Early Spring Tactics; Kayaks
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Spring is in the air for sure! March in the south signals the change from bare trees, no flowers and the cold to greener colors and warmer temperatures. Everything in nature awaits the warmer temperatures, including crappie. Rising temperatures, more sunlight, and longer daylight hours brings everything to life. As water temperatures rise into the fifties, crappie move out of the depths where they have lived during the harsh winter conditions.

Recently, I conducted many crappie seminars. I described and showed new techniques to catch crappie, especially steps for locating them during varying conditions. Specifically, many wanted to know what the crappie do during the prespawn, spawn and post spawn.

In this edition of Crappie Now, our writers discuss these techniques along with the equipment and tackle to help catch these rejuvenated fish that seek to eat, and spawn new offspring for the future.

Crappie Now is also offering a new way this spring for you to obtain a history of techniques. During March, we will be archiving each of the first four years of Crappie Now (2011, 12, 13, and 14) onto thumb drives and selling each year’s editions, twelve (12) per year, for a very low cost of $9.99 plus handling and shipping. Then, in January 2017 we will offer all editions for 2015 at that same low price.

Crappie Now is in its sixth year of publishing. We began publishing it in 2011. Our model has been and will remain to publish free monthly crappie how-to content to anyone who wants to learn more about crappie fishing. Each month is written specific to the crappie fishing techniques for that month and season. All content for the current and one previous year will remain free.

Please watch for the offering and how to pay for the archived digital library on our Face Book page, constant contact blasts and website. Enjoy catching some fresh fillets in March and know we will enjoy seeing you as we travel the country.

God Bless,
Dan Dannenmueller, Publisher
Wood and Brush. Spawning time, and the catchin’ is easy. Or maybe not. But it’s a good bet that sometime when the water warms and the crappie come in to spawn there are places where you can slip on the waders and enjoy great crappie fishing.

**Wood & Brush Combo**

Wood and brush in shallow water is to crappie what a meat-lovers pizza is to a fan watching the Super Bowl on TV. They just go together. For crappie, there is no better time than when the waters warm and fish move into the shallow water.

Cover can be anything. However, wood has a special attraction. Whether it’s algae, shade, ambush spot, protection, heat absorption, or all of the above, it draws and holds fish.

**Wade Fishing**

Without a doubt, the biggest advantage to wading is a stealth approach. A fisherman can sneak up on a fish without the fish knowing he is there. It’s easy to move quietly, something not possible in a boat. There are no slapping sounds, lids slapping in the boat, trolling motor noise or the pressure in the water from the boat. The key is to move slowly, shuffling feet in small steps while detecting bottom depth changes and underwater cover.

“The water is still cool so it’s no time to fall,” says wading expert, Kent Driscoll. “A firm bottom is best. Mud can bog you down making falls more likely. Plus, harder bottoms are what crappie prefer.”

Driscoll says, “John Harrison and I found some old bream beds where crappie had moved into during high water. We waded in and could feel the depressions. The hard surface was important to the spawning crappie. We dropped jigs down on about four inches of line and the crappie smoked them. This is not uncommon when wade fishing.”

Eight times Classic Champ, Ronnie Capps has waded for many years. He agrees that it is seasonal and not a good tactic in many waters. But where it works, it’s great. He says the reason it works so well in the Mississippi lakes where it’s so popular is water clarity. Visibility is often one to four inches in the water. The muddy stain mixed with acres of shallow water with wood cover makes these lakes outstanding for wade fishing in the spring.

**Details**

Both pros agree that water temperatures are very important. During and after the spawn are ideal times. Spawning starts around 60 degrees and continues until spawning is complete and the males leave the beds. The prime wade period is likely to be two to three weeks most years but it’s possible it could last much longer.

One of the best tips is to look for the warmest water in the spring. It’s likely that south coves will be colder than northern coves. A couple degrees difference is all it takes to make one side of the lake better than the other. Southern winds and warmer sun on the northern sides causes them to warm first so that’s where you need to start.
Typical wading cover includes stumps, trees and logs. Ronnie Capps works these shallow water large wood covers.
Also, very shallow, muddy water warms faster than clearer, deeper water. Check water temperatures often.

More Tips
Ronnie Capps has used canoes and kayaks long before they were thought of for chasing typical lake fish. He says spring shallow water or any time of year when the water is high are good times to wade.

“It’s all about getting where the crappie are and where a large boat isn’t the best choice or can’t get to,” says Capps. “It’s always been a way to catch fish but except in a few isolated spots, fishermen didn’t take advantage.”

Capps continues, “The good thing about wading is a fisherman

Large covers are good targets, but Ronnie Capps says to never overlook the tiniest of sticks... anything a crappie might relate to.
doesn’t have to have a boat but if he does it helps get to more spots. Mississippi fishermen have been wading for many years. Wind doesn’t bother a wade fisherman, it’s easy to sneak in on the fish, and you can get into the thickest cover you want to tackle.”

Another advantage is the ability to fish in high wind. A boat is difficult to handle when it’s bouncing in the waves. Standing in the water provides a stable platform so presentations can be as steady and slow as you want.

Lakes aren’t the only place to wade. River back-outs, farm ponds and any spot where water is shallow, where there are no steep slopes or drops, and good wood/brush covers to fish.

Equipment

The same equipment used for jigging from the boat can be used for wade fishing. In open water fishing of stumps, snags and trees a longer 12-foot pole helps keeps baits away to spook fewer fish. Tight quarters in brush, overhanging limbs, or otherwise restrictive areas stick to a 10-foot, or maybe even a 9-foot pole. A BnM Sam Heaton is a great pole for this technique especially in more open water. Or, a fisherman can opt for a stiffer pole in the thick brush.

Line is personal preference with 15-pound test braid being a popular choice. So is 10-pound test monofilament. Water is dingy so line size isn’t an issue for spooking fish.

