

FROZEN FISHERMEN READY TO THAW...WARMER WEATHER COMING

By Steve McCadams

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Kentucky Lake's winter fishing scene has been frozen in time the last few weeks as anglers have been riding it out indoors. Stubborn cold fronts, snow, ice and brutal winds have kept most at bay.

Relentless winter weather has dealt the cards and for most fishermen it has been a bad hand to play. In fact, the majority of fishing has been done in front of the television while watching show hosts land hefty stringers from beautiful blue lakes located somewhere south in a warm climate.

Other anglers have twisted and turned in their recliner, almost wearing out the seat as cabin fever took hold. Reading outdoor magazines renders temporary relief. For a few short moments you succumb to the stories and feel the wind in your face, fish on the line, and almost reach for the drag to adjust the reel when the big one makes a run.

Yet there's nothing quite like being there. Try to explain the excitement and picture the moments to your buddies but walking up behind a pointed bird dog, seeing the flush of a fish sucking in a topwater bait or ducks downwind on that last approach over the decoys; it's best to be up close and personal.

Yet this endurance test may soon come to an end as warmer weather is on the way. Next week looks promising as the weatherman indicates inclimate weather will be in the rearview mirror for a change.

Temperatures are forecast to climb out of the cellar and up the ladder toward the mid 50's and even lower 60's. Anglers haven't had a forecast like that since late fall, although a few days in December offered short reprieves.

Crappie and bass anglers are ready to blitz. The boat has been sleeping in the garage far too long. Once the weather breaks folks better get out of the way as there's likely to be a mass exodus toward boat ramps.

And what can anglers expect after the long cold spell? There hasn't been much to report the last couple of weeks but odds are crappie will be perking up once warmer surface temperatures return and lake levels settle down. Same goes for bass.

Surface temperatures this week have been in the 36 to 38 degree range. That will make any angler shiver as a few casts followed by cold hands pretty much pegs the frigid meter.

Watch for a rebound into the low to mid 40's by the middle of next week. Water color has been quite dingy in the main Tennessee River channel and backwater bays but that will improve by early next week too. Some dingy water has been present in Big Sandy too.

Lake levels have been falling pretty fast this week as TVA pulled the plug and pushed a lot of water through the system after last week's heavy rains swelled lake levels several feet and even reached summer pool stages.

Projections for the weekend show elevation will be in the 355.5 range at Kentucky Dam. Upstream at New Johnsonville readings will be in the 356.2 range, which indicates a lot of water is still flowing through but TVA will likely decrease discharge rates by this weekend.

Although some rain may enter the region no severe thunderstorms are in the forecast at this time so that should allow the reservoir to stabilize in the days ahead.

Winter patterns should find the crappie lingering around those main lake ledges where depths of 17 to 22 feet will be popular venues. Some fish may even back off to the deep sides of the drop-off and occupy depths of 20 to 25 feet at times as the shad are likely holding there.

Bass will likely be holding deep as well and riding out the cold snap around steeper bluffs and deeper humps. Fish may well be suspended and tossing such offerings as Alabama rigs, suspending crankbaits, jig and pig combos and such could be good choices.

If the dramatic warm-up occurs as predicted some fish could begin to move up toward gravel banks and rocky points by the end of next week.

It's still winter until March 20th but spring fever may well descend over the Kentucky Lake fishing scene next week once warm, sunny days return. Good weather will help lift the black cloud of depression that has plagued fishermen who will be trading frowns for smiles as they back the boat in and head out.