

SPRING PUSHES WINTER OFF ANGLERS' CALENDAR

By Steve McCadams

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Spring officially arrived Thursday, pushing a mean and stubborn winter off the calendar for Kentucky Lake fishermen who are hoping the weather changes in their favor. Most of March has been ruthless.

Warm sunny days indeed escorted the change of seasons as anglers will have a nice warm up going into the weekend across the region with temps expected to be in the upper 60's for a few days before another cold front enters the picture next week. Don't toss away that overcoat and coveralls just yet!

This week's fishing scene had another mixture of weather conditions that dealt some mean blows to fishermen anxious to get out and test the water for bass and crappie. Topping the list of challenges have been high winds that pretty much dictated where boaters could go. Added to the gale force breezes have been some bitter cold temperatures to start off the week but things are moderating and a rapid warm-up is in progress.

Surface temperatures across Kentucky Lake have pretty much stayed in the 46 to 49 degree range this week, influenced by cold nights and bone chilling north winds. Some moderation began at midweek but only rarely have some areas eclipsed the 50-degree mark for short periods of the day.

Anglers can expect surface temps to climb into the low 50's this weekend, a situation that should improve the overall bite for both bass and crappie anglers as cold water has dominated the fishing scene all month.

Lake levels are pretty much normal as the reservoir is back down near it's low ebb of winter pool. Lake levels will remain low until TVA's curve begins reservoir filling on April 1st each year. A slow and gradual increase in lake elevations begins then but projections are always at the mercy of heavy rains and runoff.

Projections for the weekend at Kentucky Dam will be 354.9. Upstream at New Johnsonville Steam Plant TVA projects the elevation to be in the 354.6 range.

Water color has improved since last week for many sections of Big Sandy that had been a bit muddy. A good stain is present across most of the Big Sandy and Paris Landing area and even the main Tennessee River channel is now sporting a good color for fishing.

Crappie continued to be scattered as most anglers battling adverse conditions of high winds and cold fronts are hoping the warm-up underway will increase surface temperatures and stimulate movement from sluggish fish toward some prespawn areas.

Most boats have been working main lake ledges and concentrating their efforts toward deep drop-offs where depths of 18 to 22 feet have given up a few fish. However, it has been a one-here; one there scenario. Anglers are not finding any concentrations of fish despite working some good structure along the deep sides of ledges where the fish ought to be.

Scattered reports of fish taken in midrange depths of 9 to 12 feet have come in from a few boaters back in the larger bays. Tipping minnows over brushpiles has produced a few fish but no big numbers have been reported.

Same goes for a few boaters working shallow stakebeds while casting grubs and jigs beneath slip-bobbers. The shallow bite has not been on, a likely result of cold surface temperatures that have lingered throughout the month and kept baitfish out deeper. Watch for that to change quickly in the next week to ten days.

The overall crappie scenario has been a bit tough for a variety of anglers who have implemented several techniques. From slow spider rigging to long line drifts and straight bottom bumping tightline methods, the fish have been finicky.

If you've been having tough luck out there you're not alone! March Madness has been hard on Kentucky Lake crappie fishermen thus far.

Bass fishermen have struggled as well. High winds and cold fronts have greeted anglers the majority of March and catch rates have diminished. It has been mean and tough to hold the boat around open water spots.

With the warm-up underway surface temperatures are rising and that should see a significant improvement for the shallow water bite in the days ahead. Although gravel points and shorelines haven't been too productive lately, watch for that to change as the weekend approaches.

Tossing crawfish colored crankbaits is the norm this time of year around the abundant rock and gravel points and sloping sandbars. Also, roadbeds and rip-rap normally produce as fish move up.

The last week or two boats have also worked main lake ledges and humps along the main river channel with deep diving crankbaits, Alabama rigs and Caroline rigged craws in hopes of finding those winter patterns of staging bass in deep confines.

March is a month when a lot of movement takes place for both bass and crappie as the fish transition from winter hideouts to prespawn phase. With the warm-up underway watch for activity to improve as the fish respond to slightly warmer surface temperatures.

Another cold front is expected early next week, an unfortunate forecast at a time when a consistent spell of warm weather is needed, but it appears the cold snap will be brief and allow a quick rebound by later next week.

Things are getting better but March weather has many faces. Anglers have seen most of the ugly ones lately and deserve a smile in the form of warm days and light winds. Spring has finally sprung!