It’s possible to use a minnow rig for brush to catch these fish. However, There are many advantages to using a jig with the first reason being easier manipulation. A jig can be placed in spots a minnow rig can’t. A jig stays in good shape for several bites and landed fish so a fisherman spends more time fishing. However, when fishing is tough a minnow can be used to tip a jig.

Colors that are typically good muddy water picks include orange, chartreuse glow and black. Larger jigs that give a big profile and water displacement work great. Scent and attractants are good, too.

Wading is done in Florida, Texas, Alabama, Mississippi and other states. The key is dingy water and a bottom that’s flat and firm enough for wading. High water periods due to floods make many different lakes potential wading spots.

The last tip is to always wade with a partner because the unexpected can happen when wading. A life vest is recommended, too.

- Tim Huffman
Bass Pro Shops
Memphis, TN

Road Trip
by Tim Huffman
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Depending on where you live in up North, early bird anglers may refer to it as the mud bay bite, the canal bite, the backwater bite, or my favorite, the old pad bed bite. Regardless what you choose to call it, this is all about the ice-out crappie bite.

Go Early

Ice out on lakes in my neck of the woods is typically late March. Of course, when winter weather lingers, ice-out may not happen in NW Pennsylvania until around April 1st. In Eastern PA, New Jersey and Maryland, ice out is earlier in March. In New England and the upper Mid-

In the frozen northern tier, black crappies apparently are positioned in shallow bays and canals of lakes prior to ice out because it is possible to catch them there almost immediately after ice disappears.

Jim McClave holds a nice ice-out crappie taken with bobber rig.
West, it is later.

On slow-moving creeks or small rivers which support crappies, the bite begins earlier than it does in lakes. Melting snow increases the flow, pushing water into feeder stream mouths, inlets and oxbow ponds. Locate no-current backwaters with shallow cover, and you will likely find crappies.

Just to be clear, when mentioning flooded backwaters, I am referring to normal spring high water pushing into low spots. If serious flooding occurs, all bets are off in finding crappies in a river system.

The same applies to flood-control impoundments; extremely high water is a wash out for ice-out crappies on these reservoirs, too.

Relatively stable level bodies of water (natural lakes and impoundments which only fluctuate a few feet in the spring) are far better bets for ice-out crappies.

**Go Shallow**

This is not a spawning movement. These crappies are shallow to eat, and sometimes they are found in areas that will not have water when spawning begins much later in the spring.

Exactly where crappies are found in a particular lake depends on the lay of the land. Look for sheltered areas with all these requirements: (1) water depths of two to four feet, certainly no more than five feet; (2) a bottom of dark sediment so it heats quickly from timing is everything for ice-out crappies. Shallow dark bottom areas warm quickly.
Go Early, Go Shallow, Go Small, or Go Home

Go Early

The sun may be shining and the air temperature may seem pleasant enough after a long winter. But the ice has just melted and the water is cold. Crappies are in the shallows to feed on minnows and zooplankton. But getting them to bite is more akin to ice fishing. Keep baits small and fairly motionless. Soak the presentation. Give crappies plenty of time to react.

Many fishermen use tiny ice jigs tipped with maggots and suspended below a float for their early fish. Personally, I miss too many crappies with those itty bitty hooks. Instead I prefer a small minnow on a lightweight, small profile jighead with a #4 hook. Of course my jig-n-minnow is supported by a bobber. Bobbers or floats are critical in keeping your bait suspended above the bottom and right in the crappie zone. During the day, crappies may be three feet deep over four or five feet of water. But as sun goes lower, these crappies

direct sunlight; (3) protection from wind and waves; and (4) some type of cover – stumps, deadfalls, brush, remnant vegetation, dock posts, etc.

On my favorite crappie reservoir, I prefer fishing shallow bays with muck bottom and remnants of last year’s spatterdock beds. Shallow bays or inlets with numerous deadfalls, shallow stumps along the bank or partially submerged brushy shorelines are second on my list. If your lake (or river) has floating log jams in back bays, be sure to check these out, too.

Northern natural lakes often have dug canals allowing lake access from cottage allotments beyond the actual lakeshore. The shores of these canals may be posted, but you may still be able to access these areas by boat. Walled marinas with lots of dock posts are good bets, too – if fishing is permitted from the docks or shore prior to renters putting their boats in the slips.

Go Small

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may move up to one or two feet below the surface. They are reacting to the movement of minnow schools. If you are not getting bites, keep adjusting the bobber setting.

My ice-out rig consists of a 1/24-ounce Bobby Garland Mo’Glo Jighead, small piece of white or silver flake plastic grub on the hook shank with a live fathead minnow hooked through the lower and upper lips. I use a Thill Sliding Crappie

Bryan Stuyvesant cast a bobber rig to a shoreline deadfall in a protected inlet of a large lake.

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Cork which allows me to easily adjust the depth setting. I cast, pitch or sling-shot the rig into tight places with a B’n’M 8’ Buck’s Ultimate rod. Retrieving steadily in the normal way rarely works. Instead, cast or pitch the bobber rig to cover and then let it rest for at least two minutes. If no nibble, slowly retrieve the bobber several feet, stop and let it rest for another two to three minutes. That’s an ice-out retrieve!

**Go NOW**

Timing is everything for ice-out crappies. Shallow dark bottom areas warm quickly. On a thermometer, the water in the protected shallows should register between the mid-30s and the mid-40s for this bite to kick in. This bite does not last long, usually measured in days rather than weeks depending on weather and the heating of the main lake. A slow warming trend provides the longest bite duration – perhaps a bit more than two weeks if lucky. Other years with late ice-out or rapid warming, the bite is over almost as soon as it starts. With water temperature in the main lake area eventually rising towards 50 degrees, baitfish and crappies leave the extreme backwater spots.

You need to be there within days of ice out. If you dilly dally a week or two, by the time you arrive crappies likely have abandoned the extreme shallows. Better to be a few days early than a week late. If you are too early, you can always return. So the best advice is to go fish as soon as ice in your area begins to disappear!

