

The Guide's Forecast - volume 6 issue number 28

## **Northwest Oregon's most complete and accurate fishing forecast**

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 14<sup>th</sup> – January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2005**

**Fisheries Update:** Whether you are driftfishing, bobberfishing 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>.

Travelers are reminded again this week to check the ODOT website or dial **511** for the latest road conditions and travel advisories. With overnight temperatures dipping into the 20s every night, it's sure to be icy. Exercise particular caution on bridges as these will be the first to freeze and the last to thaw.

Columbia River sturgeon fishing continues to produce poor results mostly due to cooler weather. A warm front would likely improve matters but that may be a ways off. It will likely be weeks before a decent bite is stimulated by the presence of fresh smelt, too.

Commercial crabbers on the lower Columbia began to soak their pots by mid-week. There should still be plenty of keepers for the persistent crabber downstream of Hammond, however.

The North Coast continues to be a disappointment for steelheaders. The early returning hatchery fish seem to be a no-show and it won't likely improve until the wild component makes their showing in late February.

Steelheading is good to excellent on most South coast streams. Cured salmon eggs are most effective now. While the water is low in many of these streams, the fishing continues to hood up well. An exception is the Siletz where it's still too early for winters.

Sturgeon fishing is still a draw on Tillamook Bay, however, and a late afternoon minus tide is due to hit by late in the weekend. Bring lots of sand shrimp cause you'll be competing with the crab.

Sturgeon are finding no relief from the chilly Columbia water in the even colder water of the Willamette. Fishing effort and results are negligible.

Cold, clear water plagues the Clack and Sandy, where fishing has been very slow. It is hoped that rain will arrive in time to turn around these normally productive rivers.

The North Santiam has a few winter steelhead available but all are wild and must be released.

Alder Lake, Cleawox Lake, Dune Lake and Munsel Lake, Walling Pond, Junction City Pond and Huddleston Pond were planted with trout this week. PowerBait is effective to stocked trout.

**Soapbox Update:** Some catching up to do.....a pile of credit to Michael Teague and brother Doug Rees for taking up the slack as I have been out of town for the last several weeks. Thanks amigos!

We have lost another friend to fishing. Avid angler "old-man" Ronnie Biggs passed away on the North

Fork of the Lewis River on 1/11. Ronnie was getting some help from a gentleman who has fished with me when he collapsed. It appears he passed away from a heart attack. His service will be on Monday, January 17<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 p.m. at the Church of the Nazarene in Woodland Washington. A great fisherman and a great friend. All who can attend should do so to show support for this wonderful family. We'll miss this fellow!

Finally, someone in Salem is paying attention to our beloved cold water friends! Governor Kulongoski reiterated numerous times in his speech his willingness to stand up and fight our federal government for recovery of our wild species. He even went so far as to mention the state may file suit over the most recent INADEQUATE biological opinion that claims dams are a natural part of the landscape! It is imperative that our state legislators know how important this issue is to us so I encourage EVERYONE to take just a minute to look up your legislator at: <http://www.leg.state.or.us/findlegsltr/> and send them a quick email asking for their support behind the Governor in fighting for our wild fish on the Columbia. In the words of NSIA director Liz Hamilton, "he put recovery back on the table for wild fish!"

A transcript of Governor Kulongoski's remarks to the Legislative Assembly can be found here: [http://governor.oregon.gov/Gov/speech\\_011005.shtml](http://governor.oregon.gov/Gov/speech_011005.shtml)

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – Sturgeon fishing on the Columbia both upstream and downstream of Bonneville is very poor right now. Granted, effort is light due to poor weather conditions. The cool weather certainly has water temperatures down as well causing the sturgeon to be much more lethargic. **Pro guide Dan Ponciano (360-607-8511)** ran a trip late last week only coming up with one keeper and about 20 shakers. Cold wind hampered their success somewhat but the fish were clearly off the bite. Most of the shakers are even on the small side. Weekend checks by ODF&W verify this is a trend river-wide for both bank and boat anglers.

