

Clinton Lake, Hot Water Fishing Smorgasbord  
by Steve Welch

By the time this article is published I surely will have had a few Crappie guide trips under my belt. I usually start in mid February for the ice-out Crappies on Lake Shelbyville. This bite can be very good on a bright sunny day and our first good warming trend.

I always put the Crappie tackle away for about three good weeks of hot water action on Clinton Lake. April the first they open up the hot water discharge. This has no boats in it since last October. We can run right up and fish in seventy-degree water. On Shelbyville or any other natural lake this doesn't happen until nearly June. The Crappie fishing is either up or down in this basin, you never know. I had a trip just three years ago on opening day and we hit a downed tree up in this area at daylight and we got three limits or forty-five fish over the nine-inch minimum on our first stop in less than an hour. So I am always prepared to start for them first. The last couple of years though we have done much better just throwing the two-jig rig or a gay blade to the shore and fishing for anything that will hit it. We caught fifty-one Walleye on my first outing last year and wouldn't you know it all of them just fell short of the length limit. So they should have grown that additional inch by now. We did however catch a ton of White bass, Large Mouth, Small Mouth, and Channel Catfish and just anything that will hit our baits. The action is fast and furious and this is what my clients hire me for anyway.

We used to have Tiger Muskie in the lake and boy are they jumpers. I had one jump in my Ranger once and hit me right in the nose while I was looking over the side of the boat. I am telling ya. You will do some backpedaling when a green 40-inch Muskie just jumps in. I had a client set the hook in a brush pile only to have a Muskie grab his Crappie and bite it in half. I had to inform him it no longer met the minimum length requirement and he would have to throw it back in. I miss those Tiger Muskies but they just didn't have a long enough life span to grow to huge proportions so they abandoned the program.

The area of the lake that I am referring to fish is from the Dewitt Bridge up to the forty-eight bridge. I try and stay in the sixty plus range on my surface temp. For the Crappie but you need to check all the downed trees and the two coves that are in this basin. For all the other species wind is a big plus since the fishing is very shallow. The White Bass will seem to leave the mouth of the hot water discharge after the water temp. Reaches eighty. The boats that just tie up to the discharge cable are looking for that big Flathead catfish. You always hear of a really big one caught early in the season usually over fifty. I have heard of some reaching eighty pounds.

The tackle that I bring along is three ten foot rods with a slip bobber rig on them with either a plain hook to tip with a minnow or a sixteenth ounce jig and tube in some color of chartreuse. These are for the Crappies. For the rest I have three spinning outfits spooled with eight-pound test six to seven foot long and some good back bone and a fast tip to whip the light baits long distances. On the business end I have a two-jig rig which consists of two-quarter ounce jigs tied on the line a foot above the other. I have a twister on one and a shad body on the other. Just throw towards the bank and keep your rod tip high and reel back. The other bait I use is a gay blade in the smaller quarter ounce size in either chartreuse or chrome.

All good things come to an end though and since I am a Crappie nut and the weather is getting warmer by the third week of April I put the spinning outfits away and go back to Shelbyville on which I will remain until the middle of September and this same pattern repeats itself. I fish it hard once again until October the tenth when they once again close it to boat traffic until April the First. This is also a good way to fish your way right through fall turnover. The current and warm water has little effect on the fish during the turnover period. Shelbyville can be very slow during this time frame.

I have good response on this pattern from my winter seminars and people are now starting to book trips for the spring. So don't wait to long too get something set up.