



Try fishing Hotwater Lakes when winter hits

by Lee Keck

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There is one thing virtually every area angler believes - the Illinois winter is way too long. And with winter weather already showing its ugly face, the return to warm weather and the fishing season will likely seem to take forever.

However, local fishermen are fortunate in one way. We are blessed with a number of power plant cooling reservoirs that offer year-round fishing fun.

Though outside temperatures may be hovering near the freezing mark, water temperatures at these locations are somewhat similar to those found during the finest spring fishing weather.

When it comes to building a bass angler's confidence, few Illinois waters can compare to the 2,000-acre Randolph County Baldwin Lake power plant cooling reservoir.

Located about four miles east of Red Bud, this sprawling rectangular shaped reservoir is teeming with largemouths. Since it is an artificially heated lake, fishing action often begins months earlier than a normal lake.

As with most cooling reservoirs, growth rates at this location are exceptional. The typical one-year-old largemouth will measure nearly 15 inches in length. Two-year-old fish are almost 18 inches.

Biologists are again expecting excellent angling action, particularly for largemouths up to 15 inches in length. In addition, the numbers of bass in the 16-19 range remain quite high. If it is sheer numbers of fish you seek, this is certainly among the top downstate waters for 2018.

Anglers seeking additional information regarding Baldwin Lake can contact the site office at (618) 785-2555.

Though the bass fishing prospects at the 1,750-acre Jasper County Newton Lake cooling reservoir are not as good as in the past, angling action remains exceptional when compared to many popular waters.

Located about ten miles southwest of Newton, this popular bass fishing destination remains among the top fishing waters in the entire state. Recent population surveys have shown the size structure of the population has declined somewhat in recent years.

Unfortunately, the percentage of largemouths measuring more than 18 inches in length has decreased. The condition of the fish has also diminished some and this may indicate some problems with the forage base.

Still, excellent numbers of largemouths in the 13- to 16-inch range still roam these waters. Biologists are again expecting excellent angling action, particularly for largemouths in the two- to three-pound class.

Anglers seeking additional information regarding Newton Lake can contact the site office at (618) 783-3478.

Coffeen Lake is yet another downstate cooling reservoir where anglers regularly enjoy excellent early season success. Some of the finest bass fishing at this 1,100-acre Montgomery County lake often occurs in January and February, long before many anglers even think of preparing for the season.

Located about six miles southeast of Hillsboro, anglers are again expected to enjoy another year of quality bass fishing. While some reports indicate some diminished angling success, bass populations at this site still remain well above those found in most lakes.

Biologists say the proportion of largemouths measuring over 15 inches in length remains quite high at more than 30 percent. And, another 30 percent fall in the 12 to 15-inch range.

Anglers seeking trophy-class largemouths will also find plenty of opportunities. Population surveys show that some 14 percent of the largemouths measure better than 18 inches in length.

Another bright note to add to the Coffeen Lake outlook is the crappie population. Anglers are already landing good numbers of quality crappie and the action should only improve in the coming weeks.

Anglers seeking additional information regarding Coffeen Lake can contact the site office at (217) 537-3351.

There are also other nearby cooling lakes to be considered. Sangchris Lake southeast of Springfield is an excellent winter fishing destination. Lake of Egypt south of Marion also provides quality winter action.

Anglers willing to brave the cold temperatures are often rewarded with some hot winter fishing action at these lakes.