Numbers from ODF&W weekly checking confirm the current status of sturgeon fishing. In all areas checked from The Dalles and Bonneville Pools, the Gorge boat and bank and all fishers downstream through the Portland to Longview stretch: three keepers.

Commercial crabbers finally have their "go-ahead" to place their gear in the lower Columbia and the Pacific Ocean north of Cape Falcon. It's been a long awaited opener for them and it should be productive. The gear is already soaking for many boats which puts sport crabbers in a hard competition on the lower Columbia River. The action prior to the gear placement was reported as....."unbelievable"!

Cleanup of the Columbia Scenic Highway, closed by a rock slide on Tuesday last week, has been completed early. It is open now.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Don't look for sturgeon action to pick up any time soon. Cool weather continues to get forecasted for NW Oregon and a blast of freezing rain may seriously jeopardize your weekend angling on the lower Columbia. It's best to wait for warmer water conditions which will not only bring in staging schools of smelt from the lower Columbia River but also bring lethargic sturgeon out of hibernation which they seem to be enjoying as of recently. Desperate anglers may seek the slightly warmer waters of the Willamette River- near the mouth using smelt for bait but don't count on any big catches.

Sport crabbers should not be too discouraged as lower river crabbing should still produce nicely. Most commercial boats will want to place the bulk of their pots at sea where opening day bounty will be best. Besides, with the number of large keepers that were reported out of the river as early as last week, there is no way they could wipe them all out in one foul swoop.....(see Lewis and Clark journals regarding salmon.....).

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – Historically, winter sturgeon move into the Willamette River seeking relief from the Chilly water of the Columbia. Water temperature at Willamette Falls are hovering around 35 degrees, however, providing little motivation for sturgeon to migrate. Fishing reflects the situation, too, as it's at a standstill. Winter steelhead counts indicate an average of 20 ore so are crossing daily as the year-to-date numbers approach the 600 mark.

The North and South Santiams are at below normal flow for mid-January. With Detroit Reservoir the source of the North and reservoir levels very low, the river won't change until Detroit gets more water. Fishing at Detroit is better than in the river.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Until the weather turns around or a decent rainfall warms the chilly waters of the Willamette, there's no reason to expect any metalhead or gator joy. See '**Reader Email,**' below, for a very recent update on the bank action in the Meldrum Bar area.

The North Santiam will remain at current level and flow until the next major rainfall. There are a few winters available with more to come, but with no hatchery fish entering this system, it's strictly a catch-and-release show.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – The Sandy River was low and clear into last weekend, providing little for anglers. Steelheaders in the Clackamas did a little better in the Barton to Carver stretch.

**The Guide's Forecast** – A few steelhead fell to bobber 'n' jigs at Eagle Creek earlier this week before levels fell and water clarity creating a situation where no fish are to be found. Hopes were high with the recent rainfall, but it was far too little to make a difference in the level, temperature and clarity, all of which must improve before there will be any reason for steelhead optimism on the Clack and Sandy Rivers.

**North Coast District Fishing Report** – Conditions have not improved any on the North coast for steelhead. The rivers remain low and the Alsea strain of steelhead continues to make a "no-show" in our area rivers. Some broodstock fish continue to be taken on the Wilson River but not with the regularity we will expect later in the season. Although unconfirmed with ODF&W personnel, I heard rumor that fewer Alsea smolts were stocked for this year's returning adults. This coupled with an apparent hard hit by cormorants during out migration is a double whammy from which these fish have a hard time recovering. I have heard of some strays coming from the Trask and even the Tillamook River (although the Tillamook has a large amount of private land). The Kilchis fish are clearly lamenting Jennie Logsdon-Martin's down time as she recovers from her December surgery.

