

Cold Fronts, Rising Water Levels, What to do
by Steve Welch

April always has me perplexed. I tend to have better crappie trips in mid March than I do in early April, With its cold fronts, cold rain, muddy water and fluctuating water levels.

I usually go to Clinton Lake early in April to avoid some of the problems that I encounter at Shelbyville. Clinton Lake is a nuclear power plant lake and for those who fish during the winter months power plant lakes like Clinton, Sanghris, and Egypt are some of Illinois favorites.

However, for me at Clinton in April we fish for what is biting. Some years I have went into the hot water arm and got right on the crappie and able to fish for them very shallow. Some years, I have to settle for walleye and white bass fishing action, last year I had several trips that turned into stringers you could hardly lift. Between walleye, white bass, crappie, and catfish, we just ended up with a smorgasbord.

Around mid-month, I go to Lake Shelbyville, and stay there fishing for crappie for the next two months. Last year we had a heavy rain mid month and the lake rose seven foot in just a few days. You can see what problems would arise for a fishing guide who needs to produce on every trip.

I always have the creeks in my mind when I am on Shelbyville and with the main lake all muddy I know the creeks will clear in three days so I opted to take my clients up the Okaw as high as I could get. This move turned out to be a good. We found fast water though so I knew where a couple of spots were to hold fish in fast water and the crappies were just stacked up. We had our triple limit in less than three hours. I fished up there for two weeks all alone and then boom they pulled the plug and dropped the lake back to winter pool.

Now I am back fishing drop offs and mid depth brush. I went from throwing a cork and jig in two-foot to tight lining over brush in fifteen foot of water. You need to be able to bounce around very quickly and have all the rods ready to fish several patterns in the early spring.

This why I love my 21 foot Ranger with its center rod storage, I can put sixteen rods in convenient storage in addition, carry a ton of tackle. The Mercury 225 will allow me to reach speeds of 70 miles per hour. I have three Lowrance depth finders; two have GPS capabilities and a Minnkota 74 pound thrust, 24 volt trolling motor to hold us all day. I never try to get batteries to last three or four years, I replace them every spring so I have endless power.

A depth finder is always necessary but in the spring a surface temperature gauge and a log on what has worked for you in previous springs is your most deadly weapon. I know that once we get water surface temperatures in the mid fifty ranges, the fish will start to move.

The males will move to mid depth and suspend around standing and laid down timber. They are aggressive and chase bait, so I throw in a little twist. For about three weeks, I pick up my white bass rod and tie on a sixteenth ounce jig and a Charlie Brewer slider on it. I use one of three basic types; white, chartreuse or plain chartreuse. I catch many fish by being able to cover water and stay back from these spooky fish.

Sixty degrees to seventy-degree water temperatures have me back on the cork because the fish are very shallow the entire month of May and most of June. This is the period to include minnows. I tend to throw more live bait presentations during May and June than any other time of the year for crappie.

At this time, the lake is filling up to the summer pool. The fish will move up the creeks with the rising water levels, my favorite time of the spring. The spawn is in full swing, every guide trip will have a triple limit, and usually we boat over a hundred fish on every trip. Only during November and December can I catch more fish and the same quality fish.

I am sure I will run into many of my readers this spring, feel free to stop and say hi, my big Ranger is easy to find. Good luck!!!!