

Lowering Lake Levels Offer Big Opportunities

Winter is the time when flood-control lakes are brought down to lower levels to prepare for heavy spring rains. Some lakes are dropped a few feet, while others are dropped 20 feet or more.

A drawdown lake becomes a place with new advantages and disadvantages. More fish per acre and fewer boats on the water are some advantages that come with a lower lake level.



Tim Huffman

Disadvantages may include launch ramps not reaching into the water and navigation problems.

Where To Look

Think deep.

Deep water gives fish a comfortable temperature zone, places to hide from predators and a food supply.

What is considered deep? It depends on the body of water. In a clear-water lake, deep may be 30, 40 or even 60 feet deep. Flatland reservoirs may include deep

water at 10 or 15 feet. Deep water in a typical stained-water lake is 15 to 35 feet. A lake's total depth, water temperature and water color will determine where you will find most low-water crappie during winter.

Remember that structure and cover become shallower in low water. For example, your favorite stump row in spring and fall may have stumps at 11 feet deep. Drop the water level by 5 feet to winter pool, and your stumps are now in 6 feet of water.

Mid-depth spots can also produce

excellent fishing. When temperatures allow the baitfish to find a comfort zone in a shallower water plane, the crappie will move up, and action becomes hotter.

Only by fishing and experimenting will you know what zone to fish. Deep water is usually best, but middle depths provide good fishing action when crappie are there.

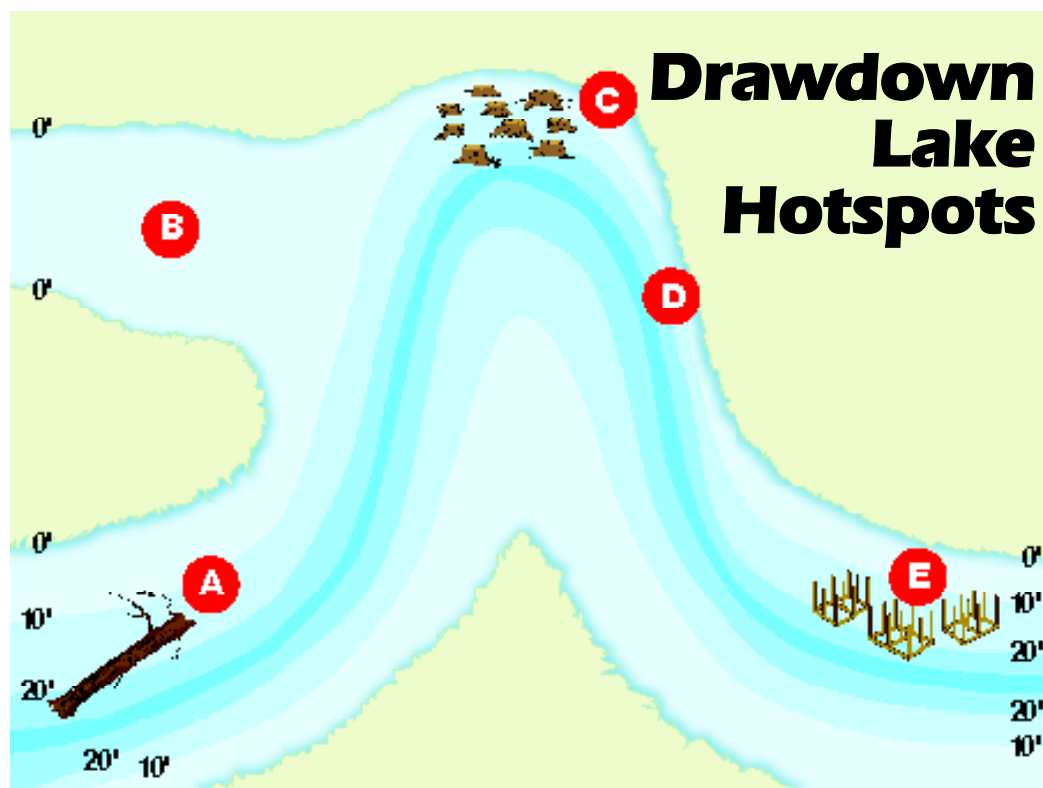
In addition, warm southern winds and sunshine for a few days can warm shallow mud flats a few degrees, causing baitfish to move into these ultra-shallow spots. When this unusual situation occurs, you can catch crappie in a foot or two of water.

