

Shelbyville Turning Into A Sauger Factory By Steve Welch

Lake Shelbyville an Army Corp flood control lake has been up all spring. Now it is ten-feet over summer pool. The lake has fluctuated all through the crappie spawn and the white crappie either dumped their eggs in deep water or just absorbed them. The black crappie came to the bank but they tend to be a lot smaller on Shelbyville than the whites.

Now that the spawn is over and I have my sight set on something else and that is looking for walleye. The last half of May on through the first half of July we can really transform ourselves into thinking we are up north and walleye fishing is routine.

Lake Shelbyville has always had a very good amount of walleye. They milk eggs from the big females and raise them in our rearing ponds until they are big enough to be put in the lake. Four years ago they put in our first sauger thinking they would spawn on their own. They have made runs up into the Kaskaskia each spring and some success in spawning has occurred. This year I have seen sauger only 12-inches long and those are two-year-old fish.

The best news is those original fish are now pushing the 20 to even 25-inch mark. I have caught one this year that went 5.3lbs and I believe in the next couple of years a state record will come from this lake.

This year I have learned that sauger are not walleye and have totally different habits and feeding areas. Walleye on Lake Shelbyville you rarely have to fish deeper than ten-feet. Once they leave those depths they suspend in deep water making it hard to find them.

Saugers however are a different beast. I have caught them in depths as deep as 30 feet and always hugging the bottom. This makes them easier to pattern. As long as you have structure AKA (stumps) on a point or ledge you will have a shot at getting a big sauger. Full sun and light winds even make odds in your favor. Since these fish are so deep they use the available light to attack prey. Sunny days put the fish right where you think they will be. Hiding up under stumps that have all the root system. Erosion has cleaned up the area under these stumps and they can get up under them and hide.

For the walleye most drag a small split shot and jig with a crawler on it twenty-feet behind the boat just anywhere on the flats. We also like to cast blade baits and crank baits up on flats near stumps. Although this does work but during high water the fish can spread out making it difficult to locate them.

I have been pulling bottom bouncers and spinners right on the drops for a month now and all the hard work I have done getting hundreds if not thousands of waypoints on stumps right on drop offs and especially an inside turn or anything irregular has paid off. Folks always ask why on earth would you want 3000 waypoints on a body of water now they can see why, high water years. I can now pull my spinners from stump to stump on these drops and walk along these drops with ease.

I pull a typical bottom bouncer only I use a two-ounce so I can keep it close to the boat. I pull along at about .9 to 1.3 miles per hour on my trolling motor and with my new Yar-Craft walleye boat I have enough weight up in the nose and a very long 62-inch shaft on a 36 volt Minn Kota that I can pull all day long right into three-foot waves if need be. I have done it many times this year already. A bass boat doesn't have the weight in the nose and when a big wave hits you the front end rides over it and this pulls your trolling motor out of the water and you lose all your momentum. My Yar-Craft just splits the big waves and doesn't even move much.

With the heavy two-ounce bottom bouncer I can spot a stump on my Lowrance unit under my trolling motor and I know that I am pulling right beside it since I don't have a mile of line out. I even shorten up my spinner rigs to 18-inches so we don't hang on the stumps as much and I see no problem still catching fish.

Currently we are working on a new Deep Ledge Jig with a small light wire hook in both 1 1/2 ounce and 2 ounce. We will then run a drop from a three-way swivel and our spinner off the three way. I will run a Gulp minnow on the heavy jig allowing me to have two baits.

I can already see that with the lake so high that I am onto something and this will be the way to catch all species of fish all summer. Instead of making a two-hook spinner rig I am making single hook and using minnows on them. Now I am catching crappie like mad as well as walleye and sauger.

I make my rigs with a number two or three Indiana or Colorado blade in either chrome, white and pink, orange and chartreuse or pink and chrome. Then I use either 4mm or 5mm beads in chrome, white, blue or

pink. Four on the number three blades and three on the number two blades. Then for a hook I use a number six-circle hook. Pretty small but I don't want to hang a bunch of stumps. We just use our long handled net and get under all our walleye and sauger. That small hook will come right out on the surface.

I can alter these rigs to target crappie or white bass as well. My clients have been loving it all month long. My Yar-Craft is a big tiller boat so no console to get in the way. I can put a client in a chair hand him a spinner rig on a line counter reel and tell him exactly how much line to let out and just set there all day long and pull in crappie, white bass, sauger and walleye and once it gets warmer I can see us getting into big bass and channel catfish doing this and maybe a big flathead.

I have plenty of openings in July and August for this laid back style of fishing so give me a call and we will set something up. www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.Com or 217-762-7257 home, 217-840-1221 cell.