- By Darl Black
BnM Kyle Schoenherr Tip of the Month
Sam Heaton and I have been friends since the late 80’s. I listened to Sam give crappie fishing seminars at Bass Pro Shops in Springfield, Missouri, when there was just one Bass Pro Shop. His combination of humor, great personality and gift for presenting crappie-catching information kept the seminar rooms packed, standing room only. That was about three decades ago, but Sam is still a fan favorite when he enters a room.

I recently caught up with him at the #1 crappie fishing show in the country, the Grizzly Jig Show & Sale in Caruthersville, Missouri.

What about work? “I’ve recently retired from a dream job,” says Heaton. “At Johnson I worked with sales and marketing groups, pro staff, worked on product development and testing, took customers fishing and taught them how to use the equipment. I loved it. But I had been there long enough everyone was tired of hearing the same old stories and my job turned into more of a corporate marketing job than field promotions. Plus, I had no formal education in computers so that was always a struggle for me. I’m 67 now. It was just time to get off the road and home more to my wonderful wife of 16 years, Lysa. We have a lot of things we want to do together.”

The biggest changes you’ve seen in crappie fishing during the past four decades? “Electronics and technique. We use to troll jig and cover water with multiple baits. We had to estimate speed and depths. But now with big sonars, the experts can target specific fish, see their bait down at 15 feet and put it right in front of the fish. So technique are more sophisticated.

“Trolling motors have gone from hand control to automatic deploy, guidance and they link into sonars. I remember in Vietnam in 1970-71 we didn’t have GPS; it was landmark identification and estimated yardage. Today GPS controls everything in the boat and has pinpoint accuracy. Shallow water anchors are not just a physical advantage over heavy anchors but they allow precision boat positioning and a stealth approach. Poles are better and more sensitive. Fishing has progressed more than we could have ever imagined.”

You’ve been a part of the BnM
Pole Company for many years? “Yes, Buck (Simmons) was the pioneer of crappie poles. When I told Buck I wanted to do a signature series of high-quality rods way back when, he said he didn’t think crappie fishermen would pay $35 for a pole, that was a lot of money back then. I promised him I would sell them door to door if he wasn’t able to get fishermen to buy them. Of course they did sell because they were so much lighter and sensitive than the popular fiberglass poles. Today Jack Wells is continuing the great legacy of BnM being the pole leader for crappie fishermen.”

Note: The Sam Heaton Signature Series poles have been updated through the years and are still some of the top-selling poles in the BnM lineup.

Biggest crappie? “Weiss Lake, 3-lb 6-oz, Yellow Creek, chartreuse-black 1/16 tube jig, 1966, shooting a dock. The fish came at me so I didn’t know it was big until she got to me. A great net job by a client allowed me to catch the fish.”

Favorite crappie lake? “Okeechobee. I like fishing vegetation straight up and down being in direct contact with the jig. I’ll put the lake up against most others for numbers of crappie. The down side is wind and how susceptible the crappie are there from cold fronts.”

Fishing hero? “Roland Martin because he never lost his desire to go catch a fish. Curt Gouty, because he had an articulate way to express hunting and fishing.”

American hero? “The men and women who fight to keep our country free.”

Favorite Food? Sweets.
Favorite movies/books? “Jeremiah Johnson; The Legend of Tom Horn. Bleachers by John Gresham.”

Sam Heaton
Born: 1949
Service: Army, Ranger Airborne, Vietnam
Work History: Adult education teacher; Weiss Lake fishing guide 25 years; Crappiethon USA 7 years; Johnson Outdoors Field Promotions Manager, 18 years, retired. Currently guides some for both salt and fresh water fishing.
Pet Peeves? “Constant complainers; those who aren’t grateful for what they have.”

Something people may not know about you? “I was raised country poor, very poor. Our recreation was going up and down the creek bank. My first boat that I owned was the hood of a 1948 Hudson. It was huge, maybe 8 feet long and shaped like a boat. I turned it upside down, put a piece of board in the back and tared it in. I learned to run trotlines on the Coosa River. Now I have a $100,000, 25-foot Ranger with the latest and greatest gadgets you can buy. That’s a long way from a Hudson hood.”

Are you still motivated? “I wish I was fishing right now.”

How would you like to spend your remaining time? “By doing exactly what I’m doing. Guiding some, being in the outdoors fishing and hunting. I’m in relatively good health and am thankful.”

How would you like to be remembered? “As a decent person, outdoorsman, conservationist and advocate for fishing.”

- Tim Huffman
Longtime CrappieNow sponsor, respected bass fisherman and great bait designer, Gary Yamamoto, enters the Bass Fishing Hall of Fame this month. He is in good company as President George H.W. Bush and Billy Murray will also be inducted, joining 59 previously inducted members.

“While serving as both the Vice-President and as our President, George Bush took exceptional interest in fisheries, water access and conservation issues- and is also a pretty good angler himself according to fellow Hall member Ray Scott,” said BFHOF Board president Sammy Lee. “Billy Murray has helped thousands of bass anglers find more fishing success through his involvement with the Bass Fishing Institute and his idea for a traveling ‘Hawg Trough.’ And Gary Yamamoto continues to develop some of the best baits out there, and is an accomplished angler in his own right.”

Gary Yamamoto has carved his legend in bass fishing, but has a crappie line-up of baits, too, including the Yamaminnow, Tiny Ika and 3” Swim Senko. The CrappieNow Magazine staff congratulates this great innovator, fisherman and genuinely nice man on his induction into the hall of fame.
Q: What type line do you use and why?

**Ron Molitor, Mark Twain Lake** - “I use Sufix 6-pound test line. I like the green because I probably see about half my bites so it’s very important. I use the same line for jigging and trolling.”

**Richard Williams, TN** - says, “I use the smallest line I can see. For me, that’s 4-pound test. I do believe that line spooks fish in clear water. The small line works fine for big fish too because anything that is big will be netted. I like the Berkley 100% Fluoro.”

