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Crappie Season Fun

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Opening Cast

Dad was a pyro.

He loved to spend several weeks each year mixing camping, crappie fishing and enjoying a fire. Fishing, camping and fires; one without the others wasn't satisfying.

Dad could adapt to any situation. He was okay building in a small fancy campground pit but preferred a large, open, remote spot. His favorite pit was a large washtub with a hole cut in one end for a draft. The large tub would handle not only standard firewood but also large limbs, rootwads or any other burnables he was able to drag to the tub.

He did not worry about the intricacies in the craft of fire building. No stacked tee-pee arrangement or staggered stacking. No flint and striker stick. Wood was thrown in haphazardly. Kerosene, diesel, Coleman fuel and wadded-up newspaper were his approved starters, with at least three of the four in the mix.

The lighting ceremony was awesome although he never thought of it as a big deal. He stood a full arm's-length from the fire, lit the match, tossed it toward the wood while lifting a forearm to protect hair and eyebrows. The 'oooossh' of the fire was music to his ears. Flames often shot up to heights of over 10 feet but lowered within minutes as the fuel finished burning. Starting at night was a change from total darkness to a several thousand lumens in a matter of a half-second. He made fires a fun part of a trip.

Most of us miss out on the overall experience because of the convenience of motels and the fast-paced world keeping us too busy. That's too bad, because the sizzling, crackling and dancing flames are great medicine, an excuse to gather for conversation and is a part of the outdoor experience. Mixing them with a crappie fishing trip can be a fantastic experience.

I'm glad Dad was a pyro and crappie fisherman.

Good fishin' and God Bless,
Tim Huffman, Editor/Sr. Writer



Cover Photo:
Pennsylvania fisherman Colin
Stuyvesant displays a nice
Northern crappie.
Darl Black photo.

Seasonal Structure

by
Tim
Huffman



A trip last year to Lake D’Arbonne, Louisiana, allowed me experience both seasonal structure fishing and strategies for prefishing a tournament. Billy Don Surface let me tag along and fish with him because his partner wasn’t arriving until the night before the tournament. He graciously shared most (but not all) of their technique details, prefishing strategies and in-depth fishing tactics for ledges in late winter and early spring.

Four Days Prior to Tournament

Surface fish by himself on Monday

Electronic maps are key for on-the-water searching, but paper maps are still good tools for studying the lake while relaxing in your cabin.

from daylight to dark. The first day was spent moving around and checking places fished last year. His best spot produced one two-plus pounder but nothing else. Other places produced a total of 30 crappie but not the size he wanted.

Monday night at the cabin he studied

his map looking for channels in 6-8 feet of water all the way up into cypress trees. It was early for fish to be shallow but a guy had told him crappie had been staging. However, weather changes were causing them to go back and forth. Surface said weather changes in early spring were typical, causing the fish to change patterns often and also become slow biters.

Three Days Prior to Tournament

A strong front moved through on Monday night. Tuesday Surface expected a slow down. Also, a big rain up north meant new water running into the lake, with current increasing.

The bite was much slower than expected. Baits had to be inched along to get a bite. The channel proved to have fish on the graph but we couldn't catch them to see their sizes. It was 11:30 and we hadn't caught a fish. "Not catching is hurting us today. We are not learning anything except for marking a few potential spots to try when they start biting. Some days are like this."

Not a fish was caught until late in the day. One was 2.27-pounds and a few small ones. The scouting was not a total loss with one spot found.

One tip that holds true most of the time, is wood cover and a ledge at the right depth will hold crappie. Crappie may not always bite, but the ledge will hold fish. The number of rigs we went through proved we were keeping our fish in the cover.

Two Days Prior to Tournament

"We can look at the map and get ideas, but the LakeMaster chip is very important. It's more detailed and up to date. Places we caught fish last year isn't producing so we are using the electronic map to find the contours and drops."

Waypoints are a key to learning and studying. By marking successful spots a pattern can be learned. If the majority of the marks are in 14-16 feet on the outside bend of a channel, it's not difficult to see

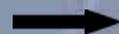


Billy Don Surface with a good crappie. Keeping a focus on ledges is an important part of a his searches.

the pattern.

"We are targeting an area I don't want you to tell anyone about. It's a spot with ledges that should be good. Our goal is to find some quality fish. The spot I found yesterday will likely be pressured. It's too bad that people follow and fish where they see others fishing, so, I won't go back there again. I hope to find a different spot today and hopefully not be seen by too many boats."

The structures targeted were good, medium-depth drop-offs with shallower water not too far away and deep water nearby. We caught a big weight of crappie without going over any spot a second time. We also kept moving so we wouldn't catch more than one big fish from a spot. We were watched by a few other fishermen but not many.





Tournament Outcome

A few hours of prefishing on the final practice day did not change plans for the tournament. Surface and Jones started the tournament by fishing the area we found on Wednesday when we caught the big stringer weight.

Weather can change strategies. “We stuck with the spot for two hours,” says Surface. “The wind was blowing hard. We had eight fish with one good one for about 10 pounds. Waves were pushing over the front of the boat and we didn’t have control of the poles or boat, so we were just wasting our time. It was tough. With the timber and stumps we couldn’t have gone with the wind because we would have hung up too much. Our trolling motor bounced on top of a stump and we thought it was broken but we lucked out. We moved and upgraded a little. I think we ended up in fifth place after day one.”

The team felt good about day two because the wind would allow them to fish their spot with the good ledges. “We were in the right spot but just didn’t get the right fish to bite today. The guys that caught the big fish were within fifty yards

Billy Don Surface slow trolls ledges searching for quality crappie at D’Arbonne Lake.

of us. They had seen us fishing the spot when practicing and found the fish. We were going to hit another part of the ledge but a boat was there, too. That’s just the way it goes sometimes.”

They moved up to third place in a large tournament, so the ledge pattern proved to be a good choice. There are usually many ledges so picking the right one is critical for success. That can take hard work, a lot of hours on the water and a little luck.

Putting It All Together

Drop-offs can be an important part of a pattern no matter the month or weather. The March timeframe is a good time to stay on the move until you find the best depth. Creek ledges will likely be good because they are part of the major highways used when crappie are on the move with seasonal changes.

Drops usually include bends, cuts,

straight sections, along with natural and manmade cover. Electronics is a necessity so a fisherman should maximize mapping, scanning and sonar when possible. Side scanning, down imaging and advanced scanning options are a big plus but not required. Again, having more is better, but using whatever you have, even if it's basic, is very important when dealing with a drop-off and cover.

Slow trolling is often the best technique for fishing ledges in cold or cool water. Multiple poles and baits allow different depths to be fished simultaneously, or, all baits can target a specific depth. The extra baits increase the odds of catching fish.

“When water temperatures near 60 degrees the big slabs like big meals without exerting a lot of energy.”

Slow trolling allows a fisherman to move at a moderate speed, slow, super-slow or completely stopped. Baits can be moved along when looking for active fish but stopped when a fish is caught, or electronics shows good cover and fish.

Discussing baits is always fun, because no matter what is mentioned, there will be a number of fishermen who disagree. Surface prefers Muddy Water Baits for their toughness, colors and scent. He says during cold water up until the spawn, minnows are always a good choice for basic fishing and catching numbers of crappie. However, jigs often catch the biggest fish.

