

Cold and I mean Cold Crappie Fishing

by Steve Welch

Now it is down to the truly die-hard fisherman. I hear all kinds of excuses from the Bass fisherman and even that tough Musky fisherman on why they can't be out here. I look around and there are no boats that aren't Crappie fishing. Parking lot is still got dozen or so boats in every day and packed full on a warm day. Warm meaning a high of fifty. We Crappie fisherman all know the same thing. You give me water temps in the mid to low forty range and the deep fish put on the feed bag.

I can remember a winter just a few years back when I was laid off for a month from Christmas to the end of January. We went almost every day and the ice would chase us down the lake a little farther each day. We would catch over a hundred fish a day, some in thirty foot of water. We would just let our jig go to the bottom and reel it up two cranks and boom a nice pound Crappie would come to the surface. We caught about five hundred fish out of that same spot in three weeks.

I have had a pretty good fall, just not on tourney day. I didn't place in the Springfield tourney. They only paid back five places and I only got seventh in the Bethany tourney but did get a check. I have had some very heavy weights in both practice and on guide trips. I had five fish twelve and over just a few days before the Bethany tourney. That would have easily given me a ten-pound stringer. I always seem to be butting heads with the duck hunters when I need to fish a certain brush pile and they either have their boat tied up over it or their blind is too close.

Oh well now it is time to work on the deep fish for my clients. This is something that I shine at anyway. I have more GPS waypoints than any other fisherman on the lake I am sure of that. My Garmin is very accurate and I use it every time I am on the water.

It seems to me that those of you that bought a hand held might get it out once a day or never at all. My dash-mounted system is always helping us to locate deep brush. I like to use brush that very few people can even find. No land marks near, all on deep fast dropping ledges near vast flats. I use these spots in the summer to cast and count down slider grubs to catch active Crappie in July and August. They also hold good fish in December. We just fish them differently. We hover and fish on the bottom. The fish are always right on the bottom in December.

I love to take clients out in December but only the few that have tried it with me before will come back. The fishing can be extremely good if the wind doesn't just kill you. We can hide from it much better than my buddies that guide on Kentucky Lake. Down there it is as bad as Lake Erie. You book a trip and you never know if you can go out or not.

On Shelbyville we have very high bluffs to get in under. The boat ride can be cold so we try and put in close to the fish. I have a propane heater tied up to the front pedestal and we can warm your hands back up. That is all that really gets cold during the day.

A great friend and good client of mine died not so long ago, Jack Nutt. Believe me he knew one thing and I could always count on some December trips with him. The fishing can be down right fantastic. I bet him and I caught about five thousand fish together on all the occasions I had to fish with him. He would come at the drop of a hat and I always wanted to get him in the boat when it got real good. Well Jack I will miss you and especially now because it has been very good for a month now and I expect it will remain so for another month.

Let us spend a minute talking about tackle and rods. I use shorter, stiffer poles to fish deep with. During the fall you will see my boat with three spinning outfits to throw the fixed corks on stump fields, three nine foot poles to flip slip-bobbers to shallow brush and three twelve-foot poles to sneak up on shallow brush and tight line with about two or three foot of line out.

In December it gets easier. I have three ten foot number eight weight fly rods converted to Crappie poles. I like a lightweight stiff pole that can take some punishment. You have to have a fast tip but it has to be stiff enough that it isn't a limber noodle like my twelve-foot poles. The guides must be of high quality to let a light sixteenth ounce jig slide through them. I seldom go heavier with my jigs. You will get more bites with the lighter jig as you will get more bites if you step down to four pound test. This I also do in the winter.

The tackle that I use in winter is slightly different than my fall baits. I like hair jigs and tensile jigs. The water is clearer and the bait is a little more subtle. Don't get me wrong I still use my tubes and my slider grubs. Instead of chartreuse glow I will use more white and chartreuse.

The line I still use is Trilene Hi-Vis solar but I step it down from six to four and sometimes even

tie on a three foot section of Berkley Vanish on the business end, if the water is very clear. I can't see it or I would use it on my entire spool.

Well I hope to see some of you before the up and coming fishing shows. I am speaking at the Midwest open house in Early January in Rantoul and the Fins and Feather show in Bloomington and the boat show in Peoria as well as the Warehouse in Springfield. Come on out and say hey.

If any of you would be thinking of a special Christmas present I get requests all the time for spring trips and would mail you a flyer to hang from the tree good for a spring trip.

I wish all of you a Merry Christmas and hope to see you on the water soon and don't give up the fish are still biting.