

Habitats important for reservoir fishing

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
FOR THE JOURNAL

Say what you want about spring being “fishing season.” For fishing guide Joel Harris, summertime is the most consistent time to catch good numbers of good-sized bass, crappie, bream and catfish around artificial structure.

Harris said during other times of year, fish tend to be scattered over a variety of locations in response to spawning, low water or lake stratification and turnover. However, during the summer, he can rest assured that fish — meaning pretty much anything in freshwater — will be oriented to manmade brush piles and planted cover in mid-water depths, especially in a clear-water impoundment.

“On a lot of clear-water lakes around the country, fish tend to be oriented to

brush piles all summer long,” Harris said. “On cloudy days, they may range 10 to 15 feet out on either side of the cover, and on sunny days, they may be buried down in it, but they’ll always be somewhere close.”

Brush piles are strands of sunken trees or tree-tops and limbs that have been strategically planted in areas that will be suitable to crappie. As a pro staff member for Mossback Fish Habitat, more and more of his planted locations are artificial products that will never need to be replenished.

“The standard water depth for summertime, depending on what type of lake you have, is around 20 to 25 feet of water,” Harris said. “The cover I plant is often as big as my boat. My preferred arrangement is a set of three to six artificial structures laid out in a circle.”

Harris said he loves using the Mossback habitat because the rough surface starts algae growth quicker than other material and lasts much longer than natural structure.

Fishing vertically in clear water necessitates some stealth in fishing line. Harris’ pick is 40 to 8-pound fluorocarbon. He typically vertically jigs the planted structure rather than casting to it from a distance.

“The boat is not moving,” Harris said. “I hold it in place using the Spot Lock feature on my trolling motor. My baits are presented vertically.”

The combination of light line, smaller baits and placement right in their living room is typically too much for any fish to pass up. It’s a pattern that Harris said will last all through the summer, and he even does pretty well during

the winter as fish take up residence on his habitat sites.

Although he has a long list of places he could visit in a typical day on the water, Harris said in the heat of summer, he can usually fill a limit in as little as three locations and often no more than 10 spots. He said rotating sites without overharvesting too many fish from each location keeps plenty of fish available for him to target all through the summer.

“To give you an example, for three years in a row, I’ve gone out on a guide trip on the Fourth of July and put a two-man limit of fish in the boat in under four hours,” Harris said.

PHILLIP GENTRY is the host of the podcast radio program, “The Outdoors Show with Phillip Gentry & Boat Girl.” More info on the show is available at pgandboatgirl.com.



PHILLIP GENTRY | FOR THE JOURNAL

Fishing guide Joel Harris said by creating fish habitat, he assures having plenty of locations that will produce fish all summer long.