When slow trolling try using a double-hook rig with a minnow on top and a jig on bottom, with a sinker in between. Only by trying different combinations of baits will the best choice for the day be determined.

A 3/8- or 1/2-ounce sinker between the baits is good if there is no current or wind. Move to a 3/4- or 1-ounce sinker is

there is current, wind or if baits must be placed deep. Use just enough weight to keep baits vertical.

A bait tip for lakes with big fish is to use big baits in early spring. Try a 1/4-ounce jig with a 3- or 3.5-inch plastic body, or, a big hair jig. Tip any jig with a medium to large minnow. When water temperatures near 60 degrees, the big slabs like big meals without exerting a lot of energy.

Final Comments

Ledges are good year-round with mid-depth ledges, creek ledges and other natural drops being top picks, especially when crappie start transitioning from winter homes. Naturally, in most lakes, the crappie will be on the deepest channels in mid-winter slowly working up to the shallow channels as water warms. Timing will be much different in the south compared to the north.

Two important lessons are (1) keep an open mind because crappie can change depths and locations quickly when weather changes, fronts move through and water temperatures change; (2) the important thing is to use your electronics and maps to find potential areas. Search and study. Time spent with electronics provides quicker searches than just fishing.

My big thanks goes to Billy Don Surface for sharing the boat and letting me catch a few fish. He spent hours answering questions and let me shoot photos. The Surface/Jones team is sponsored by Missouri Corn Growers/American Ethanol, Muddy Water Baits and others.

 - Tim Huffman

FIRST BITE

Story & photos by Darl Black

Across the Northeast and Lower Great Lakes states, March usually comes in like an old winter lion with moderately cold temperatures, dirty snow sticking to the ground and a slight softening of the ice pack on lakes. If we are lucky, March goes out leaving a brown landscape and rapidly warming open water. If not so lucky, ice may linger into the first week of April. You just never know from one year to the next!

When weather conditions come together properly, there is an incredible active shallow water black crappie bite on certain lakes sometime between mid-March and early April. However, blink and you miss it. When the black-bottom shallows get the first shot of steadily warming water, the bite is measured in days – not weeks – so go fish!

Although some locals refer to this bite as a spawning run, the appearance of crappies in the shallows has absolutely nothing to do with reproduction but everything to do with feeding.

It's difficult for an individual living in warmer climate areas to get their mind around the angler anticipation surrounding the first crappie bite of a new season in the land of ice and snow.

Northern crappie anglers begin whispering about the ice-out bite immediately after Christmas (but not too loud if ice fishermen are around). Then after Ground Hog Day anglers begin talking loudly about it. You would think with all this discussion about the First Bite, everyone would be completely prepared. Well... talking does not always lead to planning.

But that's why I'm here with some great tips on the first open-water crappie bite of the new fishing season!

Ice-Out Crappie Locations: Think shallow, protected pockets of water with dark bottom material which absorb the sun's heat, thereby warming the immediate water more rapidly than other shallow areas. Water depth in the best areas is typically no deeper than three to four feet. Check out small bays with entrances protected from prevailing winds, as well as swampy backwaters, cottage-lined canals and corners of walled-in marinas. Possible cover includes decayed pad beds, deadfalls, submerged shoreline brush, beaver lodges, dock posts, and the list goes on. Warming water kick starts the growth of zooplankton which attracts minnows. Minnows in turn attract crappies.

Get the gear ready. The time to start crappie fishing up north is almost here.

Presentation: Hands down, the best bait is a small to medium size minnow below a slip bobber. Years ago, Emerald Shiners were the preferred early season bait of crappie anglers in our region. However, almost all Emerald Shiners sold in area bait shops came from the Great Lakes. But since the appearance of Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS) in Great Lakes' Emerald Shiners, the sale of this bait is now prohibited outside of the Great Lakes drainage.

Small fatheads have become the choice for early spring on inland lakes – particularly Rosey Reds if you able to find them at your bait shop. Rosey Reds are a



species of fathead with a distinctive orange color, and ice-out crappies seem to prefer them over regular dull-colored fatheads.

During late spring, summer or fall, a #4 or a #2 bait hook performs well for crappies. But for the smaller minnows most often used at ice out, I recommend a #6 Tru-Turn Blood Red Aberdeen if you plan to use a straight bait hook.

Recently, however, I've started using a small jighead below the float to present the minnow. I go with either a 1/48-ounce Bobby Garland Overbite Sickle Jighead which carries a #6 hook or a 1/32-ounce Original Road Runner Head if I want something with more flash.

For a bobber to suspend the minnow at the proper depth, I typically choose the smallest Thill Slip Crappie Cork (for 1/16-ounce weight), and add just enough split shot to the line to make the float stand upright.

Jim McClave enjoys success on Pymatuning Lake for ice-out crappies holding in a shallow spatterdock pad bed using minnows below a float.

If you cannot readily obtain the proper minnows, the second best presentation is a very small jig/plastic body combination tipped with a couple maggots. Yes, I know the mention of live maggots (fly larva) as bait sounds creepy to some – I've had this discussion before with southern anglers. But for northern anglers, maggots are the number one live bait for bluegills and they readily available at all bait shops in the spring. During the ice-out period, maggots are particularly effective in drawing hits from crappies. Likely it's their potent smell which attracts crappies. One or two maggots on the jig can be the difference between fish or no fish.





The jig and live bait combination is fished in conjunction with a fixed bobber. Cast it out and let it rest for 60 seconds. Then begin a very slow retrieve for two or three feet. Pause again for a minute or two. Then retrieve it slowly two more feet. Repeat pause.

To assemble this rig, first affix an adjustable weighted bobber to your line allowing about two feet below the float. Then tie on the jighead and body.

Ice-out crappie casters have long favored a 1.5 inch white or yellow split-tail grub as the jig body. But when Bobby Garland brought out the 1.25-inch Itty Bit Swim'R, I made the switch to this tiny minnow profile plastic.

I fish the Itty Bit Swim'R on a 1/48 ounce Overbite Sickle Head. Select a minnow color such as Pearl White, Crystal or Monkey Milk if the water is moderately clear. But if the water is dirty or heavily

Angler dabbles small jig along blow down in a protected bay on Pymatuning Lake.

stained, go with Mo' Glo Screamer or Black Cricket. And don't forget to tip it with two maggots!

Rod/Reel and Line: I've experimented with many different rod and line combinations over the years for specific crappie presentations. For casting a float with minnow, I've found the perfect combination for me: B-n-M 8-foot Buck's Ultimate.

This rod has just the right action for propelling a slip-float/minnow into cover from a distance with accuracy. In a pinch, you can use it as a dabbling pole if dipping tight to cover. The 8-foot length provides a good sweeping hooket.

When fishing around the intense



tangles of deadfalls and brush as well as amid the remnants of last year's spatterdock or other pads, I am comfortable using straight 10-pound Gamma Torque Braid. By skipping the mono leader I use the rest of the season, I simply pull free of snags with straight braid in order to reduce loss of rigs.

