

## Winter Crappie Fishing Kentucky Lake

By Steve Welch

Most of you know that I spend a lot of time on Kentucky Lake and guide down there for two months a year now. I try and time it when Shelbyville is slow like during the up and down water levels and cold rains of early April or the lake turnover period of late September to early October.

It is the winter months that I like the best down there and my local friends that live in the area all say the same. You catch a three day period of light winds so you can get out on the ledges and comfortably fish twenty feet or deeper and you will get a wall mount. These fish rival the size of the famed Grenada Lake. I have seen fish over 17-inches or three pound plus and plenty of healthy two-pound fish.

About any other time of the year we are targeting black crappie that live much shallower and it seems more plentiful. Not in the winter I am looking for those big whites that live on a single stump parked about 22-30 feet deep out on a channel bend or a sheer drop.

Here is how I do it. I have my Yar-Craft 2095BTX rigged with three seats up on the front deck. We each fish an eight-foot medium/heavy action custom made Norm's rod taken from a St. Croix blank that is actually a Bass flipping stick. I like that length because when you are pulling slowly you can watch your jig on the screen and you know that you are going to run slightly above that stump or small brush pile.

We spool the ultra-light spinning reel with Fireline Crystal 8/3 and one of my Deep Ledge Jigs in 1/4oz. I like an orange or red head early in the morning then I switch to a white head once the sun gets high in the sky. If cloudy then I stick with the darker colored heads. We tie the jig directly to the braided line no leader. I use a small loop knot. As for plastics I stick with Midsouth, Bass Pro Baby Shads or Lake Forks. The color once again depends on how much sun we have. I have had my best luck on red/chartreuse early then a white sparkled jig once the sun gets up.

Here is the tricky part if you have never done this before. I tell folks that the mapping system on your electronics is just as important as your GPS. You must first find suitable areas to pull your jigs.

I run four Lowrance Generation three HDS units on my boat. I have two 12-inch units side by side on the rear of my tiller boat command center. I use these to run my map and down scan on one unit and then my side imaging on the other. Having that big twelve-inch screen really helps with side imaging. Since the Generation three units are both touch and manual making changes is quick and the new screens are much brighter than the older units. I tell anglers that I find fish with the rear of the boat and catch them with the front.

Then I have two HDS 9-inch units side by side on the front. All are networked to share info and I have side imaging and down scan on both the front and rear of the boat. Plus I am running a Navionics mapping system simply because I can change the hazard settings and make everything in deep water or fifteen-foot turn white while the extreme shallows are dark blue. This is critical for navigating on Kentucky or any lake that is drawn down to winter pool. With the mapping you can also find the channel drops and points. Turning everything white in deep water helps me on pulling a ledge as well.

Running the down scan alongside your sonar is important because you can compare back and forth. The down scan will show you a stump perfectly. It looks like a stump and if dialed in right you can see a fish hovering over it. The sonar is a round beam showing things that you are about to come up on. This gives you fore warning to get the boat almost stopped and you can slide over it and give the fish time. Plus if you are coming up on a big brush pile you might be fishing too deep and will snag it.

I concentrate on any point first then long stretches of old river channels that run straight. I park the boat on the side of the drop at about 22-feet and then proceed to start pulling the heavy jigs. The angler on my right might be in only 18-feet while the angler on my left is in 26-feet. I tell them to keep their rods pointed forward and throw your baits forward and let them go to the bottom. As we travel towards them reel up slack until you can drop your rod three-inches and hit bottom. Now it is my job to only go fast enough that they can routinely still hit bottom. This speed is between .2 and .4 no faster.

I have been doing this for years so I have tons of waypoints to navigate towards. I try and run myself and two clients into a stump or tick the top of a small brush pile. If we see a big brush pile we will stop and hover for a few minutes but for the most part we are moving on. I am trying to target the big active fish that tend to live alone on a big stump. These fish don't really like tight confined brush they truly think they are a bass.

This whole ledge bite does not start until the water temps fall into the forties so trying it during the spawn period of 58-68 will get you little in return. If you hit it right you will never experience anything like it. I have had multiple days of a three man ninety fish limit with forty or more of those over thirteen-inches and half of those over fifteen-inches. Most of those have come early January late December.

I will be back up guiding around end of February for the ice-out bite on Shelbyville and then going to Kentucky Lake and guiding from March 22<sup>nd</sup> through April 20<sup>th</sup>. You can go to my website at [www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.com](http://www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.com) and look at my open dates. Until then I will be at many upcoming fishing shows also listed on my website.