

The Guide's Forecast - volume 6 issue number 24

Northwest Oregon's most complete and accurate fishing forecast

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 10th – December 16th, 2004**

Fisheries Update: Whether you are drift fishing, bobber fishing or wondering which river on the North Coast to fish, our series of technical reports will up your odds of a successful fishing trip. All you have to do is log on and pick which ones will help you catch more fish! These reports and several more are available at: <http://www.theguidesforecast.com/techrpt.shtml>.

Sturgeon anglers don't have much to get excited about as gorge success continues to drop. Bank anglers are having as much success as boat anglers although this is the time of year that we typically see a shift to the lower Willamette River fishery. Unfortunately, that hasn't happened either. Sturgeon reports are lackluster from everywhere this week.

Steelheading is still poor in the John Day Pool but there are still some steelhead available in the John Day Arm itself.

Clackamas steelheaders are likely to see the first wave of the winter steelhead run when the river starts to recede but it's still too early to expect any action on the Sandy. When it happens, you'll read about it here.

Sport-anglers are on their last productive week of crabbing on the lower Columbia as commercial pots will line the estuary for the December 15th opener. Motivated sport-anglers should easily be able to take a limit of crab (either off the beach at Fort Stevens or by boat) AND a potential limit of clams (surf permitting) on Clatsop area beaches. Don't forget your shellfish license!

This week, winter steelhead will arrive on the Pineapple Express! Nature has been good to anglers this year, despite it being one of the driest Novembers on record with rainfall a full eight inches below normal. Fall chinook angling was rewarding to many. No sooner did we observe that a good, flushing rain would be the catalyst required to kickoff the winter steelhead runs than the elements delivered. Thank you, Mother Nature.

For those who may not be aware, the aptly named Pineapple Express refers to a Pacific Ocean weather system bringing wet, tropical air from Hawaii to the West coast resulting in heavy rain. That's what's happening now.

Following the current deluge, river levels will recede making the highly anticipated arrival of bright, coastal sea-run rainbows en masse a reality.

The North Coast is currently getting pummeled with the rain fall of the season. This rain will stimulate the first significant bite of the season for winter steelhead on the Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem, Kilchis, Wilson and Nestucca Rivers. Late fall Chinook will also be available on the Wilson and Kilchis along with a rare bright Chinook on the Nestucca. For much greater detail on how best to target the last of the season Chinook, see the full length version of the newsletter.

South coast rivers and streams are getting it even heavier precipitation today (12/09) with over six inches falling in many locations in the last 24 hours. Rivers are blown currently but will offer coho and chinook in some locations in addition to fresh, bright winter steelhead. Rogue River steelheaders have been particularly thankful as the rains will not only improve river levels but warm the water which has been frigid.

Tahkenitch Lake remains open to the taking of wild coho at this writing but the closure with fulfillment of quota is imminent.

No trout were planted this week. When winter stocking does occur, larger trout are generally involved.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Sturgeon fishing on the Columbia continues to slow as water temperatures drop, weather gets more unkind and the fact that a lot of keepers got culled from the fishery with a great fall bite. Of 44 boats checked in the Columbia River Gorge last week, only 6 legals were taken along with 615 shakers. The bank anglers averaged similar results taking about 4 times as many keepers with 4 times as much effort. The keeper to shaker ratio is much better from the bank fishery however. Portland to Longview boats are just out for the fun of it however; one boat out of 53 tagged a keeper on the weekend check.

The steelhead woes continue as the John Day Arm continues to show the most effort however only 5 keeper steelhead and 3 wild ones were caught for 18 boats in this fishery over the weekend. No boats were interviewed fishing the mainstem itself. Poor passage seems to be a real issue in this segment of the summer steelhead's journey.

Winter steelhead fishing on the Cowlitz is reported as fair to good.

