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## TVA BEGINS WINTER DRAWDOWN...LAKE LEVELS FALL SLOWLY

By Steve McCadams

Kentucky Lake anglers have been up against tough odds this last week as hot weather has dominated the fishing scene. Most days have been hot and humid. The other days have been humid and hot!

June was one of the hottest on record as temps were above average for the lion's share of the month that normally has a little bit of spring and summer mixed in. This past month had most days feeling like a sauna out on the lake and that accelerated summer fishing patterns.

Now that July has arrived and August is closing in anglers won't get much of a reprieve from the summer doldrums.

Surface temperatures this week held on to the 87 to 88 degree range. Some areas could well see 90-degree water by this weekend as the lake continues to heat up.

Water color remains clear across the reservoir despite several thunderstorms moving through the area at times.

Lake levels have actually been several inches above the normal summer pool elevation mark of 359 lately. At midweek the elevation in the Kentucky Dam sector was 359.6 and falling slowly. Upstream in the New Johnsonville area lake levels were a few inches lower.

TVA will begin pulling a lot of water through the system these next few weeks so anglers can expect plenty of current in the main Tennessee River channel. Normal winter drawdown begins in early July each year and TVA traditionally begins an increase in discharge rates once the Fourth of July holiday period passes.

The curve for winter drawdown is underway so all lakers can expect to see a slow and gradual decline in elevation from week to week. Shoreline habitat that has had ample water around weedbeds and buck bushes for the last several weeks will now see receding water levels leaving shallow pockets and shorelines too shallow to fish.

Bass anglers had still been tossing away at visible structure lately on shorelines in the backs of bays and along rims of river islands with topwater, spinnerbaits and Texas rigged worms. Several late hatches of fry have been coming on and occupying visible cover where they find refuge from larger predator fish among the shady confines.

That shallow pattern worms well for early summer bass fishing at times. The norm is: find the schools of pin minnows and you'll find the bass!

At the same time some bass anglers turn their back to the banks once hot weather arrives and pretty much target the main lake ledges or humps. This contrasts to the shallow summer pattern but a lot of anglers stalk the deeper venues hoping for a few bigger bites while other love to catch a fish of any size and therefore, target shallow shorelines.

Most of the winning stringers for summer bass tournaments come from deeper ledges and humps out away from the shorelines. Fishing the deep, submerged drop-offs and secondary ridges or creek channels often produces some schools of fish that choose the main lake areas as their comfort zones.

Depths of 12 to 14 feet have been holding some nice bass as the fish hold up around any brushpiles or stumps they encounter and ambush shad that come their way. Current helps put the fish in places where anglers can pattern their whereabouts.

Current brings life to a stagnant lake when the movement of water stimulates the lower food chain, pushing zooplankton and algae around. This, in turn, stimulates schools of shad to meander and follow their forage base.

The more movement from current and baitfish the more likely bass are to be on the prowl. At various times throughout the day bass will corral shad and push them from deep venues up toward the shallow sides of sandbars when a feeding frenzy takes place.

Moving to the top sides of the sandbars is a last ditch effort for the threadfin and gizzard shad. When this scenario presents itself bass fishermen do well, tossing big deep diving crankbaits, spoons, Texas and Carolina rigged worms and various swim baits.

Sometimes it's a hit and miss as to when the bass will turn on and make a blitz. That's why anglers sometimes have to sit on a hole and wait for that to happen.

Other times anglers may have to cover a lot of water on a summer day before they encounter active movement from schools of baitfish. It's often hit and miss, requiring a lot of door knocking before finding someone at home willing to respond to the knocks!

Summer crappie continue to be sluggish as the bite has been mediocre at best. Several small fish continue to show up for anglers vertical fishing live minnows and some jigs over stakebeds and brushpiles. Depths of 13 to 14 feet have given up several small fish lately.

Finding decent numbers of bigger crappie has been a challenge for most anglers throughout the spring and summer.

Most boats are vertical fishing and bumping structure but a few boats are trolling crankbaits over main lake ledges and catch a few that way. Covering a lot of water as boats troll along the edge of drop-offs out on the main lake has produced some crappie that are apparently suspended in the midrange depths.

Some loud colored crankbaits such as chartreuse and black have been attracting strikes from finicky crappie that are holding over ledges but suspended in 14 to 16 foot depths.

Anglers using bottom bumping rigs with minnows and stalking the deep sides of ledges have not found fish schooled as is usually the case when hot weather descends.

A few boats are working the main river channel and finding catfish on the prowl. Depths of 30 to 40 feet have produced at times as anglers slowly drift with the current and work the side of the river channel itself.

Baits of choice have been chicken liver and night crawlers.

Bluegill have been taken this week on the edges of some steep banks where overhanging trees holding mayflies are attracting several. Casting slip bobbers armed with crickets has been productive at times.

Several mayfly hatches have been occurring this week and more are likely on the way.

The hot weather is a factor for all fishermen these days. Best thing to do is rise and shine early. Get in a few hours of fishing before the sun takes command and pushes you back to a recliner where that cool shady spot and iced tea awaits your return!

END