**Whitey Outlaw, SC** - says, “I’ve used Vicious line for many years. Fishing shallow I like 10-pound braid or fluorocarbon because shallow fish are often more like a smallmouth bass when they hit so I need something that will stop that fish without snapping the line.”

**Kyle Schoenherr, IL** - won both the Crappie USA and Crappie Masters Classics in 2015. “We use Gamma 15-pound test white braid. We tie jigs directly to the braid. We use a leader when double-rigging. Braid has no stretch so you have to do something to make up for the stretch you get with monofilament, so we set our drags where they slip some when we set the hook. The only time we won’t use the 15-pound braid is for special situations during tournaments.”
Q: What type line do you use and why?

David Jones, KY - says, “I use Gamma 4-pound high-vis line. Sometimes I might switch to 6-pound for tournaments. Lighter line gives more bait action whether using a minnow or jig. We won our the Crappie USA Championship using 4-pound test line and caught 2-pound fish.”

Tim Blackley, TN - says, “I use Vicious clear blue line. I’m old fashion and prefer monofilament. I’ll use 6-pound for casting and 8- or 10-pound fishing vertical. I’m also a little paranoid about high-vis line in clear water, so I stick with clear blue.”

Steve Coleman, TN - , 8-time Classic Champ, says, “I use one type of line and that’s clear mono. The brand is either our own signature line or P-Line because they both have the stretch and quality that’s just right. I believe clear makes a difference.”

“March is a good time to learn and practice shallow fishing. Not shallow water but fishing 7-foot or deeper water with crappie suspended up high. For example, at Lake Washington, Mississippi, fish suspend up in less than two feet of water even if the water is eight feet deep. I’m not sure if the water is warmer or what causes them to like being near the top, but it is easy to have baits underneath these fish if not paying close attention. So watch your electronics and keep at least one bait shallow when slow trolling until you learn the strike zone.”

- John Martens, Missouri Soybean Biodiesel pro staff
"Honey, can I borrow your other earing?"
When man first crossed over the Bering Strait and began to settle North America he brought with him the kayak. It was nothing more than animal skins stretched across a wooden frame. The fragility of this craft no doubt cost some lives. But it was light and portable.

The kayak is no longer a means of transporting people across arctic waters or down raging rivers. Anglers are turning to the kayak as a lean mean fishing machine.

The modern kayak is for all waters and particularly for the angler in search of quality fishing time. They come in a variety of lengths and widths and made of a variety of plastics, nylon and fiberglass. Some are best for running fast river currents while others will stand the rigors of ocean travel. The seating also can vary from one placed on the bottom of the hull to those with a mesh armchair like apparatus.

Kayaks will never replace the bass boat for travel and stability. But there are places where the fishing kayak reigns supreme. This might come in backwater coves, bayous or a farm pond. Kayaks come in a variety of models with relatively low price tags that make them an affordable option for the crappie angler.

Tournament anglers are turning to kayak divisions in such events as those sponsored by Crappie USA. They compete in their own divisions.

Modern kayakers have adapted many of the features of power boat anglers to their crafts. There are mini-power pole units just like the normal size ones. Water tight storage areas, live wells and pole racks can aid in the storage of tackle and rain gear. As waters warm in springtime sunshine, phytoplankton and zooplankton begin to come alive in very shallow water. Be it in either a lake or pond, the nutrient rich skinny water attracts hungry crappies.

Due to the depth of water ranging in
inches, most anglers tend to pass on this fishery or else they fish from shore. Most boats experience difficulty reaching far enough back in coves to reach the fish. Kayaks are the exception.

Today’s kayak constructed of manmade materials is much safer. Some are even available in inflatable models. The crafts are more stable thanks to wider beams and built in flotation systems. Topside watertight compartments permit the stowing of gear and rod holders. Additional gear can be attached using bungee cords. For the angler there are kayaks with live wells and numerous racks for additional rods. It is usually heavier than its predecessor and some even have carts that allow one to wheel the craft right up to the shoreline.

The inflatable kayak provides a “luggable” aspect to construction. Usually constructed of PVC-vinyl they have a reinforced underside. They are ideal for quick trips after work. Once the fishing trip is over, the inflatable folds into an easy loading rolling travel bag with a high capacity hand pump or an optional powered one.

“Kayaks are quiet and stealthy so the fish do not hear or feel vibration from a trolling motor.”

The addition of comfortable low profile chairs with mesh seating allow anglers to sit comfortably while fishing skinny water and gliding over brush, weeds, snags, laydowns and rocks. Hobie kayaks have decks wide enough to allow for the fly anglers to stand up to cast while maintain stability. The Mirage Drive permits foot pedaling instead of the more traditional paddling. The unit is removable for

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**Go Fishing With The B’n’M Pros.**

**Sam Heaton’s 7-Foot Super-Sensitive**

The SHSS2n is a spinning rod with the same sensitivity and feel of the jig pole series. Improvements include Dyna-Flo guides for smooth line retrieval and a cork knob handle for outstanding balance and feel. Historically one of the most popular rods on the water, the SHSS2n is still supple, strong and sensitive.

**Whitey Outlaw DOUBLE DUTY**

Get back to “Fishing The Basics” with Whitey Outlaw. This Medium-Action rod is for big heavy hybrid bream, monster shellcrackers & any size crappie. It’s perfectly balanced with a comfortable foam handle, for all-day fishing - no reel needed! It features a tough & lightweight Graphite Blank, and one tip eyelet, with one reinforced Tie Down Guide.
instances when the angler wishes to paddle such as running a shallow river or fishing super shallow flats where the pedals would bottom out. A fingertip rudder control offers hands free steering.

California angler Morgan Promnitz is the Fishing Product Manager for Hobie and hosts the television program Hobie Outdoor Adventures. He fishes from kayaks in waters around the world.