For tossing and retrieving a float and jig, I fall back to my favorite all-around crappie casting outfit: B'n'M 7-foot Sam Heaton Super-Sensitive. For early spring fishing, I'll have the B'n'M ProStaff spinning Reels spool with 6-pound Gamma Hi-Vis Panfish Line.

Get the gear ready. The time to start crappie fishing up north is almost here!

Success comes to working the right areas with the right presentation. Northern lakes produces it's share of nice crappie.



 - Darl Black



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Crappie Basics #157

Northern Ice Out

“In Ohio the ice is just coming off. Most people think deep but shallow water, especially on the north side of the lake and big coves, will warm up and fish will be in these shallow waters. Water being just one or two degrees warmer than the main lake is huge. Use a small cork and jig. Pitch and use a slow presentation. Most bites will only be the tiniest of movement.”

–Russ Bailey, Brushpile Fishing TV





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The Spawn is Almost On: Spider Rig or Single Pole

by Ron Wong

The water is warming and lake levels are rising due to spring rains. This means the crappie are moving into the spawning grounds and following the forage. Flood control lakes like Sardis, Enid, Grenada in Mississippi; Caddo Creek, Texoma in Oklahoma;

so enjoy. Protruding cover will also act as a conductor of heat from sunlight thereby attracting more forage and crappie. We all like it when the crappie move shallow as they are somewhat easier to catch when conditions are right. However, what is the best method to fish for them just right before they spawn. Some like to spider



or Wappapelo, Lake of the Ozarks in Missouri will benefit from the rising water as shoreline cover will become submerged providing cover that crappie

Silhouette of crappie fishermen spider rigging during an early morning fog.

rig and some like to single pole. What is the best method? To try to answer this question, we talked to some of the top professional crappie fishermen to find out what they do.

Sam Heaton, B'n'M pro staff member who has his own signature crappie pole, the B'n'M Super Sensitive Crappie rod. He loves when the crappie are moving into the spawning areas because they become predictable in how to catch them. As crappie start their move towards the spawning areas, Sam likes to spider rig but once the fish are in the spawning area, single pole is the way to go. Using his 10' signature rod rigged with 6 pound test line and a single 1/16th ounce jig, he likes to find holes in grass or dropping the jig in the middle of flooded bushes. He really likes using the old style crappie tube because of the movement of the legs in the water without having to move the bait around. His best tip is to be extremely quiet both in movement and noise, "you got to stealth em". He also said, if you miss some of the bites, change color of crappie tube.

Tim Blackley, B'n'M and Strike King pro staff member likes the spider rig as the crappie are moving onto spawning areas and during the spawn. He said it covers more area and provides the ability to catch several fish at the same time around a piece of cover. He likes to use the B'n'M 16 foot Bucks graphite jig pole. Tied to his line is a 1/8th ounce Strike King jig tipped with a black/chartreuse or pink/white Crappie Thunder. He will fish his jigs no more than 6 feet deep and during the spawn the bait could be 2 feet deep. To insure he stays as quiet as possible, he will clean any nicks in his trolling motor prop. "It makes the trolling motor more quiet and cuts grass better". He also recommended using Driftmaster rod holders because of the versatility, durability and being able to get rods out of the holder easier.

Brandon Jennings, Bass Pro Shops and Bobby Garland pro staff member likes to single pole for crappie that have moved onto spawning areas. He said there is nothing like just feeling the thump! He likes using a B'n'M Sam Heaton Super Sensitive 10 foot rod with a Lew's Laser reel loaded with 10 pound test braided line. His favorite bait is a 1/16th ounce Mo'Glo jig dressed with a Bobby Garland Slab Slay'R. For dirtier water he likes to use the Mo'Glo colors

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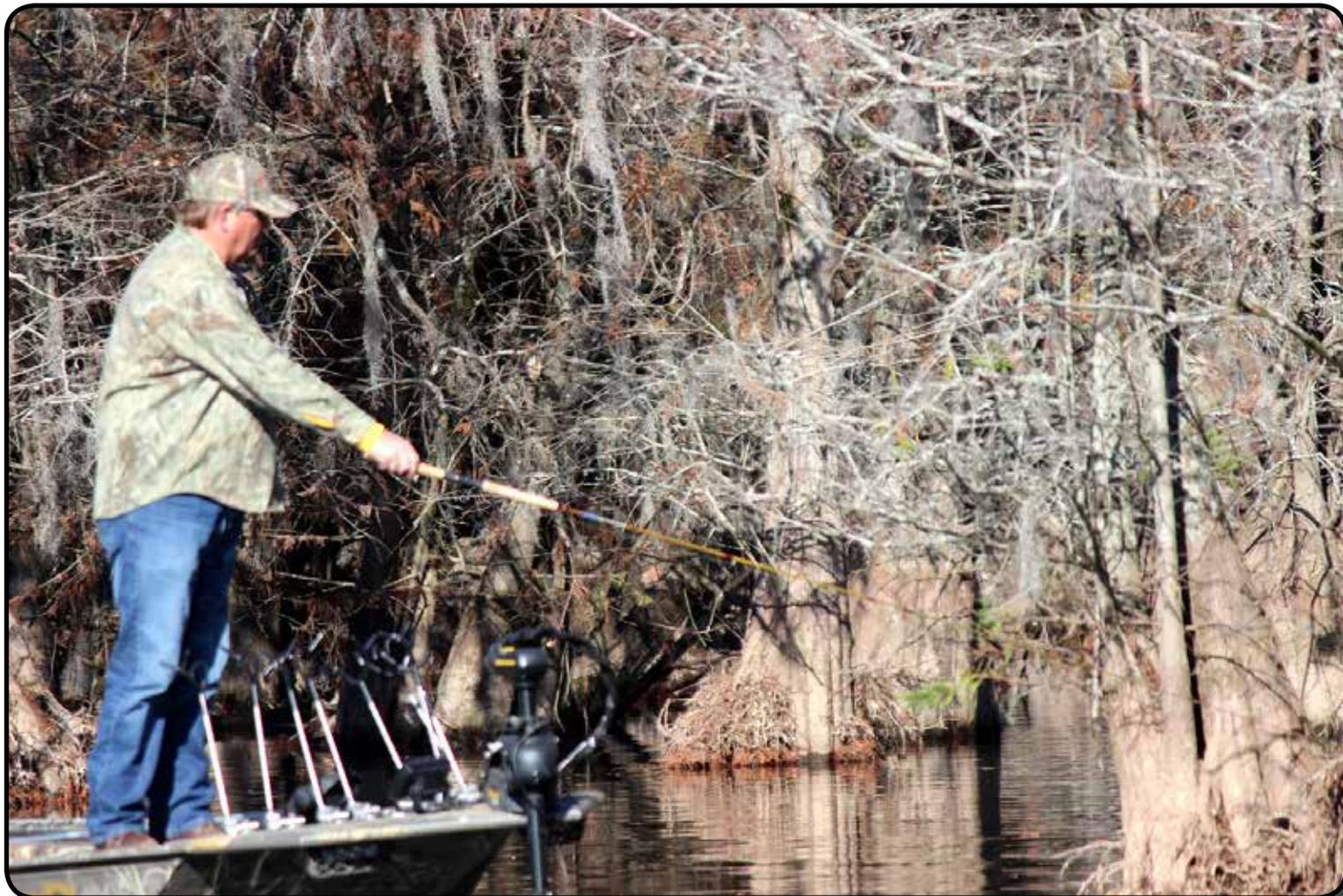
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and in clear water Blue Ice or Double Silver Rainbow color.

