

Winter Plans and Christmas Ideas

by Steve Welch

My long fishing season of guiding is winding down. If not for the flood, this would have been my busiest year in several years. I had tons of summer white bass trips booked and really wasn't done with my crappie trips when it hit.

Fifteen inches of rain fell in ten days at just about the same time Iowa was getting pelted, so the Mississippi River was already swollen. That meant the unthinkable for me. The lake rose sixteen feet and stayed like that forever. It is now mid-November and we have finally gotten back to summer pool.

The fish just buried themselves down into the flooded willows and you couldn't get bait through them. Last time this happened, the willows just had six feet in them and you could see the tops and we just poked baits in small openings and tore them up. This time the willows were fourteen feet under the water.

I took the high road and just told my clients that I wouldn't take them on an expensive boat ride because the fish just weren't cooperating. All said and done, it cost me about ten thousand dollars of earnings. Oh well, that is why guiding is my part time job.

Well that was the summer. This is winter and we are tearing up the crappie. I have a fifteen-trip triple-limit streak going right now and we shouldn't have to quit fishing until mid-month or later. I've had trips in January where we just wore them out.

Most anglers still think of crappie fishing as a spring only season and believe me the fall and winter fishing is great. Winter is when I always get my biggest fish.

So what does an out of work, part-time fishing guide do on his off-season? He goes crappie fishing at his second home Paris Landing Tennessee, located at the south end of Kentucky Lake. I speak at about four or five shows in Illinois between January and March but the rest of those weekends I am down in Tennessee, soaking up that winter sun, usually alone out on the deep ledges. The locals don't venture out much in winter as they can fish this fantastic lake anytime they want.

I don't fish down there at all like we do here. There are some similarities. We use jigs and tubes but just bigger. I never take my long rods as a good stout walleye rod works better. I spool an ultra light spinning reel with 8/3 Fireline Crystal braid and another with four pound mono if the fish are finicky.

We fish sharp drops from 18 to 24 feet down one reel crank off bottom or if it is a stake bed I follow my jig down the screen and stop it right on top of the stake bed. The big fish seem to always be on top of the brush.

Here we use a lot of chartreuse tubes, but down there, the water is very clear so I use more pearl white and emerald blue shiner tubes. I also use a lot of buck tail jigs. Big ones geared for smallmouth. Since the water is so deep we use quarter ounce jigs and hold it very still and wait for a strike so hard it jars your shoulder. I go down there for big crappie, so I am using big baits.

Wind is your worst enemy down there, so I always try and hit it with the wind forecast of eight mile per hour or less. With the internet, you can get weather forecasts and wind. I have my bags packed and if the wind looks good for the weekend we are off. Cold doesn't bother me, we just want full sun.

With Christmas just around the corner, I have some good ideas for that fisherman in your life. Recently, I have taken on a new venture. I am making instructional DVDs. I have a spring crappie fishing DVD out on Lake Shelbyville and I am wrapping up a winter pattern DVD on both Lake Shelbyville and Kentucky Lake. They all have no commercials and no ads for other companies, just good fishing tips and plenty of good fishing action. They have a home-spun look. Everyone that has seen them has really liked them.

I also give gift certificates that are good for a guide trip once the weather breaks. I start booking a ton of trips at the fishing shows in January, so a gift certificate in December would give you first shot at the best trips for both the spring crappie spawn and the best white bass run.