Morgan finds that “Kayaks are quiet and stealthy so the fish do not hear or feel vibration from a trolling motor.” Kayaks allow one to have access to bodies of water that hold fish, but do not have boat ramps, according to Morgan. This might be a farm pond or a small creek. He explains, “It also allows one to access waters beyond small openings in the reeds or that would otherwise require portaging over shallow riffles. Skinny water is often over looked by those who do not want to get weeds and junk in the props of their motorized craft.

If you leave the pedals in place and the blades folded flush to the bottom of the hull by pushing one foot forward, it makes for a paddle kayak and a pedal kayak in one craft. Morgan believes this makes for the least amount of a chance for scaring fish since it is a lot quieter.

The ease in preparation for a day on the water appeals to Promnitz. He explains that his Hobie is relatively maintenance free and there is no fuel needed, except for the food he eats to keep his legs strong for pedaling. “It’s easy to transport in the bed of my pick-up,” exclaims Morgan. “I find that I end up going

Jack Blakely of Tennessee, demonstrates the need for a pfd while fishing for crappies in Reelfoot Lake. Kayaks are becoming very popular in the shallow waters of Reelfoot for catching crappie around cypress stumps.
fishing more often, even if it’s only for a couple of hours after work.”

The lack of mechanical power limits the speed and range of the craft. If fish are not biting in one spot you may have to reload the kayak and drive to the next honey hole. Another limitation is you cannot carry as much gear on a kayak as would be the case with a larger craft. Stability may become an issue. Morgan explains that although there are some extremely stable kayaks on the market. But you will never find one as stable as a bass boat.

Morgan fishes suspended crappies in deeper water and resorts to a few special techniques. One of his favorite ones is slow trolling crankbaits thanks to the pedal system of his kayak. “Two angled molded-in rod holders separate my lines and I sit back and pedal along at the desire speed waiting for fish to bite,” reports the California angler. “If the fish are finicky, I hold the rod in my hand while pedaling along and this provides a better feel.”

Morgan also likes vertical jigging which would be impossible on a paddle kayak during windy days as you drift off of the fish and lose control of the lure. But by lightly pedaling to hold yourself in position in wind or current you can stay on top of the fish and maintain control of the lure.

Despite the practicality of the modern kayak, one still needs to consider safety precautions on the water. The pfd (life preserver) is mandatory on some waters but essential for all water. It is important to go out with at least one other person for safety’s sake. You should have a certain level of physical conditioning and ability to swim with confidence.

It is also advisable to have clothing that dries quickly. A dry bag can be stored on board either in below deck compartments or on deck with the use of bungee cords. The dry bag also doubles as a storage compartment for valuable electronics.

Regardless of its limitations, the kayak is a lean mean fishing machine that is gaining popularity with crappie anglers.

- By Don Gasaway
Thousands of crappie anglers get their start in small boats rigged for crappie fishing. Flat bottom aluminum John Boats have long been a popular choice for affordable access to many prime fishing waters. The newest craze is kayaks and canoes that are generally easier to transport. Some crappie anglers chose a small boat because they are inexpensive, while others choose them because of their maneuverability and ease of use. Either way, they make a good crappie fishing platform.

The key factor in all tiny boat crappie fishing relates to where you set and where you fish. It is very important in a small boat to have tackle management in the effective area. You need to be able to reach things from the seat. Your pliers, leader material, hooks, lures, sinkers and bobbers need a place to be conveniently stored. In reality, storage for these items is more than convenience; it is a must for efficient fishing.

One of the most effective tackle management tools are the web storage systems from Tackle Webs (http://www.tacklewebs.com). The product comes in various configurations that can be attach with bungee cords, Velcro or permanently screwed down. A stretchy web-like mesh material allows users to see what’s inside and when attached to a canoe or kayak it makes use of previously unused space.

Adapting any tiny boat to traditional crappie fishing techniques like spider rigging and longlining requires the installation of rod holders. “In small boats you do your fishing sitting in one seat,” acknowledged David Baynard, owner and designer of Driftmaster Rod Holders. “Kayaks are all the rage now and they can be rigged for some serious
crappie fishing.”

“You need to place rod holders near you,” advised Baynard. “Driftmaster offers many different configurations of mounting bases that allow kayak crappie anglers to place single stem rod holders where they want them and use the same spider rigging and longlining techniques as big boat anglers.”

Another option is a trolling bar for kayaks. “Our model #T-1000 places 2 or more rod holders in easy reach,” continued Baynard. “That model is strong enough to hold a depth finder, landing net or other gear. It is also adjustable to move the trolling bar closer to you or further away if needed.”

Donald “Corky” Krause is a recreational crappie angler. He tells the story of how he was setting in the Atlanta Airport reading about building wood strip canoes. The notion caught his fancy and he has now built five. Like a fly-fisherman enjoys catching fish on the flies that he ties, Corky enjoys catching crappie from the boats that he builds.

When the spawn is on and the fish are shallow Corky’s strip canoe will take him there. “Fishing out of a small boat is a lot of fun,” discloses Corky. “You can get to places you can’t get with a bigger boat. I can go back in some pretty skinny water. The boat has no keel on it so if I get in a place that is tight and
Corky spider rigs and longlines just like the big boys from his homemade canoes. He installs different configurations of rod holders on different boats.

“On one boat I have rod holders all the way down the left side of the boat,” explained Corky. “I can deploy a drift sock from the middle of the canoe and slowly drift fish while pulling up to six rods.”

“On another boat I have an aluminum bar with rod holders. It clamps on to the boat about 3 feet in front of me when I am seated. I can put a 16-foot rod on each side and a 14-foot in the middle and 2 shorts in the back. I’m deploying six lines at the same time. I do very well with that setup.”

He uses modern technology to help him find fish and then he catches them the old fashion way.

“I have a Side Scan Humminbird that I set on 60 feet to each side” said Corky. “I’ll find a large bunch of fish and switch it over to down view to determine the depth where the crappie are suspended. If they are at 8 feet, for example, I will rig my slip bobber to hold a minnow at 7 feet. You always want to be above them. They just won’t go down.”