Whitey Outlaw, B'n'M, Rockport Rattler, Driftmaster and Lucas Oil pro staff member likes to single pole for crappie that are moving into or in spawning grounds. He said it is easier to cover a lot more water with a single pole as you're less likely to get hung up. The key tip is "don't soak your bait in a brush pile for very long. Drop your bait into the grass hole or brush pile, jig it a couple of times and if you don't get a bite, move onto the next drop". If the crappie is there, they'll get it very soon if not as the bait falls". Whitey likes to use a 10 foot B'n'M Santee Elite rod with 8 to 10 pound test Vicious line. Tied to his line he likes a 1/16th ounce Rockport Rattler jig dressed with a Mid-south tube or Crappie Magnet. Whitey's best tip is to fish the heaviest cover possible and

You can't do this while spider rigging but on the ice you can "chase" crappie with a hot stove and a venison burger.

single poling is the only way to do it.

Ronnie Capps and Steve Coleman, 8 times world champions like to spider rig for crappie that are moving into spawning areas and do the same as they spawn. Once the fish stage up for the spawn, they will use a single 1/8th ounce jig on their poles. They will also fish these jigs as shallow as 18 inches. When fishing areas with cover, they will only use 6 poles. They will use the B'n'M Capps/Colman Series trolling rods and they use all 3 sizes (12', 14' and 16') at the same time. Their best tip is once you find a small area with cover that is holding fish, power pole down and let the fish come to you.

Kent Driscoll, better known for his ability to pull crank baits will spider rig using a single jig tipped with a minnow on each pole as the crappie are moving into the spawning area. Once the crappies have moved into very shallow water with cover, he then likes to single pole for the fish. He likes using a 16 foot B'n'M PST pole with a ¼ ounce jig that has a 3/0 hook dressed with a Fin Commander Crappie Magnet and tipped with a minnow. His tip is to use Hi-vis line so you can watch for any unusual movement that indicates a bite.

“First look for docks that have fishing boats or fish baskets in them...”

Travis Bullock, Mid-State Seed pro staffer from Laurie, Missouri, likes single poling for crappie as they move in for the spawn and during the spawn. One of his recommendations is for lakes with docks, shoot the docks as crappie will stage and spawn on them. He said, “First look for docks that have fishing boats or fish baskets in them as they are more apt to have buried brush piles that will hold more fish. Pole docks tend to hold more than floating docks”. For single poling, he likes to use a 1/16th ounce Sweetheart jig dressed with a Bobby Garland Slab Slay'R. He essentially uses the same type bait for dock shooting. Travis told us, he grew up fishing using a single pole and loves to feel the trump!

Having spoken with several other crappie tournament fishermen, most stated the same thing, spider rig as the fish move towards and onto spawning grounds. Once the crappies are in spawning areas especially those laden with cover, single poling is the way to go. As with anything there is always an exception to the rule. There are no arguments with the success that Capps/Coleman or Blackley has enjoyed over the years using the spider rig method.



Kent Driscoll uses whichever technique works best for the situation. Here's a crappie caught while jigging with a single pole.

Not sure if we have been able to answer the question, spider rig or single pole just before the spawn, but there are some good tips for us all to catch more fish. Practice good water safety and tight lines.

 - Ron Wong

TOP LAKES

by Tim Huffman

Top 10 Lakes for 2018

Which is your top lake pick? Gathering lake information has been interesting and informative. This list uses a formula of five factors with each given different degrees of importance. You, and everyone else, would have a different list because there is no right or wrong.

#1 Grenada Lake, MS

It was number #1 last year, is #1 this year, and will likely be #1 next year. The 35,000 acres provides deep and shallow water, ledges, stumps, trees and plenty of shallow spawning flats. Mix super-fast growth rates with good management practices and it earns its title of "Home of the 3-Pound Crappie".

The third week of March is usually peak time to catch a really heavy fish. It's been cooler than normal in January and early February so the timeframe may be a week later this year depending upon temperatures in March. After the spawn, look for fish moving out but still relatively shallow. When waters warm the lake becomes very good for trolling crankbaits.

#2 Washington, MS

Washington is relatively small but it has big reputation for large fish. It was in the #2 spot last year too, but is barely holding on due to big fish numbers falling some, maybe due to extreme pressure and being an easy-to-fish lake. Flats 5 to 8 feet deep along with 15 foot areas provide a variety of depths. Growth rates are great with a four-year-old being two or more pounds.

Slow trolling is a good pick but long lining is very popular due to limited cover. Try curly tail style jigs in any season and crankbaits from spring through fall.

#3 Sardis, MS

Sardis held this spot last year and is holding on strong. There are whopper crappie to be caught but it's best known as having great numbers of good 1.5-pound plus crappie, more numbers than most other MS lakes. High points include: abundant, good fish; good lake for any technique; great summer crankbait lake;



and a fantastic power trolling lake from spring through fall.

Note: Similar to other MS lakes, Sardis quickly becomes dangerous with high wind so pay attention and watch weather reports. Also, summer recreation traffic is bad so fish early hours during hot weather.

#4 Santee Cooper, SC

The Marion/Moultrie Lakes jumps from #12 last year to #4. The two lakes combine to create over 170,000 acres of diverse habitat. Fishermen say this system is making a good comeback as a producer quality fish in good numbers. It's not the easiest to fish due to size and various types of habitat. A guide is good idea for the first day or two.

Santee high marks include: beautiful, unique, back-in-time atmosphere; variety of depths and cover; numbers of good fish possible. A top pick is springtime vertical jigging in the vegetation for black slabs.

#5 Lake Fork, TX

Lake Fork jumped two spots from last year. Several different techniques work but it has taken top billing as the best jigging lake in the country. Over 27,000 acres with thousands of acres of standing timber makes it a jigging paradise. Excellent, huge slabs have been common for the past few years and more are waiting to be caught.

6. Darbonne, LA

Dropping a spot from last year, this is still a bucket-list place to fish. Though numbers of quality fish were down last spring, probably due to low water overharvest, it's a place offering any style of fishing and numbers of awesome 2-plus pound fish.

7. AL River, AL

The Alabama River dropped a spot from last year. It's difficult to rate because of its inconsistency. Constantly changing water levels, color and current makes it a challenge. However, when timing is right,

it produces large quality fish from both the river and creeks with miles and mile of fishing.

8. Arklabutla, MS

Arklabutla stays in the same spot only because of the hog crappie it produces. It's a hit-and-miss lake so there may be several bad trips between every good one. Last year was good. It's worth a try for a monster wall-hanger.

9. St. Johns River, FL

The St. Johns River is made up of several different waters along with the river itself, so they all have an influence on this ranking. It makes the list even though numbers of quality fish are getting more to find. But, it has the prettiest crappie in the country. It's a place to watch an alligator, have a manatee swim by the boat, and catch a crappie, all at the same time. Priceless.

