

The Guide's Forecast - volume 6 issue number 25

Northwest Oregon's most complete and accurate fishing forecast

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 17th – December 23rd, 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 fishing on the Columbia at Bonneville Dam remains the most productive river-wide. Although catch rates have dropped from the month of November, keepers are still quite available and the warmer weather seems to have re-stimulated a bite.

Steelhead action in the upper Columbia River pools remains poor.

Crabbing on the lower Columbia was slower over the weekend but a weaker tide series coupled with another delay in the commercial crab season should bode well for weekend crabbers.

The Tillamook district is filled with Chinook and steelhead. The Chinook seem to be more present and accounted for than the steelhead but that should change over in the very near future. The Wilson will be the river of choice for the weekend.

There are not many people fishing in the bay for sturgeon but it is time for this fishery to kick in. The crabbing has also slowed in the bay due to the freshwater influence we experienced last weekend. It may pick up over the weekend but crabbers should focus their efforts closer to the ocean.

Elk River chinook fishermen had a hot day on Monday but the action slowed somewhat mid-week.

While steelheading has been slow on many Southern coastal streams, the recent rainfall is just what the Rogue River needed to get the winter steelies moving and biting. Fishing for summer also improved on the upper river.

The Willamette River remains slow for sturgeon fishing.

The Clackamas is coming into fine shape although steelheaders aren't finding winter fish. The Sandy will be fishable later, like January, when the winter run starts there.

Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake were planted with trout this week.

It has come to the attention of the TGF staff that a beloved and respected member of the fishing community, has been hospitalized. Jennie Logsdon Martin, owner and webmaster of www.ifish.net had to undergo unexpected open-heart surgery on Friday, December 10th. Complicating the situation is that Jennie suffers from Marfan Syndrome. The Guide's Forecast and iFish have had a relationship for years, supporting and promoting one another. At this time, Jennie is recovering and her condition is improving. Please keep her in your thoughts and prayers.

Soapbox Update: * * * HOW MUCH MORE ARE YOU WILLING TO GIVE UP? * * *

I don't generally draw negative attention to our beloved Department's of Fish and Wildlife but this proposal is really frying me! Why would our Departments (both Oregon and Washington) allow a three-fold increase in steelhead mortality, putting fragile wild stocks at risk, for the harvest of a few thousand more hatchery Chinook? If there was ever a time for sportanglers to unite.....**THE TIME IS NOW!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! READ ON:**

Dear Friends of Steelhead where ever you may be:

Many of you are already aware that the States of Washington and Oregon have applied to NOAA Fisheries to increase the allowable impacts on ESA listed steelhead in the Columbia by the commercial fleet. The request is to raise from 2% to 6% the mortality cap on wild winter steelhead to give the commercial fleet the ability to have a higher by-catch of wild steelhead while they are netting Spring Chinook Salmon out of the mainstem.

Members of the sportfishing and conservation community are outraged. After all, there have been decades of conservation efforts and sacrifices made the sportfishing community that is paying off in healthier steelhead stocks. From leading the charge for selective fisheries, changing hatchery practices, habitat and hydro protections, sport fishers have fought for protective measures for wild steelhead. We did not do so to transfer the biological benefits of our efforts over to the commercial fleet to die in tangle nets. It's not fair.

Indeed, many of the stocks are still too fragile to be raising impacts. For example, WDF&W's own biologists suggest that the proposed **increase** would likely result in the extinction of the Toutle River wild winter steelhead. Furthermore, ocean conditions right now are extremely beneficial to wild steelhead. This is the time to invest the recent increase of wild ESA steelhead in recovery, not in increased mortalities!

Small communities throughout Washington and Oregon are reaping the benefits of steelhead fisheries that are selectively targeted on hatchery winter steelhead. Literally tens of thousands of angler trips are spent in pursuit of winter steelhead in the lower Columbia. ODF&W has estimated that an angler trip in the lower Columbia is valued at \$138.00 per day. Sportfishing for winter steelhead occurs during an important window to help sustain year-round family wage jobs. Looking at the last several years of data, there are almost yearly examples where the commercial fleet over fished their preseason quota. This would shut down sport fisheries in the mainstem and in the tributaries, where smaller businesses depend upon winter steelhead.

