

NASTY WEATHER LINGERS...LAKE LEVELS RISE FAST

By Steve McCadams

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Enough already! That's the cry of Kentucky Lake fishermen lately who've been battered by cold temperatures, bone chilling winds, and spitting snow. As if that weren't enough toss in rapidly rising lake levels the last few days that has further upset the apple cart.

It has been mean out there lately. Last week a lot of boat ramps were iced in from the frigid January weather that lingered too long to suit local anglers. Another round of winter weather descended this week and while boat ramps opened up there is high water to contend with, adding yet another hurdle.

Lake levels have really jumped the last few days in the aftermath of heavy rains on Tuesday that drenched a region that was already saturated. As a result there has been a massive runoff of water into the whole Tennessee River watershed, swelling lake levels more than four feet above normal winter readings.

At midweek lake stages were rising over a foot each day. The week started out with readings around 355 at Kentucky Dam and upstream at New Johnsonville but elevation was changing fast by Wednesday morning. TVA projects the reservoir could reach the summer pool mark of 358.7 at Kentucky Dam before the weekend arrives. Upstream at New Johnsonville elevation was already forecast to be 359.5 on Friday.

Barring any additional rain the reservoir is expected to crest this weekend and begin its descent. The main channel will have a lot of current for the next several days as some dingy water flows through. Surface temperatures have been hanging around the 35 to 37 degree range.

Over the last week to ten days anglers have only had a day or two mixed in that appealed to their fishing fever. A few crappie were taken last week in the Paris Landing area as the mouth of Big Sandy was showing a decent water color.

Crappie anglers working the main lake ledges caught some decent numbers for a brief period as the 17 to 22 foot depth range was holding fish in a typical winter pattern. The deeper sides of the drop-offs were attracting baitfish that were riding out the cold snaps and that's where the crappie were too.

Although a few boats were testing the water over manmade fish attractors in the mouth of a few bays reports indicate their catch rate was low. The 8 to 13 foot depth range was not paying dividends for most, a likely result of the cold surface temperatures that influenced baitfish to go deeper and pull the crappie with them.

Bass fishermen have been working some of the steeper bluffs with jig and pig combos, Alabama rigs, and slow retrieved crankbaits but the bite has been slow lately.

Sauger continue to dodge the radar screen of anglers wondering where this former winter fishery has gone. Bottom line seems to be that the fish are just not out there to catch. Several years of weak spawns have resulted in weak year classes and that has anglers and biologists concerned.

Anglers across the area are bored with the lingering winter weather and hoping it loses its grip soon. Everyone wants a warm up but it has been a year when winter has returned with a vengeance. Anglers got spoiled the last few years when warm winters allowed great fishing conditions.

Both February and March are known for inclimate weather so fishermen may have to rely on patience until a few days of good weather enter the forecast. Otherwise, the cure for spring fever might not come for quite some time and in case you're counting spring doesn't officially arrive until March 20th!