

## **Fishing the Willows**

© Steve Welch 2009

As most of you are aware, everywhere you turn in Illinois is flooded. But don't give up yet. Lake Shelbyville has miles and miles of flooded willows to fish.

I have been getting most of my crappie from them for about two weeks now. The spawn is all but done but the shad fry are abundant in these same willows so the fish will remain. Bass and White Bass and Walleye and Crappie can all be caught from the same stretch of shoreline.

Depending on the specie you are fishing for tells me what to bring. If it is the tasty crappie then we tight line a jig just over the outside row of willows that are flooded. This has been anywhere from six to eight feet deep. Then I have a client probe deeper into the willows with a plain old Aberdeen hook and split shot under a slip bobber. We get real brave with this pattern as I instruct them to get as far back into them as you can.

If it the hard fighting White Bass you are looking for then I like Charlie Brewer Sliders on eighth ounce jigs. We also use small crank baits. Anything to get you down four-feet or so. Too deep and you are buried in the willows.

I hardly ever Bass fish but catch tons of them on my White Bass pattern. Anything that resembles baitfish should work.

The outside row of willows never got a chance to get leaves on them before they flooded but the inner ones are fully loaded with leaves and this gives fish cover from the sun. Just harder to get to them.

I also am on the lookout for any floating debris in the willows. Be it a floating log or just a bunch of willow branches that have broken off and floated into a big pile also providing shade.

Last year we had this same fishing scenario and the Bass fishermen loved it. You could see it in the tourney weights. It took a five pound average to cash a check. Fish love this cover because food loves this cover.

The problem is that Lake Shelbyville normally has 192 miles of shoreline and with the lake flooded some ten to fifteen feet now you can throw in another 50-100 miles to cover.

The first thing you look for is how far are they to deep water. How thick are they. I like thinner ones that I can really get my baits into. I look for willows that are on main lake points that will always get wind on them. I also look for small cuts in the main lake shoreline that protrudes about forty feet or so. These don't get as muddy since they lack the high clay banks that give off a lot of run-off. The backs of these cuts will have willows all the way across them.

Big coves have willows as well but it is the main lake ones I concentrate on because they get more wind blowing across them.

So don't panic just yet. Get out there and cover water and fish those willows. I still have many openings for this summer. You can go to my websites fishing report and get actual dates that I have left.