You must do three things right now!

- 1) Write (via fax or mail) the Commission Chairs today!
- 2) Send the same letter to the Governor's office today
- 3) Pass this e-mail on to others on your list.

Remember to stay professional and polite, but be clear that this is not acceptable. You are welcome to call any of us with questions, or if you need help. We at NSIA would appreciate a copy of your letter sent to: nsia.aaron@comcast.net

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Columbia River Fishing Report – Sturgeon fishing improved slightly over last weeks dismal results- likely due to a slight warming trend that came in with the recent storm events. Bank anglers are still producing impressive results with almost a keeper every third rod for gorge anglers. Boat anglers in the gorge still rule the roost with catch success. They tallied a keeper for almost every other boat over the weekend. Considering the mixed weather we experienced, that was a pretty good creel check. Boats fishing closer to the Portland area on the Columbia were averaging about a keeper every sixth boat. Smelt is the go to bait this time of year but some

anglers receive dividends by going with something extra on the hook- say a sand shrimp or piece of eel. Diversity can really pay off this time of year. The upper river fishery (Wauna to Bonneville) will make it through this season with fish left on their quota. Upper river fishers tallied a successful season with only small block closures, good fishing and ample opportunity throughout the year. It looks like seasons will be set in 2005 that were similar to this year. It's a scheme that seemed to be workable for most folks.

Crabbing in the estuary has taken a turn for the worse. The commercial pots have not gone into the river yet, and aren't scheduled to do so prior to December 29th and may be delayed as late as January 15, 2005. I crabbed over the weekend but in my defense, we didn't have the elements on our side. The weather kept us from placing our pots where we wanted them and the extreme tides kept them from crabbing effectively. Most of the effort is taking place close to Buoy 22 and although we only took between 10 and 24 crab per day, the tides will become more friendly to a crabber's success. The large amount of fresh water coming down after the rain certainly didn't help matters either.

Steelhead fishing in the upper Columbia reaches continues to be a bust. We are still seeking answers to the potential passage problems at the John Day facility.

The Guide's Forecast – Sturgeon fishing will likely stay about on par as what we have witnessed over the last several weeks. Sporadic results but good fishing is certainly possible. The weather isn't forecasted to become so bitter cold that it will adversely affect the gorge sturgeon bite. Wind may hamper anglers to some degree but a fishing trip is still viable. Smelt will continue to be the best bait but keep in mind that most anglers will be using it so creativity may pay dividends. Bank anglers should continue to witness good success until colder air temperatures start affecting water temperatures. An effort shift will likely start to take place as anglers gravitate to the mouth of the Willamette River and the Willamette itself. Sturgeon seem to favor the warmer running Willamette when it cools down in the big river. There was near record catch in the Portland Harbor last winter starting about this time.

Crabbing should improve this weekend as we move into a softer tide series. The softer tides will open up much more opportunity as crabbers can effectively crab the deeper water. You want to make sure your gear is soaking through the first part of the tide change that you are targeting. The slack times are when crab are most active. The late opener only spells additional opportunity for sport crabbers wanting to score premium appetizers to their holiday menus! The fresher the bait, the more the success. Non-freezer burned shad, tuna bellies or bait fish will produce the best and keep as much of it caged as possible so it lasts longer. Target these crab from Buoy 20 to the Hammond Boat Basin in 25 to 40 foot of water.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Sturgeon reports repeat the lament "it should improve," but there's no indication of that situation transpiring. The statement is historically accurate and fast, muddy flows do generally improve the bite, but reports indicate that it's been spotty at best.

Anglers trying in the Kelly Point area are encountering numerous shakers but only the occasional keeper has been landed. Upstream from the Willamette mouth, efforts have been unrewarding.

As of December 13th, the latest counts available, 222 winter steelhead have crossed at Willamette Falls. The water temperature is 42 degrees, up from the chilly 38 degrees reported on December 7th. Visibility is less than one foot.

Boaters chasing sturgeon on either the Columbia or Willamette should anchor with caution and keep a watchful eye upstream at all times. There's a great deal of debris in both rivers.