Corky’s wood strip canoe is powered with a 2 HP air cooled Honda. “With one person in the boat it will run 10 MPH,” informed Corky. “It will run about 15 miles on a quart of gas. I also have a Minn Kota variable speed trolling motor. I like to troll somewhere between .8 and 1.0 mph. I have a handheld GPS mounted in the boat. I can turn it on and adjust my direction and my speed easily.”
“I am usually trolling with 1/32 ounce jigheads,” revealed Corky. “I like curly tail jigs from Grizzly Jig Company in various color combinations. We make some of the combinations by cutting a white tail off one jig and gluing it to the body of another color. The 1/32 head is not a ball head; it is more of a fish head. I like to paint them different colors with fingernail polish.”

Wade Leffel is another recreational angler that is keen on small boat fishing. As an angler he is always looking for ways to improve his fishing platform. For him it starts with basics.

“I think one of the main things you need to have on your canoe or your kayak is a leash on your paddle,” advised Leffel. “That way if you drop it overboard you just reach out and bring it back. I use a leash that looks like an old spiral phone cord. It is a curly, stretchy type cord. Simply hook one end to the boat and then use Velcro to wrap the other end around the handle. It doesn’t hinder paddling and you will never lose your paddle.”

Boat control is another important element of fishing. Leffel created an anchor trolley to help him anchor and control the boat from the seated position in his kayak. “I attached a ring on the front and the back of the boat and run a rope through the rings. I used a quick-connect chain link to connect the ropes into a continuous loop. I can tie my anchor rope to the quick-connect
link and deploy it from my seat. I can position the anchor anywhere I want by pulling on the rope, without ever leaving my seat."

“The other thing I always want onboard is a small dry box,” continued Leffel. “I can put my billfold in there, my cell phone, anything I want to keep dry. I always tie the box to the boat so that if it does happen to turn over I won’t lose it.”

Rigging a tiny boat for crappie fishing can pay big dividends. They are easily transported, quiet on the water, easy to maneuver and very adaptable to crappie fishing techniques. The future is bright for small crappie craft and the anglers that fish from them.

- By Ron Presley

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<th>Tentative 2016 Crappie Masters Tournament Schedule</th>
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<td>Greenwood Lake</td>
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<td>Lakes Washington, Washington, Lee, Paradise, Ferguson, Whittington - Greenville, MS</td>
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<td>Truman Lake</td>
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<td>NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP</td>
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35  Crappie NOW March 2016
Smoking and canning offer alternatives from traditional frying. You can smoke crappie but they’re so hard to keep lit. (That’s an old ’60s joke ;>)  

Smoking has long been used as a means of temporarily preserving fish and other foods throughout history. Originally this was done as a preservative but today the smoking of fish is generally done for the unique taste imparted by the smoking process.  

The steps in smoking are necessary not only for safe preservation, but also to produce good flavor and aroma. While carp, suckers, buffalo catfish, salmon, trout and chubs may be successfully smoked, we’re going to stoke the coals for crappie.  

The following document was adapted from the Complete Guide to Home Canning, Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 539, USDA, revised 2009.

A safe, high quality product can be produced using the following brining and smoking procedures. Certain steps in the brining and smoking process require careful attention.  
- Use correct amount of salt in the brine.  
- Use enough brine for a given amount of fish.  
- The temperature during brining must be no higher than 40° F.  
- Use similar size and kinds of fish in the brine.

Smoking

Here are the steps for safe smoked fish.  
- There should be uniform heat treatment of all fish in the smoking chamber.  
- Use freshly caught, dressed fish, whole or filleted. Wash fish thoroughly.  
- Fish for smoking must be brined.  
- 1 ½ cups salt to 1 gallon water – 12 hours in refrigerator.  
- 4 cups salt to 1 gallon cold water – 15 minutes.  
- Remove from brine, rinse.  
- Place short stem of meat thermometer in thickest portion of flesh of largest fish.  
- Put fish in smoker when air temperature is 100° F (you need a second thermometer to measure this).  
- During smoking, air temperature should rise to 225° F.  
- Fish flesh should reach 180° F and be kept there for 30 minutes.  
- Smoked fish must be stored in refrigerator. Use within one month.

Canning

If you plan to can or pickle raw fish, you should first freeze the fish at 0°F for 48 hours to kill any bacteria or parasites.  

Lightly smoked fish is recommended for canning. However, because it has not yet been cooked, do not taste lightly smoked fish before canning.  

Use a 16 to 22 quart pressure canner for this procedure. Do not use smaller pressure saucepans. Safe processing times haven’t been determined. Do not use quart jars or tin cans. Half-pints could be safely processed for the same length of time as pints, but the quality of the product may be less acceptable.  

For your safety, please Google Using Pressure Canners before beginning. If this
is your first time canning, it is recommended that you read Principles of Home Canning.

Procedure

If smoked fish has been frozen, thaw in the refrigerator until no ice crystals remain before canning. If not done prior to smoking, cut fish into pieces that will fit vertically into pint canning jars, leaving 1-inch headspace.

Measure 4 quarts (16 cups) of cool tap water and pour into the pressure canner. (Note: The water level probably will reach the screw bands of pint jars.) Do not decrease the amount of water or heat the water before processing begins.

Pack smoked fish vertically into jars, leaving 1-inch headspace between the pieces and the top of the jar. The fish may be packed either loosely or tightly. Clean jar rims with a clean, damp paper towel. Do not add liquid to the jars. Adjust lids and process. See recommendations for your canner unit for smoked fish, but in general, it’s 10 PSI of pressure for 110 minutes, pint jars in altitudes below 1000 feet. 15 PSI if above 1000 feet.

The easiest way to enjoy your canned crappie is right out of the jar. Eat’em either mashed or whole on crackers, but there are dozens of other ways to use them.

Mini Crappie Pizzas

Toast an English muffin and spread each half with 1½ tablespoons of spaghetti or pizza sauce, later with thin strips of canned crappie and sprinkle with 1 ounce of shredded cheddar or pizza cheese; broil for 3 to 4 minutes, until the cheese is melted and just beginning to brown.

