

Spring Is Close And I Am Poised And Ready
by Steve Welch

Although it is only March and we still have some cold nights ahead of us. We are getting some hints as to what is to come.

I speak at about five or six shows during the winter, between that and trying to get in some spillway Muskie action and ice-out Crappie action. I keep pretty busy.

This has been for the most part a pretty warm winter and the Crappie have had some pretty cooperative days for me and my diehard buddies already. The action on the north end of Lake Shelbyville will be hot one day and cold the next.

Like I tell my listeners in the winter seminars the sun has a lot to do with the success of your outing. The Crappie will suspend up above the thick brush that they are buried deep within and they will bite quite well.

On the north end the lake has many such spots, thick brush that can hold many fish and I think that during this time frame you need to concentrate more on these types of spots than the standing wood. Sure you can get a fish or two by hitting the fish on the standing wood but you can get a limit off a brush pile.

Be it mother nature or avid Crappie fisherman somehow a lot of brush has shown up the last two years up in the north end of the lake. It has become quite apparent that the fish prefer it so much over the old stumps that all the tournaments the last two or three years have been won in new brush only.

I always preach safety on this massive flood control lake during winter draw down but this is also the timeframe to get out and put all this new brush on your GPS. It is usually showing and when May hits and the lake comes up five feet that is the perfect spawning depth.

I rely on my GPS much more so than most of Bass fishing buddies who seem to just use them for navigation. I can't explain as to why because Bass use brush too and the more spots you can motor up to in a single day the more success you will have.

I have over two hundred brush piles on my GPS for Lake Shelbyville alone. I refer to them all the time. If I were to put the boat in at Bo-Woods I might use a whole different pattern than if I were to put in at Wilborn seeing they are so far apart. I might even forget some spots but by looking at my map on my GPS I will hit a few spots that I don't always hit.

One thing to keep in mind when marking a new waypoint is that your antenna is the pick up point so when I mark a new spot I always locate it with my front depth finder and throw a buoy. Then when I leave I motor over to the buoy and mark it right beside my antenna. That way I won't be that far off the next time I want to find it. If you wait to see it on your rear depth finder and then mark it you will be off at least eight foot farther than if you were to do it like I told you.

When coming back to a new GPS spot I just trust my location and throw the buoy. You can find it with your front depth finder and then just use your buoy for a reference. You don't want your buoy in the middle of the brush because someone will catch the string eventually and then move the buoy.

Fish react to the sun early in the season and I tend to stay off the top of them because they are also very spooky. I will mark a spot then get back and cast to it with my slip bobber rig or spring bobber which ever is your preference. The water is very clear in March but not the case in April when it starts in raining. So that is another reason we don't hover over them as much early in the season.

The tackle that I use early in the season has a lot to do with the fish being so finicky. In December just before ice-up I will have out the biggest baits that I use. The Southern Pro umbrella's in the two-inch and the Midsouth Super Jigs in the two-inch. I also use the Berkley Power Minnow. All three of these baits are considered very large for Crappie, but the baitfish are the biggest that they will be all year and the fish don't want to feed so often. Therefore a big bait is the answer. I use an eighth ounce jig made by Reeves Lure Co.

In the spring though cold fronts and rain will make the fish react sluggishly. I downsize everything. I still use the tube jigs but go to the smaller size and I use a lot of hair jigs and tensile jigs. The hair jigs don't have the movement and the tensile have a lot of flash in clear water. The jig size I use now is a sixteenth ounce. I always tip with either a wax worm or Berkley Crappie Nibble. People ask me all the time do I tip with a minnow and usually I don't.

The bait choice that we have from the shops for the most part is shiners and they don't do well when you take them from the tanks in the shop and put them in forty degree water. A dead minnow just won't do so I opt to wait to use them closer to the spawn. That is another story but believe me there is a time and place for live bait.

Last year I went to the Crappie U.S.A. classic and decided right then and there to rig my boat up for spiderigging. Ninety percent of the field was fishing that way and if I want to get better then I need all the tools to get there. I picked up a new sponsor this winter called Bee Ready rod holder systems. They are made extremely well and look nice to. I will have them on my boat very soon and hope to get some shops in the area to start handling them. Now I can run up to eight poles right out the front of my boat. During times when the fish are on drops or over brush you can fill the boat running eight poles but not in Illinois.

As far as my guide service goes I only guide weekends now until we start getting longer days and I can get in an evening trip after work. My trips fill very quickly but as of this writing I have several left so don't wait much longer.

I am always asked how do I get a hold of the companies you mentioned so here are numbers that you can reach them. Reeves Lure Co. (1-217-864-3493) Southern Pro www.southernpro.com and Midsouth Tackle Co. (1-870-935-4914) and last Bee Ready Rod Holders contact Rick at (1-918-724-3920) These rod holders are going to catch on believe me.