

Today's Electronics Really Help In Deep Water By Steve Welch

On my boat I have one of the sweetest electronic set ups you will ever see. I have four Lowrance HDS systems. Two HDS 10-inch screens, an HDS 7-inch screen and a HDS 5-inch screen. On my dash I have an HDS 10-inch screen to use for side imaging and down scan and then under it I have an HDS 7-inch screen to use for GPS mapping and then in the dash I have an HDS 5-inch screen to use for 2-sonar. Then up on the nose I have an HDS 10-inch screen for GPS, 2-d sonar and down scan.

The beauty of using Lowrance HDS is that they are all networked and you look at any screen from any position in the boat. Plus any GPS coordinate you put on the system from any locator will automatically be put on each system or removed.

This system gives me the confidence to go to any lake and if the fish are off shore I can find them. I use a three-step procedure for locating crappie off shore.

Step one is to use your hi-definition GPS mapping to locate the old river channels and any channel bends. On Lake Shelbyville my home lake we have tons of down and standing trees located along these channel banks. Since this lake is an Army Corp of Engineer flood Control Lake they drop it six-feet in the winter. This brings all the crappie out of the coves and they make their winter home on these channel banks. Once I have a bank that is loaded full of trees that have deep suspended branches in the fifteen to thirty feet range I then proceed to step two.

I set my side imaging at about sixty-feet shooting to each side of the boat. I then travel down these banks looking at maybe fifty down trees and a half dozen tree left standing just under the surface right out on the channel. On any tree that I see a school of crappie suspended within the branches I freeze the screen and leave a waypoint on them. I then proceed to step three.

Like I said all my Lowrance HDS units are networked so every waypoint I just put on from my dash is now waiting for me up on my trolling motor depth finder. On this Lowrance HDS 10-inch screen I have it split three ways. The left side is set on down scan so I can see these trees just like they look on an oil painting. Every branch silhouetted against a black background since I use pallet two as my color preference. On the top right hand side of the screen I have 2-d sonar so I can see my jig easier on the screen and it lets me stop short of a brush pile or tree top so as not to spook any fish. Then on the bottom right hand side I have GPS hi-definition mapping that has all my channels on it and my new waypoints. Once we get over the top of these trees I can then see just exactly how deep the crappie are suspended within these trees that might be in fifty-feet of water. Now I know how deep and just where they are living all I have to do is drop a jig right to their head and catch them.

This is how my Deep Ledge Jig came to life. I wanted a jig that was heavy and had the barb on the bottom side as not to interfere with the small number four hooks I use. I also wanted it to be squared off on the top so it would be easier to bounce a sonar image off it and therefore I could easily see it on my screen. My partner is a Mechanical Engineer by trade so he set up the design work needed for the C&C machine to cut us a mold. This jig and the entire Deep Ledge Jig family were all created by us and are not available on a commercial brand.

By being able to see our jig we can purposely bump it into a branch on a down tree and knock off some of the slime on it thus creating the same thing as if a bait fish had scurried away and left a small cloud behind him. We then drag the 1/4oz. Deep Ledge Jig over the branch and on the backside a hungry crappie is waiting. This is what I try and tell my listeners at the winter seminars that we don't fish vertically for crappie with a light jig and jig it up and down and try and get a reaction strike on the fall. We hit structure with it and bounce it off. This heavy perfectly balanced jig allows you to do that and it rarely gets hung up. If it does we use Fireline Crystal 8/3 braid and it is plenty strong enough to straighten the hook.

It works so well I tell clients to hold their rod very still after we get the right depth set and I will move the boat slowly back and forth causing them to hit branches and create strikes. We call it Illinois Spider rigging since we are limited to how many rods we can use.

My last fishing show is the Elmwood show on March 2-3 so after that I am starting my long 2013 guiding season. I will do close to 250 days before the end of the year so I book way in advance especially in the spring. You can go to my website at www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.Com and I have an up to date availability list and I also have two other guides that work with me part time so we will be able to handle any situation that might come along.