Thankfully, we still have awesome crabbing going on in the lower Columbia River. Anywhere from Buoy 20 upstream to Hammond is producing superbly but commercial pots are scheduled to soak a few days prior to the December 15th opener. This should be the last great weekend of crabbing. And speaking of shellfish, the Clatsop and Long Beach stretches should have ample clamming opportunities depending on the surf. If the surf is a rockin' don't come a knockin'. Clams seem to be "no-shows" when the surf is big and with this unsettled weather, you can bet on a big surf! Minus tides are in the evening and rather unsafe digging conditions may be likely.

The Guide's Forecast – Don't look for sturgeon or steelhead opportunities to increase anytime soon. There may be some sturgeon migration to the lower Willamette River as that system seems to run considerably warmer than the Columbia this time of year. Gorge angling will continue to slow and we are weeks away from fresh smelt sniffing sturgeon in the Longview stretch of the river. Speaking of smelt.....

The Oregon and Washington Departments of Fish and Wildlife are calling for a level 2 commercial smelt season on the Columbia. It is a cautious approach to a volatile resource. Warm ocean currents and a low Canadian bycatch of smelt in the offshore shrimp fishery indicate a smaller number of returning adults this year. Most of the smelt are 3 to 5 years old and although certain age classes show hope of a strong return, overall, the spawners should not show in big numbers again this year. A level 3 recommendation however would indicate a poor return so we have something to be thankful for.

Get out there crabbing but be safe in the unstable weather. Your last great opportunity to harvest a bounty for your holiday party! Buoy's 20 upstream to Hammond will produce the best on late morning/early afternoon tides over the weekend.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Recent data indicates the level of the Willamette above the Falls at Oregon City increased over three feet and continues to rise as of Noon on 12/09. Temperature data is only available as of 12/02 at which time it was only 40 degrees. Sturgeon anglers once again found numerous willing shakers in the lower Willamette over the last week but there were no reports of a single keeper-sized fish.

On a weather-related note, sewage spills invariably will occur in the Willamette River. This situation is horrendous and should be addressed. It is unconscionable that the discharge of raw sewage into the is a predicable event. It's Oregon. It's going to rain. Fix it.

The Guide's Forecast – As **Bob Rees** reports above, this is the time of year that the lower Willamette historically starts showing some improvement. The rain which has been such a blessing to winter steelheaders

may also be the catalyst to tempt sturgeon to the area around the Willamette mouth and Multnomah Channel if the water temperature rises with the level. Sturgeon are indifferent to muddy water and some experienced anglers claim this species prefer it. Regardless, it's no detriment and may improve this fishery, It's overdue.

With some fine fishing upcoming on rivers which receive runs of hatchery and broodstock steelhead, there's nothing happening on the Santiam systems to tempt anglers. Early in 2005, wild winter steelhead will enter, providing a catch-and-release fishery 'til the springers and summer fish arrive. Mmmmm ... springers

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Clackamas river level increased by more than five feet overnight pushing the level to 29.6 at the gauge near Oregon City on the morning of Thursday, December 9th. Prior to the rainfall, while a few steelhead were taken over the last week, effort has mirrored results; both have been very low.

The Guide's Forecast – The first worthwhile wave of winter steelhead enter with the high water on the Clackamas River with more to follow in the coming month. This will be the kickoff. Anglers would be wise to keep an eye on water levels and clarity. Being in the right place at the right time will yield results in the coming week. It won't be hot fishing, but, hey, it's just starting.

It's still early for winter steel on the Sandy River. Think Christmas. Better yet, think January.

North Coast District Fishing Report – Ask and you shall receive! The North Coast (and the rest of it too) is finally experiencing what we had been anticipating for most of the fall- a real "gully washer"! River rises will most likely occur through the weekend on most coastal tributaries giving a real jump start to the winter steelhead season when levels finally start to taper off. Prior to the current rain freshet, salmon fishing had tapered off with exception of some scattered catches in the bay and lower Wilson tidewater. Steelhead catches were also scattered in the Kilchis, Wilson and Nestucca Rivers last week but fair catches were reported in Three Rivers. **Pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** reports, "Looks like fall king season is done. It was a fantastic year. As the new weather approaches, look for fresh winter steelhead to be on the lower end of the river. There has been a few caught over the last week below Three Rivers, but very few. On this lower stretch, they seem to prefer sand shrimp and hardware. The main river is still clear (12/6) but look for some color and a good rise over the next few days. As it drops and clears a touch, the fish should be present in good numbers."

