

Cedar Creek Lake – Kentucky’s Dream Lake Come True

As your boat glides into the timbered cove on a misty June morning, it hits you. This could be a scene from another era, perhaps a cover on an outdoor magazine from half a century ago. But then a slashing strike and a leaping largemouth bass break that mood of nostalgia. And you realize you’re on one of the very best bass waters you’ve visited in a long, long time.

The water is Cedar Creek Lake, in Lincoln County, Kentucky. It’s a lake for fishermen, planned by the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. It’s a plan that has played out very, very well.

At a time when fiscal constraints have prevented many states from building new fisheries, Kentucky found itself with an ideal opportunity: why not partner with the Kentucky Department of Transportation (DOT) as it was relocating to a new location and create a thoroughly angler-friendly fishing lake?

The total cost of the project topped \$8 million. Of that sum, Kentucky’s DOT footed \$3.5 million of the \$4 million dam construction costs, with Lincoln County investing \$500,000.

Kentucky Fish and Wildlife agreed to acquire all the land needed for the project – nearly 1,600 acres – at a cost of \$4.1 million. Most of this money was provided by the Sport Fish Restoration fund, dollars derived from the special excise tax monies collected on fishing tackle and motorboat fuel. These are the funds provided by anglers and boaters each time they purchase the equipment and fuel essential to their outdoor pursuits.

Still, a great fishery takes more than fiscal partners. It takes planning and foresight. Kentucky undertook a thorough review of “what works” in an angler’s lake and applied these principles liberally across the landscape that was to be impounded. The emphasis was on leaving – and in some cases creating – fish-friendly structure and habitat that would yield a range of game fish species.

The network of gravel roads, old ditches, submerged trenches and ridges provided ideal habitat for largemouth bass, one of the prime species for which the lake is managed. After the dam was closed and the waters began to rise, Kentucky Fish & Wildlife Resources stocked the new 784-acre impoundment with 2,500 largemouth bass, as well as 15,000 5-inchers and 20,000 black crappie, critters popular with pan-fishers across the Commonwealth, especially when they attain “slab” proportions.

Additional species included 180,000 bluegills, 120,000 redear sunfish, 8,000 channel catfish and 30,000 channels. The design of the lake even included the kind of rock piles that adult channel catfish can use for successful spawning.

Fishing in the new lake has been excellent and continues to improve each year as the fishery matures. Senior fisheries biologists in Kentucky believe it will develop into one of the best and most consistent largemouth bass fisheries in a state already blessed with some exceptional bass hotspots.

One of the great amenities of Cedar Lake is its tranquility. The scenic Kentucky countryside features a mix of forest stands and rolling pastures, and a 300-foot buffer purchased by Fish & Wildlife virtually guarantees an unspoiled and uncluttered shoreline. And the prohibition against

water skiing, houseboats and other distractions help assure the angler's sport can be pursued with a reasonable degree of quiet and minimal disturbance.

Angler input was an important ingredient in shaping this innovative new lake. Just about everything an angler could want went into Cedar Creek Lake, from easy foot access - to convenient boat launch sites - to safe navigation lanes through standing timber areas. A lake that encompasses all the best components of the "good old days" – a scenic, Sport Fish Restoration-funded fishery built strictly for angling pleasure – and the very latest in applied habitat enhancement techniques. Who says they can't "build 'em like they used to"? They certainly are in Kentucky.