10. Monroe Lake, FL

Monroe, Florida, jumps three spots to squeeze into the #10 position. It's part of the St. John's system and earns high marks because of the numbers of good, average fish with a few kickers, and, it is a great January-February spot for a fisherman to start the year without freezing to death.

For a complete list of the Top 50 Lakes for 2018, go to www.monstercrappie.com



ONE LAST CAST

(reprint compliments of TTI-Blakemore)

TJ Stallings, PR/Marketing Manager TTI-Blakemore. TJ was a life long advocate of conservation and dedicated to teaching others the world of fishing. His selfless acts of compassion for people and passion for the outdoors was quality that others should follow.

His achievements included numerous outdoor writer awards, a patented hook design, accomplished photographer with multiple magazine covers, countless lure designs for TTI-Blakemore, dozens of species of fish caught and biologically studied plus the admiration and respect of the entire angling industry.

He'll always be missed but not forgotten. Just look around the next body of water that you fish and know that TJ had an impact on it in some way. When you catch your next fish be sure to thank TJ for his efforts in making your day exceptional.

Thanks for all you did, TJ.
With respect and admiration,
Your friends and family



2018 Crappie USA Trail



Schedule of Events

Logan Martin, AL	02/17/18
Weiss Lake, AL	02/24/18
Lake Wylie, NC	03/03/18
TennTom, MS	03/03/18
Lake Guntersville, AL	03/10/18
Lake of Egypt, IL	03/16-17/18
Old Hickory, TN	03/23-24/18
Pickwick Wilson, AL	03/31/18
Lk Cumberland, KY	04/07/18
Barkley-Ky Lakes, KY	04/13-14/18
Green River Lake, KY	04/20-21/18
Gmd Lk St Marys, OH	04/27-28/18
Cave Run, KY	05/04-05/18
Miss. Sal., IN	05/12/18
Monroe, IN	05/19/18
Carlyle, IL	09/22/18
2018 Early Bird @ Barkley-KY Lakes, KY	11/02-03/18

Crappie USA

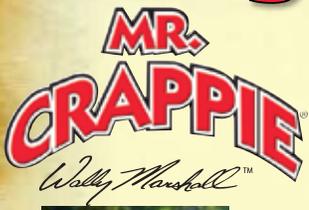
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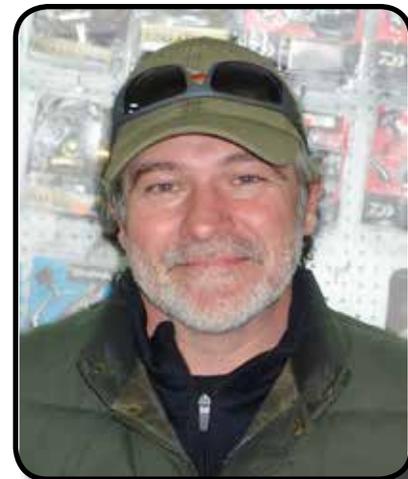
MARCH TIP: Jigs and a Hard Bottom

by Bart Gillon

My first tip is to keep it simple and use jigs. There are times of the year I want a crappie but in March the crappie are feeding up preparing for the spawn so jigs are better for the aggressive fish. If there are any doubts about not having a minnow, just tip the jig with one. When fun fishing I seldom add a minnow but when tournament fishing I'll always tip with a minnow just because of old habits and confidence.

In the spring the fish will look for a harder bottom to spawn on. Most lakes and rivers will have some sand or rock gravel bottoms. On Reelfoot Lake it might be log. You can find these bottoms by searching and checking, but anyone with modern, advanced electronics can turn the sensitivity up and find the hard bottoms.

Bart Gillon had four top ten finishes in national tournaments in 2017. He is sponsored by Mr. Crappie and Strike King, and is owner of Rod Safe, a system for locking and transporting rods.



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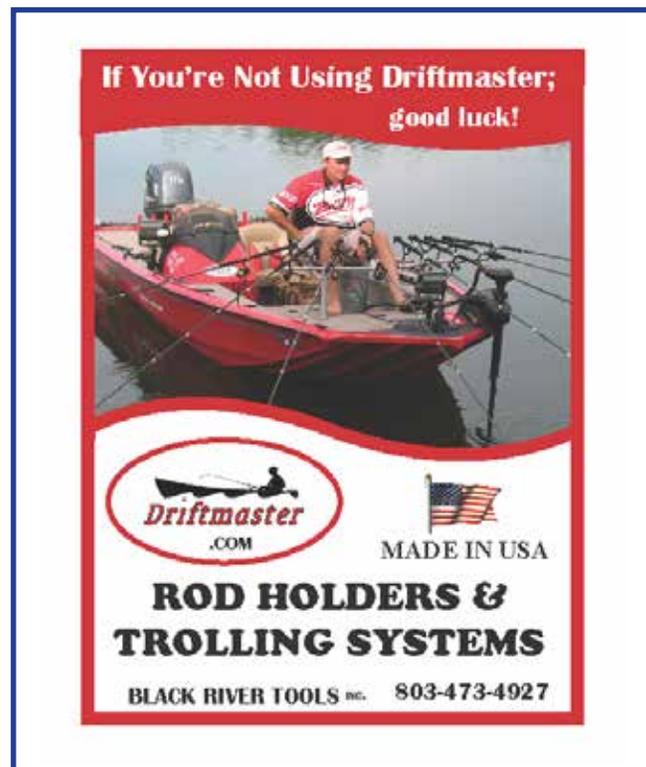


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Fishing Funny's

by Jonny Hawkins



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Crappie Basics #158

Look Shallow

March Tip. "Look shallower than where you think the fish should be. It's something that has taken place for years and so many people miss it because it doesn't compute that fish should be in such shallow water. Most people don't believe it but everyone should try the shallowest of water where they fish and they may be surprised at the outcome."

–Todd Huckabee, Oklahoma Fishing Guide





Crappie Crispy Strips & Breakfast Taco

Golden, tasty strips of crappie fillets will become most pleasing after the batter ingredients have had time to mingle for at least an hour but longer is better; even up to five days of mingling. The added time becomes an enhancer as the beer and spices make their magic with the flour. Heck, it'll make your tongue slap your face begging for more. So don't be skimping with the fish. Crappie will be the last but indispensable element to join the other components creating fabulous fried fish sticks. I recommend stirring the batter once a day to let the tasty molecules marry.

- 1 pound crappie fillets, cut into finger-like strips
- 12 ounces ale or 12 ounces any full-bodied beer
- 1 1/2 cups corn flour (see below)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper (or more to suit your taste)
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- Canola oil for frying

Pour beer into a large bowl. Add the corn flour, salt, paprika and cayenne to the bowl and whisk until you have light and frothy batter. Refrigerate for a least an hour but up to five days. In a deep fryer or deep skillet, heat a minimum of two inches of oil to 375 degrees F. Dredge fillets in flour, shaking off any excess, and then dip them in the beer batter, coating them well. Fry in oil until golden. Drain on paper towels and serve with lemon wedges, tartar sauce and a hot sauce of your choosing. Be warned: you'll want more than you've cooked.

Corn Flour: Used in Crispy Crappie and Breakfast Taco recipes.

