



By Michael Holley, Fisheries Biologist,  
Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries

# *Panfish* Paradise

East central Alabama boasts some of the most pleasant scenery in Alabama. Near the town of Delta, the Clay County Public Fishing Lakes are situated in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, only minutes away from the Talladega National Forest. Situated amongst the rolling hills, this facility is actually a chain of three lakes, which are managed by the Fisheries Section of the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries.

Locally known as the Upper, Middle, and Lower lakes, they offer over 74 acres of fishable water. If you are tired of the fast pace, and looking for a place to take kids, family, or friends on a relaxing getaway, then a trip to Clay County Lakes may be your desired destination.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

Clay County Lakes are open from February 1 to November 31, from daylight until sunset, and are only closed on Thursdays. A daily fishing permit (\$3) is needed for all anglers age 12 and older, in addition to the regular Alabama fishing license required for individuals between 16 and 64 years old.

The fishing permit should be purchased at the lake's concession building, which also has tackle, bait, snacks and is equipped with a public restroom. Boats and equipment (electric trolling motors, batteries, life jackets) are available for rent, or you can bring your own boat and launch it for a small fee from concrete ramps that have been constructed at each lake. Outboard motors can be attached to boats, but cannot be operated in the lakes.

Fishing piers have been constructed that provide good access for anglers who prefer to fish from the bank. Gene and Shirley Simmons, the lake managers, welcome new guests and enjoy helping visitors make the most of their visit to Clay County Lakes.

## FISH AND FISHING

The lakes support fish populations that include bream, crappie, bass and catfish. Crappie and bream are the most sought after fish at Clay County Lakes, but bass and catfish are also plentiful. The changing of seasons will trigger each species of fish to bite at different times. Therefore, the time of year that you visit should determine which species of fish you target.

Anglers start catching crappie that are moving shallow to spawn in late February, and they continue biting into late April. Numerous trees that have fallen around the shoreline, and fish reefs that have been added by the Fisheries Section, attract crappie during the spring. When targeting crappie at Clay County Lakes, anglers use live minnows or artificial baits that mimic minnows. Minnow imitation grubs, or tubes rigged on a 1/16- or 1/32-ounce jighead can produce good catches. If the crappie will not bite the imitation minnow, then the lake manager has live minnows for sale at the concession building. Live minnows are usually rigged on a small bait hook, with a single split shot attached about 12-15 inches above the hook, and a cork placed 2 to 5 feet above the hook.

Bass fishing is best from March through the end of May. The pre-spawn period of early March is the best time to catch a large bass, and on occasion, anglers will land a trophy weighing 8 to 10 pounds. Small bass are numerous, and anglers are encouraged to keep their daily limit of 10 bass to help improve the bass and bream populations. There is no size restriction on bass that can be kept from Clay County Lakes. You may want to contact the lake manager before heading out to the lakes to see what type of lures anglers have been getting bass to bite.

Bream can be caught almost anytime, but the best time to go for fast action is May and June. A worm or cricket rigged on a small bait hook will lead to some fantastic fishing during late spring. Fly fishing can also be effective, especially during early summer when aquatic insects are hatching. The creel limit is 20 bream per angler, and any size bream can be kept out of the lakes. The Middle Lake has exceptional bream fishing. In 2010, based on lake size, the number of bream caught from the Middle Lake was about three times higher than the statewide average for public fishing lakes.

When summer rolls around and the water temperature climbs, this is the perfect time to try your luck fishing for catfish. Catfish can be caught on a variety of baits, but a




time-tested favorite is chicken liver. Catfish action can be very fast in the small, enclosed portion of the Middle Lake, which receives a heavy stocking annually. Anglers can keep six catfish of any size daily.

Make sure and take your catch by the concession building for the manager to count and weigh before leaving.

Biologists use this information to implement management strategies to sustain quality fishing.

## ADDITIONAL FEATURES

Although fishing is the main attraction at Clay County Lakes, there are other outdoor activities of interest. Several picnic tables are available if you would like to stop by and enjoy lunch with a magnificent view. A pavilion, located near the concession building, is available for guests to enjoy, or it can be reserved for special events by contacting the lake manager.

Activities such as photography or bird watching are welcome any time the lakes are open. If you are ready for a relaxing getaway, keep Clay County Lakes in mind, and don't forget to take a fishing rod along! 

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Gene Simmons, Lake Manager  
6548 State Lake Rd.  
Delta, AL 36258  
256 488-0038

### Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries

District 2 Office  
P.O. Box 158  
Eastaboga, AL 36260  
256 831-6860

### Directions

From Lineville, take Highway 9 north to Delta. Turn left onto State Lake Road (County Road 47). Go about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile and turn left at the signs for Clay County Lakes.

From I-20 eastbound, take Highway 431 south to Hollis Crossroads. Turn right on Highway 9 to Delta. Turn right onto State Lake Road (County Road 47). Go about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile and turn left at the signs for Clay County Lakes.

I-20 westbound (Heflin), take Highway 9 south to Delta. Turn right on Highway 9 to Delta. Turn right onto State Lake Road (County Road 47). Go about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile and turn left at the signs for Clay County Lakes.