

# The Pursuit of Suspended Pre-spawn Crappies

by John Andrew

Catching pre-spawn crappies can be done several ways, although, we are fishing for them before they move into the shoreline areas. Searching for suspended crappies can be done with depth finders, sonar and side scan imaging with Lowrance and the Humminbird units.

I like getting out onto the bays or sections of the lake that are nearby traditional spawning locations. These locations can be a mile from the ritual spawning area or as close as a couple of football fields off the shoreline. When hunting these suspended fish, we will go to the side scan or 360 imaging.

As we move along in our boat, we are slowly running our sonar unit, actively searching for the fish. We are not over the deepest water; this is an important note. During this time of year, the fish are heading towards the shoreline to spawn. We are searching open water, but open water that is shallow. Shallow is a relative, and for our purposes, is strictly in reference to the body of water you are fishing and the specific location you are searching inside that body of water. For example, I guide my clients for crappie fishing before the spawn on a particular lake that is over 60 feet deep. We are fishing two miles away from that deep section of the lake. The shallow water there is about 18 to 20 feet deep.

We use our side scan imaging units to look for fish as far as 300 feet away from our boat. They are suspended eight to 15 feet deep, over 20 feet of water. This section of the lake warms much faster than the deeper sections where the crappies are caught during the winter ice fishing period. Once we have located the crappies, we catch them using various approaches.

Try wind drifting or trolling over the crappies with light line and small-hair jigs, marabou jigs or bare jigs tipped with minnows. We prefer using ultra-thin Berkley, four-pound-test Fire Line with an eight-foot Fluorocarbon Leader of also four-pound-test. When drifting or trolling for these fish, the strike can be light. Setting the hook instantly when the strike is detected is one of the critical concepts to your success.

The super line and fluorocarbon leader are both made of low- to non-stretch materials. They are needed when we are trolling with 60 to 100 feet of line out behind the boat. When the hook set does take place, we have instant contact with



This father and son enjoyed pulling in these giant crappies while fishing with John Andrew and using the tactics and methods discussed in this article.

the fish. Sharpening your hook every two or three fish makes all the difference in your total catch. Rod length can be important when trolling. Using 12- to 14-foot rods is not important to our numbers of fish caught. You may wish to use these types of lengthy rods, but we don't.

Continuously leaving the 360 or side scan imaging running is also critical to staying on your fish. As you wind drift or troll through the groups of fish you see on your Lowrance or Humminbird units, be sure to mark them on your G.P.S. Why? As the days go by, you will develop a grid or pattern of the fish in that part of the lake. These fish will move when suspended. The more pressure that is put on them, they more they will move.

Using slip bobbers also works well. Make sure you weight them correctly so your bait does not drift up into the shallower water. Also, make sure you use a bigger slip bobber to allow for the heavier weight used to hold your bait

down. Casting and retrieving your jig also works well, but retrieve slowly. Tiny crank baits also work, but mostly when the water warms up to the low- and mid-70 degree temps.

This way of fishing for suspended crappies has worked for years, but as of today, few people use this method. When the spawn is over and the crappies move back away from the shoreline, moving our boats back out into the lake and re-searching for the crappies starts all over again. We use the same information as above. It works for summer-suspended crappies, with just a few adjustments. But that's for another article.

Try this approach this spring. I think you will teach yourself a new method for catching suspended crappies. **MWO**



This grandfather and his grandson, while fishing with John Andrew, caught these jumbo-sized crappies.

*John Andrew is a fishing and tour guide in a wide area comprising Vilas, Oneida, and Iron counties, Wisconsin. He holds two world fishing records. Contact: theanglerschoiceguideservice.com, johnandrew@centurytel.net, 715-892-3020.*

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These three doctors (and brothers) enjoyed catching these big crappies with John Andrew while wind drifting.