

Winter Is Upon Us What To Do

by Steve Welch

I bet most of you by now are just plain sick and tired of cold weather. I know my wife who isn't used to me being home has heard enough of my Honey I'm Bored speech and can't wait for me to get going in the spring.

Here are a few things to tide you over. First why not take in a fishing show. I know there is one every weekend somewhere and that puts limitations on who can be where and what tackle companies can be there as well.

The Bloomington show January 25th through 27th will be a good one and that is my first show of the upcoming year. I will be speaking on Saturday the 26th and Sunday the 27th. I always speak a lot about crappie but I also fish for white bass and walleye and dabble for muskie. I throw in rigging tackle for all these species and a ton of knowledge about fishing deep-water structure and electronics probably my best strong point. Then it is off to the East Peoria show in February. I am speaking February 16th and 17th on these same topics again just incase you missed the Bloomington show. I am also speaking at the Midwest Marine open house in March. They haven't released a date yet but will sometime this week. It is very informal and people like the fact that they can talk to me all day long and Shane and John are good people and will help you in any way they can. I can attest to that.

If fishing is what you are into then here is what I do during the three winter months. I used to ice fish a ton but the last three winters I have fallen in love with huge muskie and while they are dropping the lake at Shelbyville to winter pool this has got to be the best muskie fishery in the world. We catch a ton of them. I will most likely get forty or so in my six or eight trips that I get to go on. Guys that go every day during this draw down period will double that. The draw down takes anywhere from three to six weeks. After that fishing slows as does tackle.

During draw down I use jigs and shad bodies or twisters. Five to six-inch seam to work the best. White, chartreuse or tennessee shad are your best colors. A good solid hook on a three-quarter to one-ounce jig. We use about ten-inches of Tyger thirty-pound leader. You can tie it directly to your jig with a simple clinch knot. I use seventeen-pound mono on my bait caster and I am throwing the lighter jigs I use twelve-pound on my spinning gear.

A big net is a plus and a boga grip to hold the fish for a photo. If you do not have these someone down there will and we all share. The fish range anywhere from 39-46 inches and the current state record came from down there so I know bigger fish exist. A 46-inch 28-pound fish isn't shabby though.

Here is my second getaway during the three winter months. Paris Landing down at Kentucky Lake is close enough for me to do on a long weekend. I know the fish are bigger down in Mississippi but I can go to Paris Landing and drive it once I get off work on Friday and come home on Monday afternoon and get in a ton of fishing. Nice thing about where I work is that my boss is a fisherman and early on the whole company went to ten-hour days so we can have three-day weekends. This really helps me with guide trips as well.

Most think of crappie fishing as a spring spawn getaway but not me. I want to go when the fish are on the deep ledges. Like I said deep water fishing is one of my strong points. My boat is set up for it and with all my GPS waypoints to run to I can fill the boat with big crappie. Winter fishing down there is where it is at. No crowd's at all six boats is a busy day. The fish are schooled up in the 18-22ft. range so search time is at a minimum and you get bigger fish in the winter as well.

Wind is your biggest enemy so I try and plan for a stretch of weather that gives me a slight warming trend but not too much or the south wind will get up. I want full sun and wind under ten. The Paris Landing web-site has weather predictions so you can't plan your trip too far in advance.

Just have your bags packed and out the door on Friday.

We are fishing deep so you need some weight above your jig to get a better feel. Most use a quarter-ounce split-shot above an eighth ounce jig. I use a Bighead jig that comes in quarter-ounce and a short shank hook that is light enough to bend if you get it hung up. We use either red and chartreuse, emerald blue shiner or white with silver speckles tubes. I also use Slater's tensile jigs or Bob Folder's tensile jigs. Water is very clear and the tensile jigs catch a ton of fish in gin clear water. I tip them with a crappie nibble or a small shiner.

I take my medium-heavy spinning rod and ultra-light spinning reel spooled with eight-three Fireline Crystal. I like the braid it gives you better feel and you can give the rod a quick snap and free your jig. We can't clean the catch down there in winter so I bring my biggest cooler and clean them when we get home. We stay at Fishtale Lodge just about the only place to stay during winter. Sharon is great and the place is very clean.

Come on out to the fishing shows and see me and we can talk shop and swap fishing stories. I am always willing to listen and I might pick up a pattern or two from you as well.