A few readers have inquired regarding the Wilson River levels as it would seem the relative readings are different now than in the past. According to the United States Geological Service website, the gauge was moved to a different location two miles downstream from its previous location, "and the flood stage has been changed from 13.0 feet to 12.0 feet due to differences in the river channel at the old and new gage locations." Unfortunately, there is no indication of the date this occurred. Adjust fishing activities accordingly.

Further south, one guide reported NO other boats and one hatchery steelhead for an all day drift on the Nestucca River on 1/12. Not an impressive catch for an all day trip. Dropping to low, clear water tactics is helping anglers.

Sturgeon fishing seems to be a big ticket item as more than one angler reported decent success in the upper Tillamook Bay recently. The wind chill on the bay makes for a hard day but keepers in the low 50 inch range seem to be somewhat common. Sand shrimp is a real key here and was a bit of a struggle to find over the holiday season down here in Tillamook. Now that the holiday is over, it may not be such a challenge. The south channel was also responsible for decent keeper action and you don't need a minus tide to get the job done.

Crabbing should remain fair on most coastal estuaries due to low water conditions that we are currently observing. One crabber reported fair action "raking" Netarts Bay although you have to watch the tides pretty carefully. He suggested sticking close to the eelgrass for best results. A small minus tide series will happen in the early evening starting on Sunday.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Although a rise in river levels is forecasted for early next week, not many anglers are hopeful for dramatic results. Hatchery steelhead often follow suit with hatchery coho and that run coast-wide was less than impressive. If the rain does materialize, fishing will obviously pick up but don't look for gangbuster fishing. The Wilson will put out a mix of wild, broodstock and Alsea stock fish but you will have to work for them. And even though reports have been dismal, if the weather conditions are at least safe, there will likely be large crowds on the river since it has been so long since our water conditions have changed. The Trask and Nestucca will also be leaders in the race for a steelhead but the Kilchis and Nehalem are not the best of bets for this weekend. Thankfully, we have March to look forward to!

Sturgeon action should also be fair no matter what the rivers in the area do. Just be sure to bring lots of sand shrimp in case the crabs are bad. Upper Tillamook Bay from the corral, across the bay to the top of the south channel will be some of the better bets.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – Crabbing has been good to excellent on most bays and estuaries on the South coast. Beaches remain closed to razor clamming.

The recent rain shower is unlikely to improve prospects on the Siletz where it's still too early for primetime and the rainfall will be insufficient to motivate many steelhead to make the journey ahead of schedule.

Charter boats have been doing well for bottomfish which season re-opened January 1st. In 2005, eight rockfish of all allowable species and two ling cod over 24 inches may be kept per day outside the 40-fathom line.

Low water hasn't negatively effected steelheaders at the Coquille River with reports of limits being taken mid-week. A mix of wild and hatchery fish are present. The Umpqua is also productive for matalheads with the main river reported as good and the South Fork even better.

Chetco steelheaders are reaping the rewards of a recent freshet, taking winters averaging 10 pounds with cured salmon eggs the most effective bait. No chinook are in the report any longer from the Elk and Sixes where the winter steelhead fishing is reported as good.

Snows upstream have cause the steelheading on the upper Rogue River to stall. Plunkers are catching winter steelhead in good numbers low on the river, however, with boaters taking them on plugs. Fish the afternoons to find the best bite in the warmest water of the day.

**Central and Eastern Oregon – Note that an arctic clipper is moving into northeast Oregon and southeast Washington later this week and this is not the week to visit - see you next week.**

**Pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688)** reports: "The Willowa Valley and surrounding highlands experienced a brief warming trend at the beginning of this week that brought a surge of water into local streams. The Grande Ronde River reached 850 cfs late last week, flows that mirrored water levels in early November, before warmer weather eased its grip on mid elevation snow and brought the river to 1,050 cfs over the weekend. Warmer weather continued early in the week, but late-week prospects promise a cool reception for anglers.

"Water temperatures in the Grande Ronde remained near freezing throughout the week, with flowing ice upstream near La Grande, Oregon, but no flowing ice was reported in the fishing areas at Troy and downstream.