The Guide's Forecast – The Willamette River will offer non-stop action for sturgeon. Unfortunately, these are sub-legal sized fish. We won't be so foolish as to predict when this will improve. It's overdue.

The high water conditions on the North Santiam should be reason enough to consider other options. The few fish present would be another. Until summer steelhead show, only native winter fish will be available for catch-and-release. With many locations improving for hatchery and broodstock steelhead, why bother?

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – The Clackamas River looks quite clear where it empties into the roiled waters of the Willamette. Fishing has been spotty, but winter steelhead hopes are high with the current break in the rain storms.

The occasional steelhead has reportedly been taken on the Sandy, but it's too early in the season for this to be a strong option.

The Guide's Forecast – It's a little early yet and few winter steelhead have been taken this week on the Clackamas, but it may be worth a shot for metro-area anglers looking for a Christmas fish.

Soon, metalheads will be in the Sandy River report. But not now. Look for reports early next year when the broodstock fish start entering. Fish elsewhere for now.

North Coast District Fishing Report – Fishing is all that we had hoped it would be here on the North Oregon Coast. Limits were the rule for **pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** from 12/13 – 12/15. Chris started off on the Kilchis River on 12/13 and 12/14 pursuing Chinook mainly. Efforts paid off early for him and his customers as chrome Chinook hit the deck after multiple opportunities each day. Most recently, Chris hit the Wilson River (12/15) taking 4 chrome Chinook for 7 opportunities by 10:30 a.m. Chris did the Donaldson's to Sollie Smith Bridge float and didn't see many other boats on the water—partially due to the fact that he limited early. When asked if he had heard of any steelhead, Chris indicated he personally hadn't seen any and only heard of a few from the upper drift. None-the-less, conditions were ideal for driftboaters on the Kilchis and Wilson by Wednesday. **Avid angler Bill Hof** hit the Wilson on 12/15 taking an early limit as well bobber fishing. Bill landed 4 fish for 5 opportunities in short order.

Steelheaders hitting the smaller streams like the Necanicum and North Fork of the Nehalem River fared well over the weekend. These rivers fish well when Tillamook streams are too high to drift. Foul weather kept many anglers safe from potential blow downs over the weekend but dropping conditions allowed for some success by Sunday. This is really the best time of year to pursue winter run fish as they are fresh from the sea with little chance to running into spawned out fish. Granted they are not the aggressive biters we will encounter later into the season but their quality is high and their fight is what one would expect from a steelhead.

Limits of crab have been taken from Netarts Bay which, without significant freshwater tributaries, maintains a decent level of salinity when other coastal bays and estuaries are unsuitable for Dungeness habitation due to the heavy rains.

The Guide's Forecast – Fishing should last through the weekend as flows drop into next to ideal shape. Ideal shape is NOW. The Wilson was fishing best from Wednesday through Thursday. Good numbers of chrome bright Chinook were available and should be through the weekend. Weekend anglers will not experience the same results as we did during the middle of the week so expect to have to work harder for these fish. They will be holding in their traditional Chinook-type water. That is, deep, boily water and at the heads of holes. As the flows drop, they will become more receptive to plugs. Fish Kwikfish in the deeper water and Tadpolly's in the shallower water. You will be fishing for steelhead and salmon with the Tadpolly's. With clear water conditions and sunny skies, metallic colors will work well. Metallic pink, blue and green will be great choices and of course these standard colors mixed with chrome colors as well. The Wilson will be the best bet and anglers will want to target the water from Mills Bridge to Sollie Smith.

The shorter alternative will be Donaldson's drift to Sollie Smith. Steelheaders should have ample opportunities as well and this week should define how the season will go. If we have good numbers of steelhead show up in the catches this week, it should be safe to say it is going to be a good year. Like the Chinook, the steelhead will be in their traditional drifts- shallower, broken surfaced water between 3 and 5 feet deep. There will be an occasional Chinook in this type of water as well.

The Kilchis River will also be a viable alternative but a stealthy angler will be a successful one. Use light lead to backbounce eggs in key locations (again, target that "classic" water) to find the Chinook. The water will be dropping quickly holding fish up and making them more wary of an angler's presence. Bobber fishing in the deeper pools may pay off too but you will be targeting darker fish. Keep fishing in the current for the fresher fish. Tadpolly's will be a good bet on the Kilchis River as Kwikfish may be too cumbersome for the dropping flows.

