

Winter Crappie Lake Shelbyville/Kentucky Lake

By Steve Welch

Lake Shelbyville, the lake that I guide on some 200 days a year, is an Army Corp of Engineer flood control lake. That means that they drop it mid- December to 594 ft. above sea level or six-feet lower than normal summer pool.

This pulls the fish from the coves on the south end and puts them out on points around stumps or brush. You can catch them all winter bunched up at about twenty feet deep using my big Deep Ledge Jig 1/4oz.

I love fishing on Shelbyville this time of the year, no crowds. Locals are perplexed on how to catch crappie any deeper than six-ten feet so they don't bother. I cut my teeth fishing this way on Kentucky so now I am very comfortable fishing deep. I actually prefer it. This gives you a chance to catch a big crappie that normally can't be found. I have seen multiple fish over thirteen and some fourteen come off that deep-south end in a single day. The north end I use for spawning in the spring and in the fall, both times they are shallow.

Like I said I use my knowledge from Kentucky Lake and in the winter they fish similar. I am trying to find a point that extends out to the old river channel. Which I know because of my Navionics mapping system of the lake.

I tell anglers that both your GPS and your mapping systems go hand in hand. Narrow down areas by finding deep points or channel swings or channels that sweep close to the bank then use your side imaging to see if any fish are on the structure present. Lake Shelbyville was never clear cut so very deep trees still exist out near the old channels and it is during the winter months that they really use them. With your side imaging you can locate these deep fish and then you can drop a waypoint right on that fishes head from sixty or more feet away.

I knew exactly what I wanted to create when I purchased my latest boat. A Yar-Craft 2095BTX tiller boat with a 200HP. Mercury Verado four stroke on it. The boat has power steering so no torque from the motor ever. This opened up the whole center of the boat for multiple customers. I then installed three seats up on the front deck which allows us to all hover over structure and nobody has an advantage.

We installed air lines up under the side rails with termination plugs to simply plug in your live bait tank anywhere you want. This being a walleye or multi-species boat I have trolling motors at both ends of the boat. The back one I use for pulling crankbaits and the front I use for hovering over brush.

I run four yes four Lowrance HDS Generation 3 units on my boat. All are networked so I can add or takeaway waypoints from one single unit. I run side imaging and down scan on both the front and rear of the boat. On the back at the tiller command center I have two Lowrance 12-inch units side by side. I use one only for side imaging. The larger screen really helps. I have the second one split between down imaging and GPS mapping.

Up on the nose I have two 9-inch Lowrance units side by side. On one I split it with down imaging and sonar so I can compare back and forth and the sonar will give you advanced warning of an upcoming brush pile. While the down scan will draw a perfect picture of whatever you are looking at. If it is a

stump I can clearly see it is and I can see a single fish setting on it. On the other unit I split it with Navionics mapping and down scan. The mapping has all my GPS waypoints on it and I then split the screen simply because the angler on my right can see their jig on the screen and have something to watch.

Fishing on Lake Shelbyville and Kentucky Lake in the winter has similarities. You need to be at least twenty feet deep and find channels and points. But on Kentucky but they are not close to the shore like on Shelbyville if they are they are on the LBL side of the lake. So for me you are out exposed in the wind in the mouth of the Big Sandy or Blood River. This is why during the winter my bags are packed in hopes of a light wind forecast. You catch it just right in late December on through mid-March and you can get those big white crappie you only hear stories about. Fish pushing that 17-inch three pound range and plenty of healthy 13-15-inch fish.

Unlike Shelbyville we pull big Deep Ledge 1/4oz. jigs on ledges going about .2-.4mph never faster. There are enough long stretches of channel banks that have scattered stumps that you can find those big loaner white crappie that still exist. On Shelbyville you tend to fish points more.

Kentucky has made a big transition towards black crappie that tend to live shallower but in the winter I am looking for the big whites.

Like on Shelbyville I use my mapping to locate points and long channel banks on Kentucky. We then use the three seats on the nose to slow troll with the big jigs just off bottom. Trying to hit a stump with a big crappie on it. I have so many waypoints that it is only twenty feet or so before you hit a stump or brush pile then go along and hit another rarely stopping. We are looking for the jigs not numbers.

We fish my eight-foot medium/heavy bass flipping sticks transformed into spinning rods so we can put on an ultra-light reel that is spooled with Fireline Crystal 8/3 tied directly to the jig. Which are my 1/4oz. I then tell my clients to cast them slightly forward and let it hit the bottom and as we pull towards it reel up the slack until you are just three-inches off bottom. We then pull along looking for stumps. These drops are sheer so all three of us are at different depths anywhere from 18-26-feet.

I use the big heavy sticks so when you set a hook you got them. While pulling your line will be a little behind your rod tip so I have found the wimpy rods just let too many fish go by not driving a hook home like my heavy action rods do. Plus I have caught many huge flatheads on crappie jigs, biggest topping 70 pounds.

I will be back up guiding late February for the ice-out bite on Shelbyville which is really good and then going down and spending a month guiding on Kentucky from March 20th -April 20th. I will get to see some of the ledge bite and the whole spawn so better get your trip reserved for both.

My website www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.com has my openings for the first half of the season so pick one and get on the list. I will be in attendance at many upcoming in-state fishing shows in January on through March and the list is also on my website.