"Anglers made the trip to Shumaker and report that the road is presently reasonable to drive. Beware that traveling conditions on this steep road can change quickly with a little snow. The anglers there had good success, but probably no better than anglers upriver from Washington Highway 129.

"Bill Vail at Boggan's Oasis says that there were few anglers early in the week. By Friday good fishing reports were beginning to come in and they continued through the weekend. Vail says that "new" fish are arriving in the area as indicated by brighter-colored steelhead being caught last week. John Sullivan, with Eagle Cap Fishing Guides, reported landing three of five fish hooked on Sunday and all of them were hens, which are usually "brighter-colored" fish than the bucks that may have comprised the majority of the catch during December. Whether they are "Cottonwood fish" as was speculated or Oregon fish moving upriver, the freshet late last week seems to have invigorated fish in the system.

"Last week's creel survey indicates that fishing was hot, in spite of the cold water conditions. The catch rate in Oregon was three hours per fish, while Washington anglers averaged about six hours per fish. The sample size was small and the anglers that were there were probably familiar with the river, yielding the very good results.

"Boggan's Oasis along the Grande Ronde River is open every day this month from 9:00 a.m.

until 6:00 p.m. week days and 8:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. on weekends. Troy Shilo Oasis is closed for the next few weeks until more fishermen return to the river.

"The Wallowa River is getting light prospecting from steelheaders. The freshet will help move steelhead up this tributary, but it may be another month before a significant number of fish fill this stream.

"The Wallowa River remained ice-free last week, but the Minam River has flowed with ice every day for the past couple weeks, sending a plume of even colder water down the Wallowa. The Wallowa River has flirted with ice during the past couple weeks, with anchor ice and flowing slush in the river a couple weeks ago. Last week the Wallowa was at 32 degrees, but showed no signs of icing and by the weekend those concerns disappeared.

"Wallowa River tributaries remain cold and frozen. The Lostine River is barely avoiding substantial freezing and Bear Creek is merely a trickle of water flowing through a maze of ice.

**Northwest Trout** - Alder Lake, Cleawox Lake, Dune Lake and Munsel Lake were planted with eight-to-ten inch rainbows this week. Walling Pond in Salem was also stocked. Junction City Pond and Huddleston Pond each received 350 'trophy-sized' trout for your lawn chair angling enjoyment.

### **Reader Email**

Once again, Kap'n Ken Johnson reports from the banks of the Willamette River just below the mouth of the Clackamas River where he 'made the rounds' on Wednesday, January 12th, "What Fish? That's the question of the week, or maybe the month, amongst many of the regulars down at "The Bar." "Garage Door Tony," a proverbial and prominent official "Bank Maggot" from way back, told me there were only a couple of fish caught today (1/12). He said that things were really slow because of "The Conditions." (Anita is getting a lot of nap time in, however!) I myself have been down checking out the area there about 2-3 times this week. I'm not fishing because of a newly "fused" right foot and ankle from last year. Boy, do I know how to have fun! Anyone who has been down to Meldrum Bar knows that it is either walking on golf ball to baseball sized rocks, that my non-flexible ankles just don't like. Or it's climbing up and down the rocky bank just down river from "The Bulkhead." When I fish, I need the flatness of "The Blacktop" which is located on the Northwest point at the mouth of the Clackamas River. Hardly anyone is fishing at "The Blacktop." It's a real lonely place. The problem there is the water is "Waaaaay out there.....!" Those "conditions" GDT was talking about is pretty evident. Anyone who gets out to fish with their Spin-n-Glo's, Pills and Cheaters...well, there ain't enough dang water flowing by out there to hardly spin'em! Today, the Willamette looked very much like a lake. The current just isn't happening. The upriver Iron Heads like to have a bit of current to head into. If there's a current, that means water is running down the numerous creeks and rivers feeding the might Willamette. But, for that to happen it would mean it's raining around here and snowing in the mountains. Not doing much at either location. The drizzle we've been getting just doesn't count. The Willamette's water level appeared about one foot less than it did at the same time last week. That's unofficial but it is definitely getting lower. "G-Bill," another Meldrum Bar regular, caught a nice Stealie today. He was one of the lucky ones. About 1-3 fish are being taken each day at this time. Usually, it is more like 10-15 per day. (Except in that