A powdery flour made of finely ground

cornmeal and shouldn't be confused with cornstarch. The exception is in British and Australian recipes where the term "cornflour" is used synonymously with the U.S. word cornstarch. Corn flour comes in yellow and white and is used for breading and in combination with other flours in baked goods. Corn flour is milled from the whole kernel, while cornstarch, (a thickening agent) is obtained from the endosperm portion of the kernel.

Masa Harina is a special corn flour that is the basic ingredient for corn tortillas. White corn flour blends well with other food ingredients and can be blended with wheat flour to reduce gluten in cakes, cookies, pastries and crackers. White corn flour is used as a filler, binder and thickener in cookies, pastries and meat industries.

Masa Harina has been soaked and cooked in an alkaline solution. It is used for making corn tortillas, tamales, pupusas and many other Latin American dishes. The full name is masa de maíz; the dried and powdered form is called masa harina, masa de harina and sometimes Maseca, the name of a leading commercial brand. It is reconstituted with water before use.

In Spanish masa harina translates to "dough flour" and can refer to many types of dough in addition to the specific subject of the following recipe.

Breakfast Taco

- 1 dozen large eggs
- Salt and black pepper
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 russet potato (8 ounces), peeled, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 1 jalapeño chili: stemmed, seeded and minced

Tip. When cooking eggs, pay attention to your pan's thickness because

the thickness will affect the cooking time. If you're using an electric stovetop for your eggs, heat a second burner on low and move the skillet to it when it's time to adjust the heat. You can substitute store-bought tortillas for the homemade, but why not create your own?

Whisk eggs, 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon pepper in bowl until thoroughly combined and mixture is pure yellow. Set aside. Melt butter in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add potato and 1/4 teaspoon salt and cook until tender. Add onion and jalapeño and cook until vegetables are softened and lightly browned. Add egg mixture and stir constantly using a spatula. Firmly scrape along bottom and sides of skillet until eggs begin to clump and spatula leaves trail on bottom of skillet. Reduce heat to low. Gently but constantly fold egg mixture until clumped and slightly wet. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Fill tortillas with egg mixture and serve immediately offering salsa, Monterey Jack, scallions and lime wedges separately.

Corn Flour Tortillas

Your homemade tortillas will be thicker, fresher, chewier and altogether different and better than the store-bought flattened corn cakes.

- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 cups cornmeal
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup warm water (110 degrees F)

In a large bowl, stir together the flour and cornmeal. Add baking powder and salt. Mix together well with warm water. On a floured surface, knead dough until smooth. Divide dough into 10 to 12 pieces. Flatten each piece of dough by hand and then roll into 8- to 9-inch round tortilla. Heat a large skillet over medium heat. Lightly grease the hot pan and place one tortilla in the pan. Cook tortilla until light brown, turning to

ensure equal browning. Repeat process to make remaining tortillas.

TIP: When you purchase food items at your local grocery store, you have probably noticed a printed sell by date, use by date or best before date on the packaging or item itself and wonder just what that date really means. At eatbydate.com the staff is trying to make sure that you are fully informed about the true "shelf life" of the most popular food items. Most foods are still edible after the printed expiration dates have passed.

Three More Facts:

1. Food Can Be Sold After a Date Expires – Stores are not legally required to remove food from the shelf once the expiration date has passed. The expiration dates are strictly "advisory" in nature and are left entirely to the discretion of the manufacturer, thus not truly indicative of an item's true Shelf Life.

2. Food Dates Are Not Required By Law – With the exception of infant formula and baby food, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not require food companies to place dates on their food products. The only requirement is that the food is wholesome and fit for consumption.

3. Laws Vary By State – States have varying food dating laws. For example, many states require that milk and other perishables be sold before the expiration date, while others do not.



FLORIDA CRAPPIE CLUB

LAKE HENDERSON

JANUARY 6th

- | | |
|------------------|------|
| 1. Sam Cooper | 7.1 |
| 2. Bobby Hill | 6.09 |
| 3. Tommy Kinsler | 6.06 |
| 4. Scott/Wendell | 6.04 |
| 5. Moose/William | 2.11 |

BIG FISH

- | | |
|---------------|------|
| 1. Sam Cooper | 1.14 |
|---------------|------|

EAST TENNESSEE CRAPPIE CLUB

WATTS BAR LAKE

JANUARY 20TH

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| 1. Tim Irwin/Jim Huber | 8.65 |
| 2. Darren Caughron/Tracy Caughron | |
| 3. Scott Bunch/Neil Alvis | |

BIG FISH

- | | |
|------------------------|------|
| 1. Tim Irwin/Jim Huber | 1.46 |
|------------------------|------|

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NORTHEAST GEORGIA CRAPPIE CLUB

LAKE HARTWELL

JANUARY 20th

1. Shaun Mcabee/Joe Orbe	7.04
--------------------------	------

CRAPPIE MASTERS

ST JOHNS RIVER

JANUARY 27th - 28th

1. Damon Riggins/Allen Bates	28.39
2. Paul Turner/Elizabeth Turner	27.55
3. William Hinson/Tommy Hinson	25.24
4. Len Litwinec/Bob Bourque	24.74
5. Larry Durden/Steve Durden	24.49

BIG FISH

1. Tommy Skarlis/Mike Baker	2.97
2. Jesse Shomake/Shane Cappel	2.97

MALE/FEMALE

1. Eric Howard/Leann Howard	23.61
-----------------------------	-------

ADULT/YOUTH

1. Tracy Tripp/Matthew Tripp	20.24
------------------------------	-------

CRAPPIE MASTERS

LAKE TALQUIN

FEBRUARY 2nd - 3rd

1. George Parker/Tim Eberly	25.25
2. Billy Williams/Scott Williams	23.31
3. Jonquarius Richardson/Derrick Haynes	22.93
4. Jason Little/Craig Chapman	22.89
5. Al Green/Alan Green	21.87

BIG FISH

1. Jonquarius Richardson/Derrick Haynes	2.71
---	------

MALE/FEMALE

1. Eric Howard/Leann Howard	19.63
-----------------------------	-------

ADULT/YOUTH

1. David Simmons/Jaxon Hall	11.15
-----------------------------	-------



MIDDLE TENNESSEE CRAPPIE CLUB

WOODS RESERVOIR

FEBRUARY 3rd

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------|
| 1. Joey Davis/Dave Odell | 6.92 |
| 2. Terry Spray/Trent Spray | 6.76 |
| 3. Robert Baker/Larry Britton | 5.36 |

BIG FISH

- | | |
|----------------------------|------|
| 1. Terry Spray/Trent Spray | 1.56 |
|----------------------------|------|

CAROLINA CRAPPIE ASSOCIATION

HIGH ROCK

FEBRUARY 10th

- | | |
|--------------------|------|
| 1. Quan/Grimm | 8.66 |
| 2. Perrell/Perrell | 7.3 |
| 3. Lundy | 7.17 |
| 4. Eudy/Koontz | 7.03 |
| 5. Potts/Shore | 6.73 |

BIG FISH

- | | |
|------------------|------|
| 1. Quan/Grimm | 1.63 |
| 2. Smith/Harding | 1.61 |