Again, only by testing these spots will you learn when fish move in. In the afternoons, finding a northern spot may be your best chance for this fast action. Thus, finding fish is a trial-and-error method based on your experience, water conditions and weather conditions.

Techniques

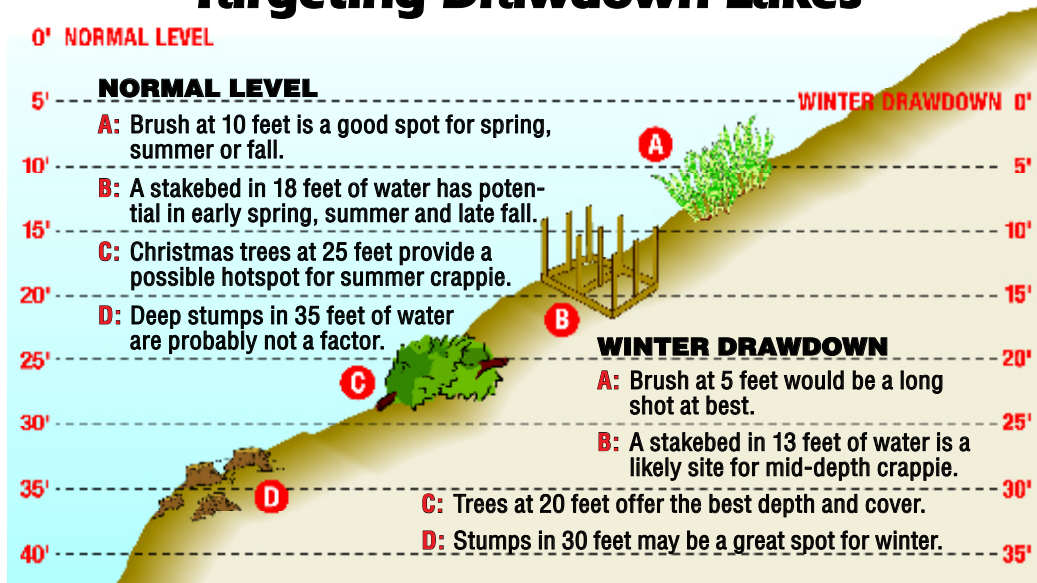
Vertical jigging is a great choice for deep water. You can use pole holders and multiple poles, or you can simply hold one or two yourself. Poles that are 9 or 10 feet in length are good because they will give you superb control with less fatigue. They also will get your baits away from the boat.

Winter is the perfect time for jigs. A 1/8-ounce jig will get down and give you good "feel." Lighter jigs can take too long to fall, and the light weight



- A:** A submerged log in 23 to 17 feet of water provides excellent cover, depth and a drop-off.
- B:** A flat that's 2 to 4 feet deep has good potential when the weather is warm for a few days.
- C:** Stumps on the outside bend can support fish at a variety of depths.
- D:** An extremely steep drop offers a wide range of depths with good fishing potential.
- E:** Stakebeds placed at different depths may be the top pick in the area.

Targeting Drawdown Lakes



in deep water reduces feel and control.

Kentucky Lake guide Richard Williams prefers a heavy jig to a minnow because he misses fewer bites with them.

“It’s impossible to tell a light bite from a minnow wiggling,” he says. “With a jig, when you feel something move, you know it’s time to set the hook.”

Be sure to tip your jigs with scent. There are many good ones on the market, with Berkley Crappie Nibbles being one of the

easiest and most effective.

