

Make Those Spring Plans Now by Steve Welch

It is Mid December and I am contemplating my season for next year. I have been a multi-species fishing guide for over ten years now and have a faithful following who listen to my suggestions and I try and keep it simple for them and it is exciting for me when I run into them and they tell me of their adventures and how successful they were by taking my advice.

Here is how I set up my fishing year so too speak. It works for me because I have seen these active biting periods forever and it seems to always work.

My season starts in mid February right after ice-out on Shelbyville. The fish will suspend in the standing timber and even go up the creeks to bask in the mud bottom bays. You might say wow that is early but I have seen this pattern work year after year. You might be ice fishing just three days earlier. I fish the West Okaw section of the lake from the Wilborn boat ramp down to the Railroad Bridge. If this isn't going good then I will fish down the lake in the Coon creek area. They pull the lake down five feet in the winter and this will move the fish down the lake to deeper water.

Here is how I fish this pattern. First of all the sun is the most important factor. I have seen so many people fishing under these fish this early in the season. The fish will suspend around the standing timber in as deep as twenty or more foot of water. They will suspend down only about three feet though. They are very spooky and will be gone way before you can slide up to tight line over them. I fish either a slip-bobber or a fixed cork and a heavy eighth ounce jig. You need the heavy jig to keep it down while you reel it slowly by the tree. My colors are usually the same all year. I just vary the size. I use white and chartreuse or red and chartreuse most of the time. This pattern will work for me through mid March.

Mid March is my time to get away before things really pick up on my guide service. I like to go down to Paris Landing on Kentucky lake. The males have hit the bank and the females will be in at the end of the month. Down there I fish a couple of different ways. If the fish have hit the bank I cast a Charlie Brewer slider grub on a sixteenth ounce jig. White and chartreuse usually is your best color. You can cover more water and catch more fish. They like to chase bait once the water warms anyway. If I am too early I will go back out into the middle of the lake and hover over brush. I have a ton of GPS waypoints to use through years of trial and error. I have had several double and triple limits during this time frame over the last ten years so I know this is when to go.

Once April hits then it is walleye time for me at Clinton Lake. They close a section of the lake that is directly fed by the hot water since this is a nuclear power plant lake. It opens April 1st and if the weather is warm enough you can actually get twenty or so walleye in a single day. You have to fight your way through a ton of white bass to get them but hey it is a ton of fun landing a hundred fish in just a couple of foot of water.

About three weeks of the walleye and we have beat them to death so it is back to Shelbyville for me. The fish are suspending around the standing timber big time by now. The difference is now the water is warm enough that they will chase a bait so I am casting the slider grubs just like down at Kentucky. Only instead of throwing to the bank we are in areas of standing timber in ten to fifteen feet of water. You need to swim your bait down about four feet. This is a tough period for most of the fisherman at Shelbyville because once again they are tight lining down near the bottom like they were last winter when they quit. I have pulled into areas where several other boats were tight lining and just caught a ton of fish while they just watched and still wouldn't change.

May has the fish on the bank all over the lake so that has me up the creeks. Bigger fish and with the tourneys coming I need to stay on top of the bigger fish rather than the numbers of small fish you will get on the lake. You catch fewer fish during the day but you get more legal sized keepers so the clients have a bigger stringer to take home.

Lake Shelbyville is a Corp of Engineer Lake so they bring it up to summer pool in late May. This brings a lot more fish up the feeder creeks and they will stay there until as late as July 4th depending on the color of the water. The creeks will clear easily and move the fish out. I try and stay on them as long as I can before going back to the lake. Once Memorial Day hits, out come the big boats and the waves.

June and July has me on the main lake flats chasing the walleye. I fish both lakes for this Lake Shelbyville and Clinton which ever has the best bite going. Last year it was Clinton for me. This year who knows? I troll more cranks at Clinton and fish stumps on the flats at Shelbyville. I use number 5 Shad Raps at Clinton on light line and spinning outfits. I run them about fifty feet behind the boat at about two and a half miles per hour. I also pull light jigs with my trolling motor tipped with a crawler. This also works at Shelbyville.

From mid July to Labor Day I fish for the deep white bass at Shelbyville. I now have a good client base for this and the reason has to be we just flat out catch a ton of fish. Secret is a good depth finder and the knowledge of the lakes drop offs. We start by casting the slider grubs up on top of the flat early in the day so we can get a few bonus fish like crappie or walleye. Once mid day hits we switch to the drop-shot rig and fish a plain minnow above a half-ounce weight. I usually get fifteen dozen minnows just to keep us in bait for four hours. A good day will have the three of us landing a couple of hundred fish.

After Labor Day I start looking for the crappie again. The Kaskaskia is the best place to start. I can fish up there until the lake starts to bite sometime mid October. It is treacherous up there so you better know how to navigate.

Once the water temp. comes down below eighty the lakes Musky will start to move into the backs of the larger coves on the south end of the lake. I like to spend about six weeks chasing them. Jerk baits and buck tails are your best baits. Nothing can give you the fever like Lake Shelbyville that I have ever experienced. It is rated as one of the best lakes in the country and holds the state record for Musky. There are fifty-five inch fish running around this lake.

November through whenever I quit has me back on the crappie. The shallow bite in November is as good as it gets anywhere in the Midwest. The deep bite in the dead of winter is a blast and nobody is on the water. I will usually stay out until early January so my season off the water isn't long.

Hope this helps you in your plans for 2006 and if a guide trip with me is in your plan book very early. If you have questions about anything feel free to get a hold of me.

I will be speaking at the Midwest Open house on January 7th and 8th in Rantoul. The Midstate Fish and Feather Expo in Bloomington on January 27-29. The Peoria boat show on Feb. 12th and the boat show at Springfield March 10-12th. Come out and see me and maybe learn a thing or too.