sea level or summer pool down to 594 ft. or roughly six feet.

This year in December the lake went up to 617 ft. or the third highest level in history. At the time of this writing it is still at 605 ft. and dropping about six-inches a day. Currently they have all the ramps closed due to floating debris. At the rate they now have it dropping it will be around March 1<sup>st</sup> before it is down to winter pool, barring no more rain or snow. Now in this article I am going to talk about what I normally do in March at winter pool.

Six-feet below summer pool is very low and this exposes a lot of cover, especially on the already shallow north end. There is not a lot of places for crappie to hide on the north end and really all you have are areas right on the old river channel or bridges. Even though you can catch some of the biggest crappie in the lake up on the extreme north end you have fish that the weather really messes with. Full sun and they will get going then next day nothing. The river channels on the north end are only about twelve-foot deep.

Driving a boat on the north end at winter pool is best left to locals. You must respect slow dropping banks and stay towards the sheer dropping banks. You can go by point six on the lake a big flat and be a quarter mile from shore and find yourself in three-feet or less of water. This is why we have to rescue so many boats in March and April. The Corp does not mark hidden sand bars and they are magnets for non-local boaters. Last year at least six boats had to be pulled off the sand bar in front of the Eagle Creek boat ramp.

I like to fish the south end during winter drawdown. I am very comfortable fishing either end of the lake and a lot of locals only fish the north end and vice versa. It usually depends on where you live as this lake is nearly thirty miles long, making it hard to fish all over it with a small boat.

Once you get to the Findlay-bridge your river channels go from being twelve ft. deep to twenty and then as you go south they get as deep as fifty. Water levels this deep allows fish to set up on a river channel bend suspend and live in the same area all winter. They also love the points leading into deep coves that they will eventually spawn in.

Side-imaging is a big plus when your fish are suspended or bunched up on just certain down trees. I have a Lowrance Generation Three HDS 12 on my boat just dedicated to side-imaging. I have another just like it that I split the screen between down scan and GPS mapping. These I use for navigation and finding fish. I have two Lowrance HDS 9's on the nose side by side that I use to catch fish with down-scan and sonar split on one and GPS mapping and down-scan split on the other.

I run Navionics Premium East mapping chip simply because I can change the safety setting on it to make everything deeper than fifteen feet in white. Fifteen to six-feet light blue, shallower than six-feet in dark blue. This is your best friend when navigating on a flood control lake. But it also helps you find fish. I now know which banks are the river channel banks and which really sweep close to shore or make a

sharp bend or sweep by the mouth of a cove. I tell my listeners all the time that this along with your boats sonar work hand in hand.

Now that I have cut a thirty mile long lake down to a handful of fishing areas it is time to go side-imaging. I use mine set at about sixty feet out to the side of the boat both ways. I then try and drive my boat in about fifteen feet of water scanning both sides of the boat. This splits a lot of down trees right down the middle so I can get a clear picture of what is out on the end of that tree. By judging how big the white dots are on each tree I can then judge as to whether they are small black crappie or larger whites.

Once I find some good sized fish I then put a waypoint on them and check for a depth setting. Like I said these fish are going to be suspended.

We then go up to the front of my Yar-Craft 2095BTX and I have three seats up on the nose so we can hover over these deep fish and vertically jig for them. I have custom made rods that are short enough to see our jigs on one of the depth-finders up on the nose of the boat. It is hard to measure out twenty-feet of line in forty-feet of water so we try and see your jig going down right to that fish's mouth. You feel a light tick on the rod set the hook. Do not think these deep fish are paper mouths, you must put the steel to them.

As for what baits do I use I like the fly-tied baits I have called the Brush Bugs. Black crappie tend to start feeding on much smaller microscopic bugs in the winter over shad. Our lake has only got Gizzard shad in it so they grow too large for the crappie to feed on in the cold water.

I use as light of a jig as I can get away with in March. I make the Brush Bugs in 1/8oz. and 1/4oz. but I also make my own Deep Ledge Jigs in 3/32oz. 1/8oz. 3/16oz. and 1/4oz. I love these jigs since they always hang vertically when jiggling and the light wire hook easily bends when you get hung up. I started out making these jigs about five years ago for myself and now pour and paint about 60,000 a year and sell them on my on-line store and at several retail spots around Lake Shelbyville. These spots are listed on the front page of my website.

Do not get hung up on color because sun penetration, water color and depth all have something to do with the colors you will use and do not forget the best reason is confidence.

I keep about a dozen colors on hand starting with the light shad colored baits of pearl, pink or chartreuse and then on dark days I have some orange, black and purple baits ready. The plastics I put on the back are Midsouth tubes or my new bait I teamed up with BrushPile plastics and had them make me a bait with a deeper body to resemble a small shad and we call it the Brush Chub. It is a solid bodied bait so it will stay on your jig better. Plus it is both glow in the dark and UV enhanced. I had them made out of a much harder plastic so they won't rip as easy. A big plus when fishing so deep and light biting crappie that try and pull the plastic off the jig.

I use nothing but artificial baits until the water temps get into the upper fifties low sixties then I switch over to minnows under a cork and fish spawning beds but that is another story.