Swap jig colors until you find the best one. If you wish to invest in a Color-C-Lector, the unit can quickly give you the best colors at a specific depth.

Minnows are good at this time, too. You can use a double-hook system, but a single hook under a 1/4- to 1/2-ounce sinker is simpler. You can dabble it in and around prime wood cover at any depth.

The key is to use super-slow presentations and pay attention. Bites are often very light in winter.

You may see your line move without feeling anything, so set the hook quickly on any light bite.

Jig And Float

Any water that’s 1 to 7 feet deep is ideal for jig-and-float tactics. The main advantages are fewer spooked fish because the boat isn’t close and the ease of working a lot of water from one boat position.

The fish you are chasing with this method are more finicky, so they may only be active for a short period of time. They alter their moods immediately with a change in sun, clouds, wind or boat traffic.

Your jig should match the conditions. A small 1/32-ounce jig and a small float can be a great choice for life-like action on calm days. A larger, heavier jig matched with a weighted float is excellent for windy conditions, fishing deeper water or making very long casts.

Long spinning poles have been underrated for years. A long pole allows you to cast a small bait much farther.

One pole that is versatile for many techniques but specifically suited for the jig-and-float method is

Jim Duckworth’s 7-foot-11-inch B’n’M Float & Fly Crappie/Bass Special. Its length makes it perfect for casting and retrieving a jig-and-float combination or a free-fall jig, lobbing a minnow, vertical jigging and finesse bass fishing.

Anglers can save time on the water by asking friends or calling a few tackle shops to gather pertinent information on a drawdown lake.

For instance, is the water accessible for launching and is navigation a problem? What depth are the crappie? These two questions will give you the answers you need to start your fishing trip.

If crappie are deep, look along river channel drop-offs for unique structure features, including bends, cuts or other features that should hold fish. Then look to find cover — stumps, sunken logs, stakebeds and other fish-holding cover.

Vertical tight-lining is a good tactic for fishing deep structures. Use super-slow presentations and be prepared for light bites.

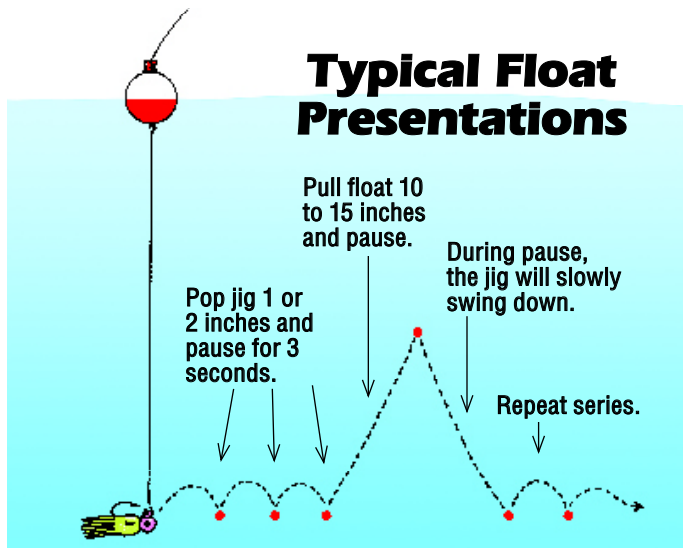
Shallow crappie can be attacked with more aggressive jig-and-float tactics. These rigs make it easy to fan-cast shallow areas for active fish.

Factors

Water Temperature — A crappie’s movement is directly related to water temperature and bait movement. Look for the warmest water you can find.

Water Levels — Any dramatic change always puts the fish in a negative mood.

Wind — During winter, wind can make you miserable, but it probably won’t affect the fishing. Warm, southern breezes may warm the water enough to trigger action in shallow northern mud flats and coves. 🌬️



1. Pause-pop-pause-pop-pause-long pull-pause (as shown).
2. Slow and steady.
3. Slow for 2 feet then pause for about 5 seconds.