



PHILLIP GENTRY | FOR THE JOURNAL

Crappie in deep, clearwater lakes like Keowee and Jocassee often go unnoticed in favor of other species.

How to catch wintertime crappie on deep, clearwater lakes

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
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The federal government performed an opinion poll 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 the angler participated 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 for a number of reasons. 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.

Another factor is that crappie are one of the best fish to eat 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.

One of the most difficult lakes to consistently target crappie in are deep, clearwater lakes. Two such venues are lakes Keowee and Jocassee. Part of the reason is that Keowee is considered solely a bass-fishing lake, and Jocassee is a trout-fishing lake. Both are deep, clear, relatively clean bottom lakes and not the kind of waters you expect to catch crappie in.

One of the big benefits on Keowee is fishing around the heated waters produced by the nuclear plant.

The hot water coming out of the nuclear plant keeps lake Keowee several degrees warmer than most of the other area lakes. On top of that, the upper arms of the lake tend to hold most of the crappie because the water is dingier

than the rest of the lake. That slightly colored water heats up quicker and holds heat making that area a little warmer, too. Fisheries' sampling often shows crappie prefer colored water to clear water.

One additional consideration to keep in mind when fishing on lakes Keowee or Jocassee is that much of the natural 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 brush pile on a clean bottom is like an oasis in the desert, and crappie will flock there in droves, even if that water is deeper than what you'd expect to be fishing in other area lakes.

An angler who has several locations of natural laydowns or manmade brush piles can 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 until they get a bite.

If crappie are present, the bite usually doesn't take long. During the winter-time, when crappie condense in much tighter schools, you may find that crappie will only bite if you are fishing straight down in a section of the brush pile that may only measure about the same size as a sheet of plywood.

The good thing is that though these elusive, clear, cold-water lake fish can be extremely hard to find, once you figure out the pattern and location, they often bite like crazy.

PHILLIP GENTRY is the host of PG & Boatgirl Outdoors Podcast. Download the podcast on Apple, Google Play, Spotify or at pgandboatgirl.com.