Prior to the current rain, sturgeon effort had remained steady in Tillamook Bay with most anglers sticking to the south channel in search of a keeper. With high salinity levels, crabs were again a problem so you had to stay shallow and keep lots of bait handy in order to keep targeting sturgeon. The rain should drive a lot of the crab from the upper bay and give some incentive for sturgeon anglers to up their efforts.

Crabbing in Tillamook Bay remained better than the ocean unless you were a commercial crabber. Commercial boats scored big catches last week but you had to travel long distances (too far for a sport boat) to get them. Crab harbor and even the jaws produced nicely during last weeks weak tide series.

The Guide's Forecast – This is the rain we have been waiting for! This freshet will drive coho, Chinook, steelhead and a few remaining chum into all coastal tributaries by early next week when river levels are predicted to drop back down into fishable shape. Look for the smaller tributaries to fish quicker. The Necanicum will be the first to come in but there are some considerations to take into account if you are going to fish this river. First, watch for blow down trees that make this float hazardous. I keep a saw in the boat for emergency purposes only. Don't cut out any branches or trees that you don't need to in order to pass safely as they are potential fish habitat. Concentrate on obstacles way ahead of you giving your maximum time to react in a dangerous situation. Second, if you plan on using the Johnson

Construction take-out, you have to renew your annual pass in October - as in last October - so make sure you are up to date on that. Finally, I have had some great fishing this time of year on the Necanicum but due to it's habitat complexity, plan on losing some gear. Be prepared to snag a lot so don't cut yourself short by under-stocking your tackle box. The fish on this small tributary respond well to smaller baits too! Corky and yarn combinations can sometimes produce as good as any bait combination! And as on all tributaries this time of year, be prepared to be able to identify the difference between coho and steelhead as they are both present at this time. If you are not 100% sure of the species you catch, you should release it. Coho and steelhead are frequently mistaken for each other. All the coho you will catch now are WILD!

The second best bet this week will be the Kilchis River. It has already produced some decent steelhead but this rain will bring fishable numbers of Chinook and steelhead. With the high river levels, fish will be spread nicely throughout the system. The higher the flows, the more Chinook will hang in steelhead type water. Target Chinook (again, in high flows) in the tailouts of pools and 2 to 5 foot slots using plugs- and shallow diving plugs too such as the hot shot and tadpolly. As flows drop to classic "green" condition, you can go back to targeting Chinook in their classic holding water of the heads of holes and deep runs, then targeting steelhead in their classic water. The water may still be quite high over the weekend which will make plunking or anchor fishing slots some of the more productive options. When fish aren't moving as fast in dropping flows, anchor fishing is NOT the way to go. It's a rare day when this fishing guide advocates for anchor fishing but higher flows (so high there aren't many other boats on the water) dictates this type of method with bait or plugs!

The Wilson, Trask and Nestucca will likely fish the best after the weekend if the predicted rain comes through. The Wilson will be the best bet (besides the Kilchis) for late season Chinook. I will re-iterate that even though a large percentage of the fish that will be caught this week are females, they are not of the best tablefare. Even the chrome-bright, sea-lice infested hens will likely cut mottled this late in the season. This is not the time to get greedy as these late running Chinook are very susceptible to over harvest. Like the smaller tributaries, the higher drifts will produce well at the first sign of a clearing river- and may be the better bets! The Wilson from Vanderzanden's downstream for Chinook and some steelhead early on, and then from Mills Bridge to Sollie Smith as the flows subside. On the Nestucca, most anglers will find the Three Rivers to Cloverdale drift the best option as most of the fish entering the Nestucca will be steelhead bound for Three Rivers. Bait will be the top choice in most cases as steelhead are inherently tuned into eggs during the Chinook spawn this time of year. Eggs and plugs will also work the best for Chinook but plugs seem more effective as flows begin to drop and Chinook become more territorial.