FLORIDA CRAPPIE CLUB

JOHNS LAKE

FEBRUARY 10th

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------|
| 1. Wayne Loy/Bill Fee | 13.01 |
| 2. Darryl Cole/Terri Cole | 9.08 |
| 3. Don Egnor/Aubrey Whitt | 8.1 |

BIG FISH

- | | |
|-----------------------|------|
| 1. Wayne Loy/Bill Fee | 2.05 |
|-----------------------|------|

CHATTANOOGA CRAPPIE CLUB

CHESTER FROST

FEBRUARY 11th

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------|
| 1. Brian Howard | 8.77 |
| 2. Mike Johnston/Kyler Brewer | 7.05 |

BIG FISH

- | | |
|-----------------|------|
| 1. Brian Howard | 1.47 |
|-----------------|------|

BEAVER LAKE CRAPPIE ASSOCIATION

BEAVER LAKE

FEBRUARY 17th

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------|
| 1. Rance Carter/Glen Carter | 8.05 |
| 2. Payton Usery/Cody Usery | 7.91 |
| 3. Clayton Price/Michael Price | 6.97 |
| 4. Matt | 6.85 |
| 5. Clay/Todd | 6.5 |

BIG FISH

- | | |
|-----------------------------|------|
| 1. Rance Carter/Glen Carter | 1.89 |
|-----------------------------|------|

CRAPPIE ANGLERS OF TEXAS

LEWISVILLE

FEBRUARY 17th**DIVISION 1**

1. Jack Wiggins/Phillip Hurlbut/Wiggins JR	9.29
2. Pat Martin/Gary Sims	6.41
3. Brian Carter/Wes Belcher	6.13
4. Anh Nguyen/Carl Ellis	5.38
5. Todd Froebe/Clay Gann	5.3

BIG FISH

1. Jack Wiggins/Phillip Hurlbut/Wiggins JR	1.72
--	------

DIVISION 2

1. Michael Pettis/Kevin Guffey	7.18
2. Charlie Brown/Steve Giles	6.77
3. Brandon Miles/Steve Goncalves	5.64
4. Scott Bradshaw/Jody Bradshaw	5.63
5. Ralston Wright/Ronnie Wright	5.43

BIG FISH

1. Charlie Brown/Steve Giles	1.99
------------------------------	------

CRAPPIE USA

LOGAN MARTIN LAKE

FEBRUARY 17th**AMATEUR DIVISION**

1. Frank Jackson/James Stuart	12.1
2. Joe Partenza/Richard Malcom	11.87
3. Gary Kendrick/Blake Kendrick	11.09
4. Donald Hicken/Chad Hill	11.02
5. Tom Gant/James Causey	10.29

PRO DIVISION

1. Forrest Walker/Jacob Walker	12.92
2. Steve Ferguson/FRANK Finley	12.67
3. Adam Mobbs/Carlton Teague	11.67
4. Jonathan Phillips/Dewayne Scott	11.33
5. Rodney Talley/John Baker	11.14

BIG FISH

1. Andy Adams/Braxton Davis	2.51
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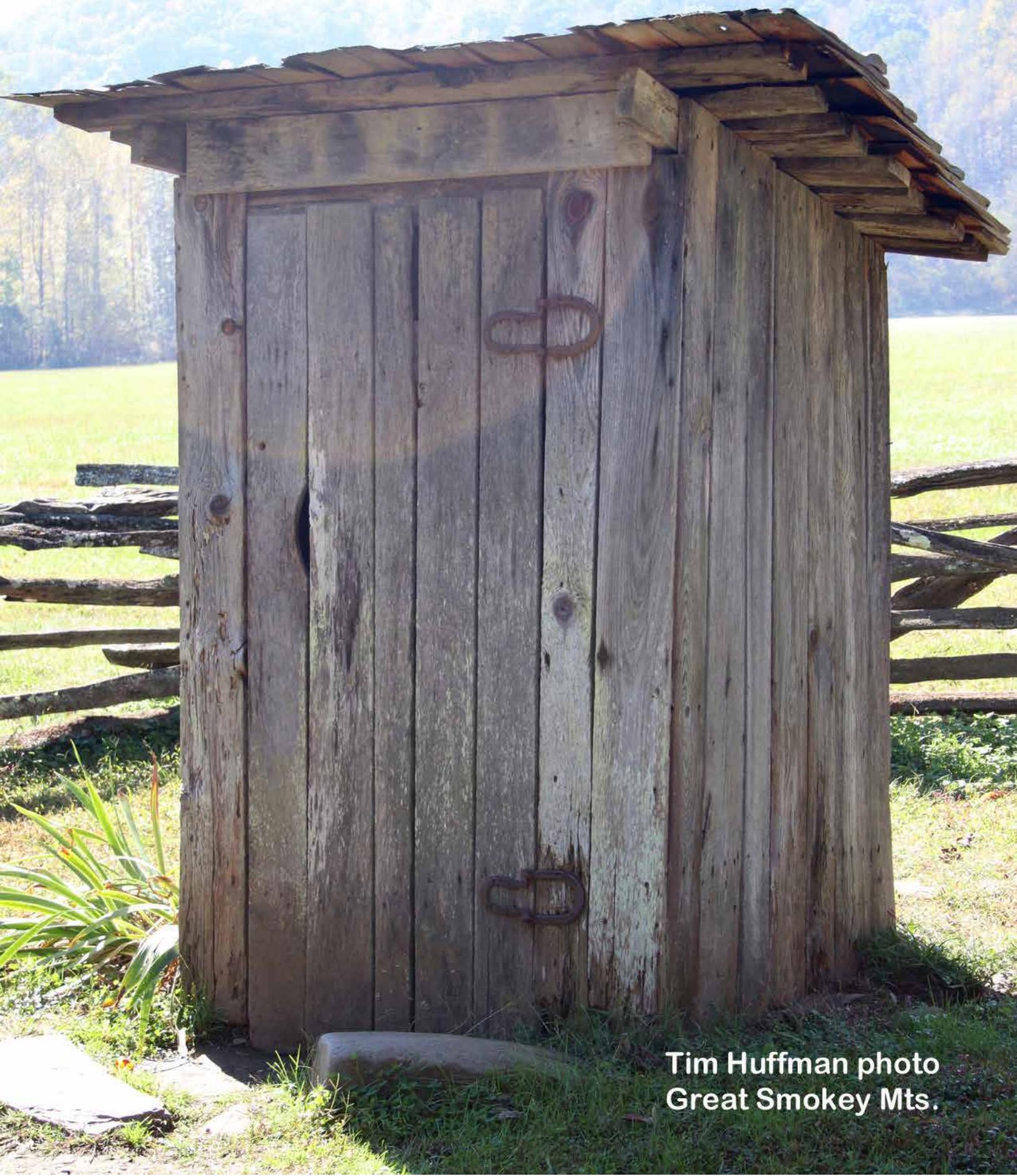
CRAPPIE CALENDAR

