

Lake Shelbyville Transformation

By Steve Welch

About three years ago Mike Mounce, our Fisheries Biologist, came to me with proof of a problem on Lake Shelbyville. He knew I would be interested in his findings.

He had taken samples from crappie that gave a more precise determination of age and growth. Shelbyville crappie weren't as big as other Illinois lakes of the exact same age. The black crappies, which are very numerous on the south end of the lake, weren't growing properly. They were eating more microscopic bugs than the larger, healthier shad, thus stunting their growth.

He suggested a change on the limits of crappie, but this had to go in front of Illinois congress for the change. His suggestion was to allow anglers to keep an extra five fish under the ten-inch minimum as well as the ten over the ten-inch mark. This would get the high numbers of fish down to let the survivors have more food.

Then as per usual for Lake Shelbyville an Army Corp of Engineer flood control lake. The floods hit for an astounding two years. The lake grew from 13,500 acres to 20,000 acres. The fish love this and more important the food has huge spawns and get into the flooded brush and have great success at getting larger.

This past year we have had the hottest lake anywhere I know of. The crappie fishing from ice-out all the way through the spawn was the best I have ever seen. I can't remember a spring with more fish near or at that two-pound range. Every guide trip we were getting our boats limit and catching close to a hundred a day. Once they get back into their deep haunts I plan on doing several guide trips for crappie this summer. Something I have never done in the past. But it is this fall that I am looking forward to. Mid September on up to mid December, crappie poles are all I have in the boat.

Even though the crappie spawn wasn't done I started hearing reports of the great walleye fishing. I know one angler who reported to have caught 103 legal walleye in one week. He never kept any but just an account of how many.

I have to admit I don't look forward to walleye trips because people associate walleye trips with their Canada experiences. Not this year I had a ball. I saw hundreds of walleye come over the side of my Ranger boat and even the old timers had to admit that this year was the best walleye fishing this lake has ever seen.

I am quick to remind them that about four years ago Mike Mounce decided to utilize a rearing pond normally used for bass but not early in the season. This allowed the walleye to get larger before being put into the lake. The results were phenomenal. Before the white bass had a feeding frenzy when the fry were dumped into the lake and few survived.

Well this year the weather has been anything but normal and right now mid June we are in mid summer form. With temps in the mid nineties the walleye have pulled off the shallow flats and started to roam with the white bass as they tend to do all summer.

So I switched gears a little early and started cashing in on the white bass. The fish are huge and everywhere. The busts on the surface will astound you. I have been in busts of five acres or more and these busts stay up for hours. Anyone can catch them on just about any bait when they are busting shad.

It has only been three weeks of white bass fishing and already we have caught about five or six thousand fish. I kid people that I am on my fifth electric knife this year but if this keeps up I will need about five more just to get through the summer. The bigger fish are getting on the drops and next month all the fish will be right on the ledges and I will have them more to myself. Like I said

busts are easy for everyone to catch.

It is the white bass that need to be thinned as they eat tons of shad and since they are a fine table fare and we have no limit on them. I suggest we catch as many of them as we can get. I know we clean about 100-150 a day.

So what I am trying to tell everyone that Shelbyville is on fire and has been for sometime. I have even caught many muskies while walleye and white bass fishing this year, another first for me. So the numbers of them must be coming back as well. Bass I can only attest to what I have seen in the tourneys and the fishery looks great for them too.

For those of you planning a fishing vacation to some far off location you might want to stick close to home because you have a real jewel right here in south central Illinois.