May Spawning Crappie and More
By Steve Welch

This year has certainly been different than any other I can remember. The warmest March in history had me catching pre-spawn crappie right on the bank and then they would drop back with a cold front then back on the bank again. On again off again the entire month of April. Folks just keep asking me when will it be over. Our spawn has been going on now for six weeks and isn't done.

Lake Shelbyville is actually two different lakes. The north end has huge shallow flats and most of the north end is very shallow and the water kind of dirty. This warms very quickly and once we get water temps in the low sixties for any time frame the crappie move shallow and the males will get dark in preparation for the spawn.

The south end is very deep and the water gin clear so the water warms slowly. It is also full of black crappie that tend to love clear water over turbulent stained water. The fish on the south end will spawn deeper due to it be being so clear. Ten feet of water is not uncommon for a spawn depth on the south end where as ten inches of water can happen on the north end.

Then once May hits the Corp brings the lake up to summer pool and we have another wave of shallow spawning crappie. This one is my favorite. The extreme upper reaches of the lake will now have water and new fish and these tend to be the biggest crappie of the spring. I love getting my Ranger Bass boat in some of the skinniest water you can imagine. We run up creeks and rivers so small you can barely turn around.

These creeks all have smartweeds lining the shoreline and have old stumps and crappie love to get in both. Reading current breaks is the key to success in these small creeks. A row of stumps will block the current for several yards down stream and the crappie all gravitate towards the slack water. I like to see current up in the creeks since it bunches up the crappie once you learn how to find the current breaks you will see crappie fishing like you have never experienced before.

We catch crappie in the creeks in water no deeper than a foot all the way up to mid June if we get two things. Light rains to keep the water stained and bait fish present. The spawn is over they just stay up there if food is abundant. The weeds provide ample cover and they stay cool in them.

Being as it we are a flood control lake and we now have ample water to cover the main lake flats that are lined with stumps. Our next prey that we target will start to show up walleye. Once the flats have six-feet of water over the stumps the walleye will move into them and hide in the root system. We then cast a jig and crawler, a Big Dude or my Candystriper up in and around these stumps. Inline spinners like the Panther Martin or the Blue Fox Vibrex also work well.

The key to success for this is to get out there and do your homework while the lake is at winter pool. I have 1700 waypoints on my Lowrance HDS system on just Lake Shelbyville. I put a waypoint on every stump I can find because I know some day they will hold a walleye. This is really like bass fishing; we make short cast at every angle of each and every stump trying to entice a strike.

The walleye fishing will start mid April and continue through May and June. Then it will be too hot for them to be that shallow so we turn to white bass or crappie for the summer months. They are easier to find and we really catch a lot of both during the summer months.

I have plenty of openings left for the fantastic summer fishing on Lake Shelbyville. You can go to my website at www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.Com and while you are on there go on over to my fishing forum called Illinois Fish Talk. It is growing very rapidly and we have had great reviews.