Although the mainstem Nehalem does not hold much promise for salmon or steelhead this time of year, the North Fork will get a good dose of steelhead. The hatchery holes will produce nicely as hatchery born fish will make tracks to enter their home facility. The drift from Erickson's old place is still accessible to the public for a fee I believe with the take-out being Aldervale.

A big tide exchange this week will put interested anglers fishing on the mudflats for sturgeon. Target water just out of the channels (on top of shrimp beds if you know where those are) on the flood tides and just into the channels on the outgoing tide. Don't be afraid to fish the 3 to 5 foot water for sturgeon. They should be present in decent numbers after this rain. Sand shrimp and mud shrimp should work equally well although mud shrimp will certainly hold up better if any crab are present.

And speaking of crabbing, this rain freshet should put crab back in their place- the ocean! Crabbing will likely taper a bit in the bay and the ocean looks to be rough for some time so that holiday order of shellfish may have to come from the grocery store! Be aware of the high tide series that may jeopardize your gear during peak flows!

Central & South Coast Reports – Timing, as always, will be following this deluge. Catching the rivers as they recede will yield the best results and predicting here when the prime conditions will occur would mean reliance on the weather forecasts. Life-long Oregonians know better.

In off-color water, cured salmon eggs will be most productive, either alone or in conjunction with a brightly-colored Corky. If the water is classic 'steelhead green' or clearer, many anglers will score with only a Corky, possibly decorated with a wisp of yarn which helps to carry scent. Jigs fished under a float are also effective. Eggs will remain productive in all water conditions.

The important element regardless of technique is to keep offerings very near the bottom. The advantage of weighting baits and lures properly to just take them to bottom, touching occasionally rather than tap-tap-tapping along becomes evident when one considers that steelhead often take very lightly and the pickup is much easier to detect with the using the least amount of lead possible to keep it in 'the zone.' The result of proper weighting is better 'feel' combined with a more natural presentation.

The South coast is really taking a beating in this storm with reports on 12/09 of six inches or more having fallen in the last 24 hours.

Between the startup of commercial crabbing efforts on December 1st and the fresh water reducing salinity in bays which forces Dungeness out to the ocean, crabbing will be poor for the upcoming week with the exception of deep-water ports like Charleston.

Incidentally, when the weather breaks and skies clear, nights will be seasonally cold. Travel with care and think twice about trailering anything on icy roads.

On the central and South coast, best bets include the Umpqua where wild coho will be amidst the fresh winter steelhead. Coho lacking a fin clip must be released. Sturgeon are being taken below the 101 Bridge and while the majority are over the legal length limit, a 59-incher fell on Saturday, December 4th.

Speaking of wild coho, the ODFW indicates the quota at Tahkenitch is yet to fill. It must be getting close, however, so those entertaining a shot at the fishery should check to be certain it remains open. Check the regulations for boundary locations.

Speaking of regulations, the 2005 Oregon Fishing Regulations are available now. One of the interesting early revelations is the opening of a wild coho fishery on the Yaquina and Alsea Rivers in August. More to follow. Stay tuned.

Chinook are entering the Elk and Sixes Rivers with this freshet and providing they don't run the entire length of the river, will provide late-season action.

Like most Southern Oregon coastal rivers, the Rogue River is blown. Steelheaders on the Rogue have been among those most hopeful for this precipitation, however, as the rain will not only provide motivation to awaiting fish but also raise the temperature of the frigid water.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688) reports from the chilly East side, "December's snowy weather in the Wallowa Valley has all except the most hardy steelhead anglers looking for other activities.

"Although mid and high elevations are collecting and holding snow this week, the low elevations along the county's steelhead rivers are snow free with temperatures reaching the 40s each day. By late this week those temperatures could reach the low 50s as a warm-weather system approaches bringing more precipitation. The question for anglers becomes the quantity of runoff that this new weather system will create.