Greek Salad with Canned Crappie

Toss chunks of fish with fresh tomato, cucumber, feta cheese and good olives. Dress the salad with lemony vinaigrette. Used liquid from your canned crappie to add more flavor.

Crappie Basics #108

Water Temperature

“March is pre-spawn month in at Kentucky Lake. However, the exact time of spawn, no matter what part of the country you are in, is largely dictated by water temperature. When water is below 50 degrees the fish are in 10 to 12 feet of water. When water is above 50 degrees look in 5 to 6 foot water. When it gets above 60 degrees you can look from 3 feet to 6 inches of water.

“From fall to the spring it’s important to be near a drop-off. My fish catching improves a lot just by concentrating most of my fishing on a drop, even it it’s only a one foot drop. Crappie relate to them.”

- Richard Williams, 2014 Crappie USA Classic Champ.
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<td>2. Tommy Ezel/Richard James</td>
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<td>3. Willie Scott/Chris Scott</td>
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<td>4. Jeff Schwieterman/James Rains</td>
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<td>5. Paul Obier/George Nelon</td>
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<td>BIG FISH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Paul Obier/George Nelon</td>
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<td>2. Willie Scott/Chris Scott</td>
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<td>OKATIBBEE LAKE</td>
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<td>1. Kim Gray/Vick Finkley</td>
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<td>2. Steve Marquis/Troy Garrett</td>
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<td>3. Monty Blount/Keith Sullivan</td>
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<td>4. Ronnie Bleas/Gilbert Sipes</td>
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<td>5. Paula Nowell/Michael Nowell</td>
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<td>2. Charles Lindsey</td>
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<td>CRAPPIE MASTERS</td>
<td>ST JOHNS RIVER/FL ST CHAMPIONSHIP</td>
<td>JANUARY 22nd - 23rd</td>
<td>1. Larry Durden/Steve Durden</td>
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<td>3. Billy Williams/Scott Williams</td>
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<td>4. Tommie Roper/Jared Roper</td>
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<td>5. Steve Coleman/Randy Tomlin</td>
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<td>1. Vic Finkley/Kim Gray</td>
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<td>1. Scott Broxton/Scott Broxton Jr</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Trenton Lambert/William Lucas</td>
<td>3.21</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>2. Phil Rambo/Eva Rambo</td>
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<td>CRAPPIE NUTZ</td>
<td>LAKE BLACKSHEAR</td>
<td>JANUARY 30th</td>
<td>1. Mike Nipper</td>
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</table>
2. Craig Chapman/Jason Little 8.38  
3. Roger Milby/Rodger Brown 6.63  
4. Dan Sidle/Jamie Moore 6.17  
5. Robbie Bishop/Donald Wright 5.8  

**BIG FISH**  
1. Craig Chapman/Jason Little 1.72

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**CRAPPIE USA**

**FEBRUARY 5th - 6th**  
**CRESCENT & DEAD LAKES**

**AMATUER DIVISION**

1. Gilford Sipes/Ronnie Bleas 23.23  
2. Randy Homer/Randy Homer 21.89  
3. Tommy Sellers/Robert Sellers 21.3  
4. Gary Dodgen/Gary Dodgen 20.7  
5. Mark Gore/Warren Gore 18.73  

**PRO DIVISION**

1. Eric Howard/Leann Howard 24.99  
2. Joseph Carter/Janette Carter 24.88  
3. Steve Deason/Rick Howard 21.91  
4. Darryl Cole/Bill Bradley 21.78  
5. Danny Williamson/Beth Williamson 20.54  

**BIG FISH**  
1. Jessie Hovell/Christopher Wells 2.73

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**CAROLINA**

**FEBRUARY 6th**  
**GREENWOOD LAKE**

1. Potts/Shore 11.37  
2. Strickland/Strickland 11.31  
3. McGhee/Lundy 11.26  
4. Sprouser/Wilson 10.2  
5. Huffstetler/Koon 9.95  

**BIG FISH**

1. Huffstetler/koon 2.07  
2. Sprouser/wilson 1.8

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**BAYOU STATE**

**FEBRUARY 13th**  
**CLAIBORN**

1. Jason Thomas/Scott Johnson 11.01  
2. Wes Barmore/Mark Theodos 10.26  
3. Jeremy McKinney/Kelly Billsborough 9.6  
4. Terry Richard/Casey Rayner 7.91  
5. Neal Pace/Maureen Cox 5.52
Tournament Results

BIG FISH
1. Jason Thomas/Scott Johnson 2.34

MIDDLE TENNESSEE

FEBRUARY 20th
1. Randy Clark 8.72
2. Steve Trost/Terri Trost 8.3
3. Terri Spray/Tyler Spray 3.44
4. Joey Davis 2.86

BIG FISH
1. Randy Clark 1.67

CENTRAL ARKANSAS

FEBRUARY 20th
1. Greg London/Russ Clarke 9.02
3. Marty Herlacher/Dustin Eagle 5.31
4. Chris Head/Isaac Evans 4.05
5. Scott Black/Ken Fugate 3.12

BIG FISH
1. Michael Ditmore/Clint Blair 2.06
2. Greg London/Russ Clarke 2.02

CAT TEXAS

FEBRUARY 20th
1. Mackey Whyte/Keith Moore 9.02
2. Paul Obier/George Nelson 7.14
3. Larry Middleton/Chris Waters 5.59
4. Tommy Ezel/Richard James 5
5. Cody Standerfer/Lane Plamer 4.34

BIG FISH
1. Mackey Whyte/Keith Moore 2.1

DIVISION 1
1. Clay Gann/Todd Froebe 8.56
2. Max Dukes 4.18
3. Stuart Angelle 2.61
4. Robert Russell/Cody Russell 1.7
5. Jimmy Leonard 1.6

BIG FISH
1. Clay Gann/Todd Froebe 1.76
By Kevin Jones

Spring is the time for a lot of cold fronts that shut the fish off. So when fish are shallow in the spring. Most people think that shallow water eliminates the use of electronics. However, we use our Side Imaging to find the fish. We can find them on beds in shallow water.