MAR	3rd	CRAPPIE MASTERS	WEISS LAKE	1st LEG OF AL ST Champ.
MAR	3rd	CRAPPIE USA	LAKW WYLIE & TENN-TOM	CLUB
MAR	3rd	HOI CRAPPIE CLUB	SANGCHRIS LAKE	CLUB
MAR	4th	CHATTANOOGA	CHESTER FROST PARK	CLASSIC
MAR	4th	ULTIMATE PANFISH LEAGUE	EAST RUSH LAKE	CLUB
MAR	10th	CENTRAL ALABAMA CRAPPIE CLUB	LAKE JORDAN/BONNERS POINT	CLUB
MAR	10th	CRAPPIE MASTERS	LAKES WASH,LEE PARADISE FERG. WHITT.	1st Leg of MS St Champ.
MAR	10th	CRAPPIE NUTZ	BLACK SHEAR	OPEN
MAR	10th	CRAPPIE USA	LAKE GUNTERSVILLE	CLUB
MAR	10th	NORTHEAST GEORGIA	GILLS POINT	CLUB
MAR	16th - 17th	AMERICAN CRAPPIE TRAIL	NEELY HENRY	CLUB
MAR	16th - 17th	CRAPPIE USA	LAKE OF EGYPT	SUPER EVENT
MAR	17th	BEAVER LAKE CRAPPIE ASSOC.	BEAVER LAKE	CLUB
MAR	17th	CRAPPIE ANGLERS OF TEXAS	LAKE MILLWOOD	QUALIFIER
MAR	17th	EAST TN CRAPPIE CLUB	WATTS BAR LAKE	CLUB
MAR	17th	MAGNOLIA	GRENADA	CLUB
MAR	17th	SHOALS CRAPPIE	WHEELER LAKE	CLUB
MAR	17th	WAPPAPELLO	WAPPAPELLO LAKE	CLASSIC
MAR	17th - 18th	EASTERN MO CRAPPIE CLUB	LAKE OF THE OZARKS	CLUB
MAR	23rd - 24th	CAROLINA CRAPPIE ASSOC	LAKE JORDAN	CLASSIC
MAR	23rd - 24th	CRAPPIE MASTERS	GRENADA LAKE	Final leg of MS ST Champ.
MAR	23rd - 24th	CRAPPIE USA	OLD HICKORY LAKE	SUPER EVENT
MAR	24th	PEACH STATE	BLACKSHEAR	CLUB
MAR	24th	SPRINGFIELD CRAPPIE	LAKE SANGCHRIS	OPEN BUDDY
MAR	25th	CENTRAL ILLINOIS	CLINTON LAKE	CLUB
MAR	25th	SOUTHERN ILLINOIS	CRAB ORCHARD	CLUB
MAR	31st	CRAPPIE ANGLERS OF TEXAS	LAKE FORK/CRAPPIEFEST	INDIVIDUAL
MAR	31st	CRAPPIE USA	PICKWICK/WILSON	CLUB
MAR	31st	INDIANA SLAB MASTERS	PATOKA	CLUB
MAR	31st	NORTHEAST GEORGIA	HARTWELL LAKE	CLUB
APR	7th	CRAPPIE ANGLERS OF TEXAS	LAKE FORK/CRAPPIE MASTERS	CLUB
APR	7th	CRAPPIE MASTERS	LAKE FORK	1 POLE ULTIMATE CHALLENGE
APR	7th	CRAPPIE USA	LAKE CUMBERLAND	CLUB
APR	7th	CRAPPIE NUTZ	BLACKSHEAR	CLASSIC
APR	7th	EASTERN MO CRAPPIE CLUB	MARK TWAIN LAKE	CLUB
APR	7th	SOUTHWEST MISSOURI	BULL SHOALS LAKE	CLUB
APR	8th	SOUTHERN ILLINOIS	LAKE OF EGYPT	CLUB
APR	13th - 14th	CRAPPIE USA	BARKLEY/KENTUCKY LAKES	SUPER EVENT

Club	Contact	Link
AMERICAN CRAPPIE TRAIL	MATT MORGAN	FACEBOOK
BEAVER LAKE CRAPPIE CLUB	PAYTON USERY	FACEBOOK
CAPITOL CRAPPIE CLUB	AUSTIN KNEESKERN	FACEBOOK
CAROLINA CRAPPIE ASSOCIATION	RICK EUDY	FACEBOOK
CENTRAL ALABAMA CRAPPIE CLUB	DAN DANNANMUELLER/JONATHAN PHILLIPS	FACEBOOK
CENTRAL ARKANSAS CRAPPIE CLUB	JASON WESTERBERG	FACEBOOK
CENTRAL ILLINOIS CRAPPIE CLUB	JOE SCHRADER/GREG FOLEY	FACEBOOK
CHATTANOOGA CRAPPIE CLUB	MIKE JOHNSTON/JIM EDMISTER	FACEBOOK
CRAPPIE ANGLERS OF TEXAS	JAY REVE	FACEBOOK
CRAPPIE MASTERS	MIKE VALENTINE	FACEBOOK
CRAPPIE USA	DARRELL VAN VACTOR	FACEBOOK
CRAPPIENUTZ MS	ROBERT SMITH/JOE FAIRCLOTH	FACEBOOK
EAST TENNESSEE CRAPPIE CLUB	MATT	FACEBOOK
EAST TEXAS CRAPPIE SERIES	CREEKSIDE SPORTS-903-849-2634	FACEBOOK
EASTERN MISSOURI CRAPPIE CLUB	STEVE PEROTTO	FACEBOOK
FLORIDA CRAPPIE CLUB	DARRELL COLE	FACEBOOK
GRAND LAKE CRAPPIE SERIES OH	JEFF	WEBSITE
HOI CRAPPIE CLUB	CHAD ANDERSON	FACEBOOK
INDIANNA SLAB MASTERS	JOE LONG/DAMON PHILLIPS	FACEBOOK
KANSAS CRAPPIE CLUB	JOE BRAGG/FRANK HAIDUSEK	FACEBOOK
MAGNOLIA CRAPPIE CLUB	MICHAEL NOWELL/ROGER WOMACK	FACEBOOK
MIDDLE TENNESSEE CRAPPIE CLUB	TOBY IVEY	FACEBOOK
NORTHEAST GEORGIA CRAPPIE	KEVIN STRONG	FACEBOOK
NORTHEAST OHIO CRAPPIE CLUB	DAN ELKO/ROBERT ELKO	FACEBOOK
OKLAHOMA CRAPPIE TRAIL	DARRELL AND BRIAN	FACEBOOK
PEACH STATE CRAPPIE CLUB	ROBERT SMITH	FACEBOOK
SHOALS AREA CRAPPIE ASSOCIATION	KEITH DODD	FACEBOOK
SOUTHERN ILLINOIS CRAPPIE	CHAD HAMSON	FACEBOOK
SOUTHWEST MISSOURI CRAPPIE	KERRY YATES	FACEBOOK
GA SLABMASTERS TOURNAMENT TRAIL	JAMIE MOORE/DAN SIDLE	FACEBOOK
SPRINGFIELD CRAPPIE CLUB IL	JERRY JALLAS/RICK MONTTOOTH	FACEBOOK
TWIN LAKES CRAPPIE CLUB		FACEBOOK
WAPPAPELLO CRAPPIE CLUB MO		FaceBook



*It's time to go.
See you next month. Good crappie fishing to you..*



Tim Huffman photo
Great Smokey Mts.