

A guide for slow trolling for crappie

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
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With the promise of the coming spring, both crappie and crappie anglers are preparing for the coming spawning season in a few weeks.

This time of year, casual observers may note an angler or two sitting in the front of a boat with a multitude of long fishing rods sticking out in all directions. The angler detects a bite by the slightest movement of one of the rods, then sharply lifts the rod to set the hook.

Slow trolling — also referred to as tight lining — emphasizes baits presented horizontally to the fish by pushing rods forward with the boat, using a quarter-ounce to 1-ounce weight to keep lines vertical.

It could be argued that the fathers of modern slow trolling are seven-time National Crappie Championship winners Ronnie Capps and Steve Coleman. They are arguably the best-known names in the crappie business and have made slow trolling the most popular crappie-fishing tactic in the country.

"It's actually pretty simple," Capps said. "From the fish's perspective, he's down there hanging out on a brush pile or a stake bed or hanging on the edge of a creek channel, and suddenly here comes 16 baits right in his face."

The benefit of slow trolling is absolute depth control. Because the line is vertical in the water column with heavier weight used to keep the line at close to 90 degrees when moving, the angler can dial in the depth of the bait.



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Slow trolling live minnows is a tactic made famous by the team of Ronnie Capps and Steve Coleman and works anywhere crappie are suspended in deeper water.

In order to keep the line and baits at precise depths, standard slow trollers typically don't move much faster than about half a mile per hour without whipping the lines back underneath the boat. Some anglers will use heavier weights and bump up the trolling speed in order to cover more water in less time, but the basic idea is the same.

According to Coleman, slow trolling works best when the boat is following a known crappie travel route — such as the edge of a creek or river channel — and the angler is targeting the dropoff and structure related to the dropoff. It's well known that crappie use contour lines when traveling, so slow trolling along a contour line is a great way to intercept fish.

"When we first started using GPS, Ronnie and I would place a waypoint on the GPS whenever we would catch a big crappie," Coleman said. "At the end of the day, wheth-

er we were trying to follow the creek channel or not, most of the biggest fish came off the drop. That changed a lot about the way we trolled. Now we almost always follow the contour line."

One of the mainstays to the success of slow trolling is the rig that is used. Capps and Coleman employ a two-hook minnow rig that offers a live minnow at two different depths on each rod. By varying the depth of each rod, the pair can quickly figure out what depth the fish are biting best at, then concentrate their efforts at that level.

"The cool thing about this rig is if you hang up, the light-wire hook can be pulled loose and re-straightened with a pair of pliers, and you're right back to fishing," Capps said. "They work well with straight live bait, or you can tie a small jig head to the end of the line and tip that with a minnow. Either way will catch loads of slab crappie."

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