

Eagle Lake – The Secret is Out!!

By Bernard Williams, Magnolia Crappie Club

For a long time I've been preaching "You need to start fishing the MS River Oxbows", guess I need to reiterate it again. Early winter months are the perfect time to start. We recently held a club tournament at Eagle Lake / Chotard Lake outside of Vicksburg on some old MS River Oxbows. For you youngsters that are unfamiliar with what an Oxbow is, here's Keith Sutton's (The Crappie Fishing Handbook) definition of just what an Oxbow is:

"A lowland river left to its own devices will writhe and twist in its valley like a head-shot snake. The river erodes earth away in one place only to deposit it somewhere else, and though a river may always look the same to a casual visitor, it's never the same two days in a row. Over the years, a lowland river plows a new channel and abandons an old one there, always following the path of least resistance. Sometimes, when a meandering stream erodes the shores of its broad bends, loops of water are severed from the main stream. The ends of the loops are blocked by sediments deposited by the parent stream, and crescent-shaped lake is left behind. The shape of these lakes, Oxbow lakes are also known as cutoffs or river lakes.

When an oxbow is cut off from the river, its character immediately begins changing. The absence of continually flowing water allows sediment carried in from seasonal flooding to build up on the bottom and the old meander scar becomes shallow and relatively flat-bottomed. Water-tolerant plants such as cypress, tupelos and willows take root along the lake's edges. In years of drought, some shallow oxbows dry up, allowing plants to gain a foothold and encroach still farther into the lake. It's because of this cyclic process that many oxbows have large cypress trees growing in the middle of the lake, or have a ring of living trees and shrubs extending 50 to 100 feet or more from dry land.

All these natural process, from the natural cutting off of a new oxbow to the building up of bottom sediment to the gradual extension of woody vegetation farther and farther from the bank, are stages in the death of an oxbow lake. The process may take 500 years or more, but left undisturbed, all oxbows eventually silt in and transform into wetland forest.

The annual flooding cycle stimulates oxbow crappie to go on a feeding binge as water recede to normal levels. The feeding binge puts them in excellent spawning conditions, and because oxbows are very fertile, heavy spawns usually follow each winter / spring flooding cycle. Spawning still occurs in years of low rain, when flooding is absent, but it doesn't happen with the gusto that characterizes post-flood spawns."

Well, that's just what happened on Eagle Lake, located about 24 miles north of Vicksburg, MS. Through stocking efforts of MDWFP and MCC, I'm here to tell you "Eagle is back". Now, after the 2011 - 500 year flood elevated the water level at Eagle to almost overfull, huge white & black crappie in numbers are being caught. The arrival of flood waters stimulated the growth and the bite, just like Keith said. It is phenomenal to say the least. Limits after limits are being hauled out of Eagle every day.



Base on comparisons, MCC's tournament at Eagle and the Ropers All-Star Tournament at Sardis during the same week, our top weight was 15.09# versus 12.03#. To be honest 12.03# would have placed you around 24th place at Eagle. It took 14#'s to make the top 10. I don't know if Grenada could have matched those numbers during December. It was shocking; to the point we're glad we had 2 tournaments scheduled on Eagle / Chotard.

Here are the facts:

- Eagle is full of huge white crappie, fat and full of shad. They're in deep open water.
- Eagle is full of huge black crappie, fat and full of shad. They're in shallow water around the docks.
- Both species can be caught on minnows or jigs.
- The limits are 50 per person, most boats average about 40 per person per day.
- Average crappie catches are 1.25# to 2.5#.



For any of you that need a guide for a day or two on any of the MS River Oxbows, contact David Thornton (601-218-0007). David is very reasonable and knowledgeable of Eagle Lake, Chotard, and Albermarle. He fishes almost every day of the week and is a great teacher.

I'm not one to lead you astray, a trip to Eagle during the winter months may be just what you've be dreaming about. So, lay down the bows and rifles during the holidays and hit the water for some tremendous crappie action. Come on down south, ya hear. **BW**