Secret Hole I can't tell you about!) There are fish, but they are few and far between. Usually, at this time of year, cars and trucks (fishermen too!) are NOT on the point because they can't get out there. Water's too high. Usually, this time of year, the fisherfolks are bunched up together much closer to the boat ramp because the water level is up much much more. This year.....What water??? It's there but not in the volume we need for great Steelie fishing. A lot of talking going on down there. If it stays like this, what's the Fall Chinook Fishery going to be like? It's right around the corner....but....Right now there is plenty of time to talk, read, tie up some new rigs and catch up on your naps. The new rigs that are being tied up probably won't be used because the fishing is pretty darned slow. There is one thing that is to be sure, however. **You won't catch a fish unless your line is in the water!** So, get on down there and enjoy the fact that there's not 100's of crowded vehicles and people hunkering down for "The Big One." For Newbie's, it's a great time to learn from the pro's (And some who think they're pro's) just how to fish this little piece of heaven right here in our own backyard. Speaking of heaven in our own back yard...Could everybody out there just "Pray for Rain." Not *too much* though."

This week, reader and avid angler Peter H. wrote, "I'm a new student at Linfield College this year. Not to say it is a boring college town, but there is not much going around campus. I was interested in learning more about local areas I where I could fly fish. I have not been able to use the custom fly rod I built much lately, it would be nice to get the dust off it from the summer.

"I brought with me both a 5 and a 6 weight rod. I'm more experienced with trout than steelhead, and I think my gear wouldn't allow to gain much experience with steelhead either. I'm from Gresham, OR, so I guess I can be considered as local. I'm looking for areas near McMinnville where there might be some fish. Thanks for any tips and advice!"

I (Michael) replied to Peter on 01/12, "In and around McMinnville (as with the rest of the Willamette Valley, for the most part), rivers and streams are closed to trout fishing. Stocking of these waters ended years ago (with a few exceptions like parts of the McKenzie and Santiam Rivers). Consequently, decent trout water requires a trip West but the rewards are worthwhile.

"The sea-run cutthroat trout (know locally as blueback) is your best bet at this (or any) time of year in this area. The closest place you can expect reasonably good results is the Nestucca River. It's an hour's trip from McMinnville, but has a strong population. There are no rainbows here (or in most coastal streams). Any trout-sized rainbow you catch in the Nestucca will be a juvenile steelhead; return it gently.

"Sea-run cutthroat may also be found in the Wilson, though that would involve a longer trip, or in the Siletz. South of the Salmon River (Lincoln City) two may be kept a day. North of the Salmon, it's catch-and-release. Rainbow trout are also present in addition to cuts on the Siletz.

"The behavior of these fish differs from trout or steelhead in that they will be in what's most commonly referred to as 'frog water.' Where one might expect trout to lie below the mouth of any intersecting stream, particularly in 'seam' water, cuts will hold in the dark, swirly water that's created just above the mouth of a secondary tributary. This is my favorite place to take them.

"The second area on which to concentrate would be the overlying brush along the edges, a difficult place to fish but productive. Fortunately, cuts are usually willing quarry, willing to move out from cover to take an offering.

"Flies need not be fancy creations. 'Most any wet pattern which has some color will attract them, with steelhead patterns often tied in sizes 4 to 8. Anything with yellow in it (such as a brown hackle yellow) is often effective.

"If the coastal fishery is just too far from your home base in McMinnville, you have two options; fish the stocked trout in lakes or the streams when they open on May 28th. The few which open in April and are listed in the Oregon angling regulations on pages 44 and 45. While most fly fishers don't care, streams from which trout may be kept are few. The Yamhill River which flows through town is one of those where not even catch-and-release for trout is allowed, which is unfortunate as there is a decent native cutthroat fishery on the North Fork.