"Presently river levels are below average flow, which has pluses and minuses. The low water makes access to fishing holes easier, but the clear water produces spookier fish and the low-water flows are relatively cold, often just above freezing, that may result in lethargic fish. The risk later in the week is that rain on snow could push water levels up too quickly, effectively ending fishing for a day or so. If water levels rise slowly there will only be a barely noticeable change in fishing. If the water rises rapidly, fishing will drop to zero until the water stabilizes and begins dropping again. The turbid water from the runoff will benefit anglers by moving more fish upstream, the active fish typically biting readily.

"The Grande Ronde River early this week is flowing at 720 cfs with water temperatures in the low 30s. An abundance of fish has made fishing good during the last couple weeks and the cool weather has eased angling pressure and simplified finding open water to fish.

"A creel survey from Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife for the last week of November shows Oregon anglers averaged about nine hours per fish, landing 13 hatchery and nine wild steelhead among the 48 anglers interviewed. Washington anglers averaged about 12 hours per fish, landing 13 hatchery and seven wild steelhead among 52 anglers checked.

"The Wallowa River offers slim hope for steelhead now. These fish usually arrive in fishable numbers in late February. The Wallowa River offers handy fishing for whitefish while awaiting the arrival of steelhead, with the possibility connecting with the real thing."

Northwest Trout - Planting of state-raised rainbows is sporadic over the winter time but when it occurs, the trucks will invariably carry some larger specimens. On Monday, December 13th, Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake, both of which are located in Salem, will receive trout, some of which will measure 12 inches or better. Soon, broad-shouldered brood trout will be included in the stocking runs.

Reader Email

Over the last week or so, I (Michael) have exchanged Emails with Paul D., and experienced angler from McMinnville who was new to sturgeon fishing on the coast.

"Greeting, I am interested in Sturgeon fishing in the Yaquina River. I was wondering if you had any information on where you fish, incoming or outgoing tide, type of bait and depth? I have only fished for Sturgeon in the Columbia and Willamette Rivers, so this will be a whole new experience. I enjoy reading your article every week. Keep up the good work!"

To which I replied, "Regarding sturgeon fishing, since you have some experience I won't go into great detail on the tackle or techniques. Suffice it to say that salmon rods are adequate as this is much like fishing the Columbia estuary. The lighter tackle is all that's required since you won't be fishing deep water or strong currents.

"The best bait for coastal sturgeon is generally considered to be mud shrimp. This bait is more durable than the alternative, sand shrimp (but then, what isn't?). In coastal waters, crab may be a problem so be sure to take some maline cloth and stretchy thread. alternately, moving upriver will help. These baits are usually fished unscented (since the smell of fresh shrimp bait is naturally appealing). If you can't get sand or mud shrimp, squid from the local meat market is a reliable bait. Herring from a bait dealer is another. It'd be a good idea to scent either of these.

"If you use prepared Dacron leaders, try soaking them overnight in vanilla. You'll find that scent in the cupboard with your wife's baking supplies. <g> On the Yaquina River, anglers targeting sturgeon either start at marker 25 and work up or at Toledo and work down. There are launches at both locations. About the highest anyone fishes sturgeon is Mill Creek (above Toledo). The best option will be to start on the outgoing tide, fishing through

the turn and into the first hour or two of incoming. Here's a map which includes other coastal locations.

"Look for ledges, points or sand flats with small channels running through them. These channels act as sturgeon freeways and are a good spot to set up your ambush.

"An interesting aspect to fishing sturgeon anywhere on the coast is that while it's likely to be a long wait between bites (since there are virtually no shakers), any fish hooked is likely to be a keeper. While sturgeon are not technically a schooling fish, they usually travel in groups of similar size.

"Here are some local numbers to call for additional information. Be sure to ask if they've got mud shrimp available even though it's a bit of a long shot at this time of year.

Harry's Bait and Tackle (541-265-2407)

Newport Marina Store (541-867 4470)

Englund Marine (541-265-9275).

"Hope this helps, Paul. Please let me know how you do."

