

FISHING SCENE WELCOMES WARM-UP

By Steve McCadams

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March Madness has been alive and well, making its presence known to Kentucky Lake's fishing scene this week as anglers have endured a wide variety of weather. There have been some beautiful days with spring-like weather---temps climbed to 75 degrees on Tuesday---only to have another stubborn cold front roll in at midweek.

It appears warmer conditions are in progress as the weekend approaches so after a short hiatus anglers are back out on the water in search of winter crappie and bass that have shown signs of improvement lately.

Kentucky Lake's elevation will be 355.2 at Kentucky Dam as the weekend approaches. Upstream at New Johnsonville lake levels are slightly higher with readings in the 355.7 range. Elevation had been falling earlier in the week but experienced a slight surge at midweek only to return to a gradual drop forecast by TVA.

Water color has been stained in the main Tennessee River but most of Big Sandy and West Sandy is in good shape with some dingy water still hanging around. The overall color in the Paris Landing sector is sporting a good color for bass and crappie fishing.

Surface temperatures have slowly climbed this week as the runoff last weekend from melting ice and snow delivered cold water into the reservoir for several days. Last week's 39 to 42 degree range finally lost its grip and by midweek the water rose to the 47 to 49 degree range.

Crappie have shown increased interest this week but the overall picture has been blurred for anglers attempting to find concentrated schools of fish along main lake ledges. Most boats are reporting scattered crappie around the deep sides of drop-offs where anglers have targeted the 18 to 22 foot depths.

A few fish moved up to the 12 to 14 foot range earlier in the week when warm sunny days descended and improved the attitude of both the fish and the fishermen. However, crappie have been reluctant to school and it's been a few here and a few there scenario.

Both live minnows and jigs have produced with a few anglers tipping jigs with minnows in an attempt to entice finicky fish. Most anglers are using tightline methods in the deeper structure. Some like the double hook bottom bumping rig while others are just fishing a single jig around brush and stumps.

Popular colors of jig skirts have ranged from pink/chartreuse to blue/white. When encountering dingy water a lot of anglers have been choosing loud colored leadheads such as florescent green, red, pink and chartreuse while experimenting with various colors of jig skirts.

Crappie have been somewhat scattered for several weeks and anglers are seeing suspended fish

show up on their sonar screens out over deeper water. Seems a lot of fish are not relating to structure and just roaming, which sometimes appeals to spider rig or drift fishermen applying multiple presentations.

Once surface temperatures cross the 50 degree threshold watch for crappie action to improve. A combination of cold fronts, very chilly runoff entering the reservoir, and some fluctuation in lake levels have teamed up to confuse the fish and those pursuing them.

Bass fishermen haven't had as much trouble finding fish as their crappie cousins. Despite cold surface temperatures in shallow bays some pretty good stringers have been taken the last two weeks.

Two of the first major tournaments required 5-fish limits weighing 20 pounds or more to win. March is a month known to produce hefty stringers as the big egg-laden females are putting on the feed bag as spring approaches. Their prespawn phase usually produces some of the biggest bass of the year.

Crankbaits are king right now along the long sloping mud bars and gravel points on Kentucky Lake. Crawfish varieties have been popular choices with some dingy water areas requiring such choices as firetiger and florescent red variations.

Rapala's Shad Rap, Bandit's Root Beer, Strike King's Red-eye shad series have been a few popular choices for anglers working gravel banks, rip-rap and fan casting some drop-offs in an effort to cover a lot of water.

Tossing some bigger deep diving crankbaits have worked too as have some suspending jerk baits, Alabama rigs, and also some Carolina rigged crawfish.

There's been a lot of current in the main Tennessee River channel and TVA continues to flush a lot of water through the system. Bass anglers have been playing the current card in a few areas too.

March is a mixed up month of weather patterns. Always has been; always will be. It's fair to say some pretty days are ahead with overdue warming trends but wind and cold fronts will be in the equation too as anglers battle March Madness Kentucky Lake style!