"Most of the lakes and ponds are open year-around. Once again, check the regulations for exceptions if still-water fishing is appealing to you.

"Stocked ponds are as close as the Sheridan-Willamina area. I mention which ones are stocked Oregon in the weekly fishing column and in TGF.

"I do hope this is of some help. Please write again if you have any further questions."

Reader Chris G. asked a tough one via our online Contact Form at the TGF website, "Many years ago on Channel 2 in Portland there was an outdoor show hosted by a guy named , Jim Conway. Being a local show I contacted the folks at Channel 2 to see if they had saved the old tapes. No luck. Do you have any thought who might have been involved with the program and might have old film or tapes? Thank for your thoughts..... "

Although we're aware of Larry Shoenborn's show "Fishing the West" returning in a 'best of' format (vote your favorite here: [\\*http://www.fishingthewest.com/page/page/1614263.htm](http://www.fishingthewest.com/page/page/1614263.htm)), no one at TGF knew about the availability of the old Jim Conway show (which was called "Outdoor Sportsman," if memory serves). **Readers?**

When **pro guide Bob Rees** returned from vacation he found this Email from Subscriber Robby E. dated January 1st which demonstrates that even in two weeks time, conditions and fishing prospects can change dramatically: "My brother and I fished just inside the mouth of the Multnomah Channel Friday 12-31 and landed 46 sturgeon between us. It was tough, but we finally did limit. Most were in the 30's, so it would be a great fishery for the kids to enjoy, IE not too big to handle on lighter gear. I've fished these waters for over 35 years and have never seen the Slough be the hot spot like it has been the last two years. It will stay fairly consistent through the Springer season into June. Counted 44 boats in there one spring day last year and they were all catching sturgies."

Michael sez: Few fishing endeavors evoke as much passion or result in such effort as that of spring chinook. With the winter steelhead season yet to peak, there's plenty of talk about springers and the first inquiry regarding the fishery came in earlier this week.

In a January 7th release, the ODFW stated, "Fish and Wildlife Commission supports options to

extend 2005 Columbia River spring chinook season into May." The other side of that coin is that restrictions are likely on the bag limit or the number of days during which fishing will be open each week below Bonneville Dam.

Are you willing to trade reduced limits or fish on a schedule (or both) for an extended springer season? Opinions are welcomed.

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: [brees@pacifier.com](mailto:brees@pacifier.com)

Doug Rees: [drees@TheGuidesForecast.com](mailto:drees@TheGuidesForecast.com)

Michael Teague: [SailCat@TheGuidesForecast.com](mailto:SailCat@TheGuidesForecast.com)

### **Random Links**

For 2005 Oregon Recreational Fishery regulations at a glance, including a map of the 40-fathom line offshore, go here: [\\*http://hmsc.oregonstate.edu/odfw/regs/recregs.html](http://hmsc.oregonstate.edu/odfw/regs/recregs.html)

Salmon forecasts show solid chinook, coho returns in 2004 from the WDFW:

[\\*http://wdfw.wa.gov/do/newreal/mar0204c.htm](http://wdfw.wa.gov/do/newreal/mar0204c.htm)

Text and graphical overview of the historical salmon runs on the North American coast:

[\\*http://www.inforain.org/maparchive/salmon\\_nation.htm](http://www.inforain.org/maparchive/salmon_nation.htm)

Caught on tape - Kayaker survives over-the-top encounter with killer whale: [\\*http://www.big-boys.com/articles/whaleandkayak.html](http://www.big-boys.com/articles/whaleandkayak.html)

**Weekly Quote** - "Fish sense, applied in the field, is what the old Zen masters would call enlightenment: simply the ability to see what's right there in front of you without having to sift through a lot of thoughts and theories and, yes, expensive fishing tackle." - John Gierach

**GOOD LUCK!**