Sure enough, Paul went fishing and wrote again, "Hi Michael, I wanted to give you an update on Sturgeon Fishing on the Yaquina. It turns out we spent the morning feeding Dungeness. We fished various spots all the way to Toledo and couldn't get away from them. After we got back to Southbeach Marina we went to the little bait shop on the Docks and talked to a couple of old timers. They said sturgeon fishing is best from Jan 1 - April 30. They said the fresh water will flush out the crab down to about Marker 25. I looked for Maline cloth before we left but couldn't find any. Anyway, it was a beautiful day at the coast, and gave us an opportunity to learn the river. We plan on going back after the first of the year. Thank you again for the information. I'm sure I'll be talking to you in the future."

And I replied. "Thanks for the report, Paul.

"Yeah, early spring is historically the time to pursue coastal sturgeon. I considered mentioning it in my previous response, but since you hadn't asked about the best time and I'd heard of a few coming from the Tillamook system (indicating their presence in the estuaries) was concerned that doing so might be construed as discouraging words.

"Early in the year, sturgeon head out into the ocean, down the coast and into the bays following the food supply. These hardy fish are comfortable in salt or freshwater environments.

"Regarding the Maline cloth, the 'Marts should have it with the steelhead gear. It's a handy item to have on hand to counter crab attacks. If they don't have the generic stretchy thread (which is usually white rather than red), seek some in the sewing department. It's much cheaper.

"Please write again anytime. I'll be looking forward to hearing about your fishing adventures in the future."

Several readers made inquiries similar to this one from "Pat K., "I am a new subscriber and have been waiting in anticipation the past few weeks for you to report that the Idaho bound Steelhead have arrived at John Day. I've fished the John Day arm this time each year for the past 6 years from the mouth to Lapage park and just beyond and had a fair amount of luck. Your John Day reports have been dismal but I went anyway a few weeks ago (got skunked) AND I was planning on going tomorrow (Friday). I talked to me brother yesterday who told me that a guide that he and I have fished with, fished the John Day on Tuesday of

this week. It was him and one other boat. He had no luck and fished the river hard. I got curious and got on the internet and started doing some John Day research. I came across this newsletter and article (10) about "Repairs Blocked Winter Fish Passage At John Day Dam" which was shocking to me. If the article is true, it would explain what is going on this year at John Day. This information may be worth passing along to your other subscribers."

Here's the answer: [*http://www.newsdata.com/enernet/fishletter/fishltr160.html#10](http://www.newsdata.com/enernet/fishletter/fishltr160.html#10)

Write to the TGF staff:

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Random Links

Lotasa stuff to read 'eil the floods recede. Winter steelhead tackle and techniques:

[*http://www.gameandfishmag.com/salmonsteelhead/gf_aa026303a/](http://www.gameandfishmag.com/salmonsteelhead/gf_aa026303a/)

[*http://www.miracleglue.com/fishing2.htm](http://www.miracleglue.com/fishing2.htm)

[*http://www.steelheaduniversity.com/sandshrimp.html](http://www.steelheaduniversity.com/sandshrimp.html)

[*http://www.fishonbc.com/articles_wstp2.html](http://www.fishonbc.com/articles_wstp2.html)

[*http://www.fishingmagician.com/story_steelhead.html](http://www.fishingmagician.com/story_steelhead.html)

[*http://www.yakimabait.com/procorky.phtml](http://www.yakimabait.com/procorky.phtml)

[*http://www.piscatorialpursuits.com/resourcecenter/driftfishing.htm](http://www.piscatorialpursuits.com/resourcecenter/driftfishing.htm)

Weekly Quote - "One of the first rules in fishing is that there are few rules in fishing that resourceful trout do not manage to break.

Indeed, if there be any they don't smash to smithereens at one time or another my top candidate is this one: if you want to make sure the fishing will turn lousy, just dare invite a fellow angler from far away; the farther, the lousier. Before the poor man's visit is over you can lay ten to one you'll be muttering some version of the classic lament of Pierre the Guide, "Mistaire, you shoulda been 'ere las' week."" - Robert Traver

GOOD LUCK