

RISING LAKE LEVELS ALTER SUMMER FISHING SCENE...MAYFLY HATCHES UNDERWAY

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Lake levels this week on Kentucky Lake have been rising in the aftermath of regional flooding last week, an unusual scenario for this time of year. Normally, TVA begins its decent toward winter drawdown in early July but just the opposite has happened the last few days.

At midweek lake stages at Kentucky Dam were 361.2, which is more than two feet above normal summer pool (359) elevation. Readings upstream at New Johnsonville were even higher as a wall of water headed north due to massive runoff. Elevation was observed at 362.3.

There is a lot of current in the main Tennessee River this week as TVA will be pushing a lot of water through Kentucky reservoir in the next few days. Anglers can expect lake levels to crest soon and begin falling as TVA increases discharge rates.

Surface temperatures this week climbed back into the 83 to 85 degree range after a cool spell during the first week of July actually saw temps fall back to the lower 80's for a few days. Water color is clear in most of the Big Sandy and West Sandy areas with increasing stain now along the main Tennessee River as water flushes through.

Summer crappie action has been holding up pretty good as some decent numbers are still coming from midrange depths where brushpiles and stakebeds in the 13 to 15 foot depth range are holding fish. The rising lake levels have likely given crappie a longer comfort zone in the midrange depths lately as baitfish have moved up with the rising water.

Crappie were hitting good on red/white/chartreuse color combo jigs the last few days and tipping with Berkley power bait or live minnows enhanced the presentation. Strikes are light but that's normal as warm weather descends.

Other popular jig colors have been black/chartreuse with glitter, red/black/chartreuse, and some motor oil with glitter skirts just to name a few. While a lot of small fish are hitting there are still adequate numbers of keeper size fish sharing the same spots.

A few fish are residing on the deep ledges in the main lake around submerged structure in the 18 to 24 foot depths. Bottom bumping rigs armed with live minnows have worked best in the deep summer hideouts.

Catfish action had been good prior to the rise in lake levels and increased current. Right now there almost too much current along the main river channel but watch for that to improve by next week once lake stages return back to the normal range.

Some boats were taking catfish while jug fishing in the backwaters of big bays. Catfish really go on the prowl when lake levels rise fast.

Depths of 30 to 40 feet were giving up some good catfish along the main riverbank. However, with the rising lake levels catfish have moved up this week and crappie anglers are tying into some on a regular basis.

Mayfly hatches were underway across the reservoir this week too and catfish, bass, bluegill and just about every other species seems to feed on them at times. Anglers can likely find some scattered bluegill around overhanging willows along river islands.

Bass action was holding up for a variety of patterns this week. While most boats are still banging away at main lake ledges with big deep diving crankbaits, Carolina rigged craws and worms, and Texas rigged worms there are some fish moving up shallow in response to the rising water and mayfly hatches.

Tossing spinnerbaits and Texas rigged worms around shallow bushes and grass has scored for anglers this week as some schools of pin minnows are roaming the visible structure. Working topwater plugs have paid off too such as floating worms, flukes, and assorted jerk baits.

Anglers will need to play the current in the days ahead as that will redistribute bait fish and likely push bass to hang on the down current sides of submerged sandbars where they'll congregate in submerged eddies and await shad washed right to them.

Some scattered bluegill were being caught around bridge piers where mayflyies were hatching and washing by in the current.

With the higher lake levels inundating shoreline buck bushes and willow trees along river islands there is a lot of shallow cover holding bass that now have abundant canopies of shade and refuge. Some of the aquatic grass patches that were visible last week are now slightly beneath the surface but still holding fish too.

Higher lake levels make the main lake ledge fishing a little more challenging at times but once the crest occurs and levels begin falling drop-offs should really start producing good bass fishing. Crappie will begin to fall back to deeper depths too once the decline begins.