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OUTDOORS



Alex Orr of Jocassee Outdoor Center displays some nice slab crappie he caught on Lake Keowee. Keowee's crappie often go unnoticed in favor of other species.

Phillip Gentry

Now's time to bucket some wintertime Keowee crappie

By PHILLIP GENTRY
Special to The Daily Journal /
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SENECA — The Federal Government performed one of those opinion polls a few years ago on a random selection of fishing license buyers across the country. One of the questions revolved around how many hours and what type of fishing did the angler participate in.

Most people might guess bass fishing, but the most highly sought after species were panfish—particularly crappie.

Crappie fishing appeals to a number of anglers on a number of levels. One is that crappie are one of the most widespread species across the country. They can be caught from the swamps of south Florida to frozen waters in Canada. The second factor is that crappie are one of the best eating fish available anywhere. While they do pose their own set of challenges, crappie are not all that difficult to catch and can be caught year round.

As an outdoor writer, I have caught and written about crappie all over the southeast. But I must confess that I've never caught a crappie in my own backyard waters at Lake

Keowee...until a few days ago. Part of the reason is that Keowee is a bass fishing lake. That's where I go to catch bass, particularly spotted bass. It's a deep, clear, relatively clean bottom lake; not the kind of waters you expect to catch crappie in.

On a stop in at the Jocassee Outdoor Center a week or so ago, the topic of crappie fishing came up and I was invited to fish with the JOC manager Alex Orr who vowed to show me that Keowee has a great untapped crappie fishery.

When we got on the lake, Orr began explaining a few things about the crappie fishing potential of the Duke Power impoundment.

"The hot water coming out of the nuclear plant keeps this lake several degrees warmer than most of the other area lakes" explained the angler. "On top of that the upper arms of the lake where I do most of my crappie fishing is dingier than the rest of the lake and that slightly colored water heats up quicker and holds heat making that area a little warmer too—plus the biologists say crappie prefer colored water to clear water."

The third thing that Keowee has in favor of the crappie angler is that much of the natu-

ral cover was removed prior to the impounding the lake—a common practice to keep debris from entering water intakes and damaging expensive equipment. A well placed brushpile on a clean bottom is like an oasis in the desert and crappie will flock there in droves.

"The rest is simple" said Orr who maintains notes about the locations of brushpiles he finds while fishing on Keowee. "I get over the top of the brush and put down a live minnow on a small gold hook with a split shot weight added above the hook and float around till they bite."

If crappie are present, the bite doesn't take long. On our particular foray, we found that the crappie would only bite if we were fishing straight down in a section of the brushpile that measured about the same size as a sheet of plywood. Hard to find, but once you were on it, they bit like crazy.

On your next stop by Jocassee Outdoor Center, ask Alex Orr about what kind of crappie jigs he prefers, it's a subject he's not shy to talk about.

— Got outdoor news or photos to share? E-mail Phillip Gentry at pgentry6@bellsouth.net