The Trask will have a stray bright Chinook and maybe a stray hatchery steelhead with little competition for angling space.

Central & South Coast Reports – With the passage of the aptly-named Pineapple Express, coastal rivers are coming into optimal condition for winter steelhead. While still early on many systems, the time is right for anglers who hit the right location with the best technique.

Color is the primary issue, not flow. If the water is any shade of green, fishing should be good providing one is fishing a river where steelhead are available.

The target of the majority of anglers is winter steel but late-season chinook are available as well. Rivers are forecast to drop from several inches by the weekend.

In higher flows, bait will out-fish lures for steelhead. Drifting good-quality, cured salmon eggs with a small Corky to add a bit of buoyancy will be most effective. When the rivers once again drop and clear, spinners, bobber 'n' jig setups or drift lures will also be effective. Chinook will also take these offerings although they tend to hold in the deepest holes as rivers drop.

The lack of any December photographs at Coyote Rock is not as good an indicator of prospects as a first-hand report, but in lieu of that, one might surmise that it's been pretty slow. That may change following the recent freshet.

Several dozen winter steelhead may be seen at the hatchery on the North Fork of the Alsea River and there are a few very large fish in the mix. Although fishing has been spotty, A few steelhead are being taken daily on a morning bite.

Winter steelheading on the Umpqua is very slow although some have moved up to the South which may offer possibilities as the river levels recede.

In my haste last week to glean new information from next year's fishing regulations, I misread the change on the Yaquina and Alsea which resulted in an error. These rivers will open in August for **fin-clipped** coho. Wild fish must be released unharmed, as always. The 2005 Oregon Fishing Regulations pamphlet is available now at all location which sell licenses and tags.

As predicted, chinook entered the Elk and Sixes Rivers with the recent Deluge. The Elk was red-hot on Monday, December 13th, and while the action has slowed a bit, this location remains the best bet on the South coast for chrome, Fall chinook.

The recent rain had a positive effect on the Rogue, as was expected. Local anglers were dealing with not only

summertime-low water conditions but frigid water temperatures as well. With the rain came winter steelhead in good number to the lower river where plunkers have been intercepting fresh metalheads near shore in high water. Another rainfall-related bonus is the summer steelhead which turned on in the upper river, providing entertainment to drift fishermen and plug-pullers. The hatchery hole has been productive and recycling of summer is once again taking place.

In 2005, it will once again be possible to catch bottom fish but anglers should be aware of new, tighter restrictions put in place to extend the season rather than shut it off. Wight bottom fish (black and other rockfish, cabezon and greenling) will be allowed per day in along with two ling cod. There are no guarantees, however. "Reducing the marine bag limit to eight will not ensure that the 2005 fishery will stay open for the entire year," according to officials.

In a release December 15th, the ODFW announced some good news for halibut fishermen which may help to offset the mixed feelings regarding restrictions on other bottom fish. In addition to an extra day of opportunity for all-depth halibut, and an increased in the quota, minimum length requirements have been eliminated. Spring season will extend from May through July and summer season will open in August and continue through July on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays for the all-depth fishery. Stonewall Bank out of Newport will be off limits as the PMFC determined it's over fished. Anglers will find a map in the 2005 fishing regs.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Pro Guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688) sent this detailed report, "The season's first "Pineapple Express" made an untimely arrival late last week and put a damper on weekend fishing activities.

"Low elevation snow was soon cleared from the ground in northeast Oregon with minimal impact for the first day, but by Saturday saturated soils were no longer absorbing the runoff and the rivers were rapidly rising, some to more than double the water levels during the preceding week.

"The Grande Ronde River crept up from near 700 cfs early last week to about 1,000 cfs on Friday and then accelerated to a peak of more than 2,100 cfs on Sunday, spoiling fishing on Saturday and Sunday. By Monday the river had stabilized and was dropping and fishing showed marked improvement from the weekend's dismal conditions.

"Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's creel survey for the Grande Ronde River suggests a continued slowing for fishing, but other angler reports indicate that all is not equal. The creel survey reports Oregon anglers averaged about 12 hours per fish, landing six hatchery and three wild steelhead and Washington anglers averaging nearly 14 hours per fish, landing 11 hatchery and one wild steelhead.

"During the week, however, anglers reported days when they caught more fish than the total creel-survey results, using various bait fishing methods. Fly anglers probably reflected the creel average statistics in their results, but that changed this week. Higher, warmer water on Monday, however, changed results for fly anglers - there were virtually no others on the river - with the results for them finally attaining multi fish results, including fish rising to dry flies.

"While the water level raised substantially the increased flows also bolstered water temperatures, boosting them from the low 30s to the low 40s. Water clarity was improving steadily through the day on Monday with reasonable visibility at the beginning to the day and adding inches as the day progressed.

"The Wallowa and Minam rivers as well as other tributaries showed substantial drops in volume at the end of the weekend which promises continued improving conditions for the next few days.

"The Wallowa River, with input from Bear Creek and the Lostine River may have suffered a minor setback early in the weekend but was probably fishable by Sunday, while the Grande Ronde didn't begin

producing for another 24 hours."

Northwest Trout - Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake received a fresh-fish injection this week courtesy of the ODFW. These plantings were a mix of "catchable" (eight to 10-inch) and "larger" (12-inch) specimens. Next week, Huddleston Pond in Willamina along with Junction City Pond will receive several hundred trout each in the "trophy" (16-inches or better) category. For directions to any of these family-friendly fisheries, drop us an Email.

Reader Email

Avid angler Don S., a retired salmon troller after 25 years and now dedicated to improving fishing for recreational fishermen as it related to ocean salmon harvest, is well on his way to becoming a regular contributor. This week, he wrote, "Attached is the latest landings of Troll Salmon by pounds and price by statistical week and Port.

"Total all Chinook combined of **2.8** million lbs. Average price per pound for Chinook all grades **\$3.45** and total ex-vessel landings of Chinook **\$9.8 million**.

"Adding in the **\$86K** from Coho caught North of Falcon (**\$1.24/lb avg.**) Oregon Trollers totaled **closer to \$9.9 Million**.

"This is the largest ex-vessel dollar amount landed in Oregon Coastal Ports according to the PFMC REVIEWS since they began in 1971.

"I wonder how high the total would have been if a full season had been prosecuted?"

"I will have a final report sometime in January 2005 and will forward it as it comes.

"Better sharpen your hooks for 2005!"

TGF Readers interested in this information are welcomed to Email *SailCat@TheGuidesForecast.com for a PDF copy of the complete 45-page document detailing all salmon landings and the price these fish brought. In addition, troll and sport salmon estimates through week 44 of 2004 are available.

Other items of interest-

At a Dec 10 ODFW commission meeting, this subject of abuse of limits by unscrupulous, so-called anglers reporting fishing tags as 'lost' and replacing them with a new, blank tag. This allows them to get more than their annual limit of salmon, steelhead, sturgeon or halibut. OSP recommended to the commissioners that replacements tags be changed so that they could only be purchased at ODFW offices, an inconvenience to honest fisherfolks. Lindsey Ball, Director of the ODFW, said this problem has been around for the entire 30 years he spent at ODFW, no good solution had ever been found but that it was time to deal with it.

Another document crossed our desks, the contents of which defies classification by region but which is of interest to many anglers who fish (or want to fish) spring chinook. In a December 10th release, the ODFW Commission predicted returns next year to be stronger than thought originally and similar to those of 2004. An estimated 200,000 to 250,000 upriver brights along with 100,000 bound for the Willamette River are anticipated. Coastal runs are also expected to be good again in 2005. Regulations based on these estimates will be finalized in January.

Write to the TGF staff:

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Random Links

It'll be cold again this weekend. Check the road conditions before you go:

*<http://www.tripcheck.com/RoadCond/izone1.htm>

Near-shore winter steelheading tops from Scot Haugen:

*http://espn.go.com/outdoors/tips/s/f_fea_04_steelhead_FHN.html

Weekly Quote - "If a new man is particularly attentive he can learn to fly fish in a half hour. But then he will go on learning as long as he fishes " - Arthur R. MacDougal, Jr.,

GOOD LUCK!