“"A lot of times we see them with our imaging and then target fish in a specific spot or area. That way we know we are not fishing dead water and can take our time. If they don’t want to bite after a cold front but can see them on our electronics, we have confidence to stay on them longer. We can usually make them bite if we aggravate them long enough.

Kevin Jones is a tournament fishermen from Missouri. Sponsors include Missouri Corn Growers/E-10 Ethanol, Muddy Water Baits, and others.
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<tr>
<td>MAY 14th</td>
<td>MAGNOLIA</td>
<td>ENID LAKE</td>
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<td>MAY 21st</td>
<td>CRAPPIE USA</td>
<td>LAKE SHELBYVILLE</td>
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<td>MONROE</td>
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<td>CAT TEXAS</td>
<td>RAY ROBERTS</td>
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<td>CRAPPIE MASTERS</td>
<td>TRUMAN LAKE</td>
<td>BIG FISH CHALLENGE</td>
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<td>MAY 22nd</td>
<td>GRAND LAKES</td>
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<td>CLUB</td>
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<td>MAY 28th</td>
<td>NORTHEAST OHIO</td>
<td>SHENANGO LAKE</td>
<td>CLUB</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAY 28th</td>
<td>SHOALS AREA</td>
<td>BCDA LAKE</td>
<td>CLUB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUNE 4th-5th</td>
<td>INDIANNA</td>
<td>TANNERS CREEK/OHIO RIVER</td>
<td>CLUB</td>
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<tr>
<td>JUNE 4th-5th</td>
<td>CAT TEXAS</td>
<td>CEDAR CREEK LAKE</td>
<td>JR. ANGLER</td>
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<td>JUNE 10th-11th</td>
<td>MAGNOLIA</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>STATE CHAMPIONSHIP</td>
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<td>CENTRAL ALABAMA</td>
<td>ALABAMA RIVER</td>
<td>QUALIFIER</td>
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<td>MOSQUITO LAKE</td>
<td>CLUB</td>
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<td>JUNE 17th-18th</td>
<td>CRAPPIE MASTERS</td>
<td>TRUMAN LAKE</td>
<td>ONE POLE ULTIMATE</td>
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<td>JUNE 18th</td>
<td>CENTRAL ARKANSAS</td>
<td>LAKE MAUMELLE</td>
<td>CLUB</td>
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<td>JUNE 18th</td>
<td>CAT TEXAS</td>
<td>COOPER LAKE</td>
<td>CLUB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUNE 25th</td>
<td>SHOALS AREA</td>
<td>CEDAR CREEK LAKE</td>
<td>CLUB</td>
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<td>JUNE 28th</td>
<td>NORTHEAST OHIO</td>
<td>SHENANGO LAKE</td>
<td>3 ANGLER CLUB</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
(Note that club news, results and schedules are taken from websites around the 10th of each month. Only those who provide information through their website or by email will have updated information and results included.) Fishermen, check with club/association for exact dates, changes, cancellations and rules.

## Clubs/Regional Tournaments

**MAGNOLIA CRAPPIE CLUB - MS**
www.magnoliacrappieclub.com

**CRAPPIE ANGLERS OF TEXAS (CAT)- TX**
www.crappieanglersoftexas.com

**WEST TENNESSEE CRAPPIE CLUB-WTCC -TN**
www.westtennesseeecrappieclub.com; also facebook

**INDIANA SLAB MASTERS- IN**
www.indianaslabmasters.com

**MIDDLE TENNESSEE CRAPPIE CLUB -TN**
middletennesseeecrappieclub@gmail.com

**SHOALS AREA CRAPPIE ASSOCIATION -AL**
www.shoalscrappie.com shoalscrappie@yahoo.com

**WEST ALABAMA CRAPPIE ASSOCIATION -AL**
www.westalabamacrappie.com Tracy Humber 662-574-0649

**SLAB MASTERS TOURNAMENT TRAIL -GA**
www.slabmasterstournamenttrail.net

**EASTERN MISSOURI CRAPPIE CLUB- MO**
www.easternmocrappie.com

**EASTERN BUCKEYE CRAPPIE CLUB -OH**
Easternbuckeyecrappieclub@yahoo.com www.easternbuckeyecrappieclub.com

**WILLIAM’S CREEK CRAPPIE CLUB- TX**
www.williamscreekcrappieclub.com

**WAPPAPELLO CRAPPIECLUB- MO**
Facebook: Wappapello CrappieClub

**GRAND LAKE CRAPPIE SERIES- OH**
www.grandlakecrappieseries.comule.com

**COOSA RIVER CRAPPIE CLUB**
Paul Whorton 205-821-8373
Roger Absher 205-283-7638
(see facebook)
CRAPPIE CLUBS

CRAPPIE BUCKS- TX  
www.crappiebucks.com

CRAPPIE SLayers TOURNAMENT SERIES- MO  
See the www.crappie.com MO-tournaments

CAPITAL CRAPPIE CLUB- MO  
Mike 573-230-3058, Ben 573-694-3588  
Marshall Albertson 573-690-2370

ARIZONIA CRAPPIE ASSOCIATION -AZ  
www.azcrappie.com (forum)

BUCKEYE CRAPPIE CHALLENGE -OH  
www.buckeyecrappiechallenge.com

NORTHEAST OHIO CRAPPIE CLUB -OH  
www.northeastohiocrappieclub.com

SPRINGFIELD CRAPPIE CLUB- IL  
www.springfieldcrappieclub.com

CRAPPienutz- MS  
www.crappieguys.com

CAROLINA CRAPPIE ASSOCIATION  
www.carolinacrappieassociation.com 704-792-5022  raeudy@ctc.net
Shoreline anglers, wade fishermen, and boaters can all enjoy early spring fishing.

Darl Black photo

Good-bye Until Next Month