

Northwest Oregon's most complete and accurate fishing forecast

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 25th – March 3rd, 2005**

Fisheries Update: Spring Chinook are on their way so make sure that you have the tools you need to put more fish in the creel! Our technical report #1- Willamette River Spring Chinook Tactics and Locations for the Boat Angler is a real hit and a real help! These reports and several more are available at: <http://www.theguidesforecast.com/techrpt.shtml>.

Sturgeon fishing remains poor on the mainstem Columbia with exception to the Bonneville Pool. Keepers are rare below Bonneville and the absence of smelt is not helping matters. Keepers are falling fast however in the area downstream of the Wind River and frozen smelt is a top bait- think of the possibilities if one had fresh smelt!

Salmon action on the mainstem remains poor. The mainstem run is clearly not in yet as most fish present are bound for the Willamette River. The water temperature remains cold.

North coast steelhead are finally beginning to show. We predicted the wild run would materialize much better than the hatchery fish and it looks to becoming reality. Larger systems will continue to produce the best as low water persists.

Most South coast rivers are suffering from another week without rain. Steelhead fishing is slow. Crabbing is good, particularly at Coos and Winchester Bays.

Estuary opportunities exist for sturgeon and crab and if the marine weather forecast holds true, it will be great fun pursuing bottomfish off the North Coast. Tides for sturgeon are both early and late in the day. Softer tides should mean good crabbing opportunities!

A few steelhead have been taken over the last week in the Clackamas and Sandy Rivers. The North Santiam, suffering from low, clear, cold water as are most rivers, has little to offer until the summer steelhead arrive in decent numbers.

Spring chinook fishing on the lower Willamette River improved slightly over the last week, but it's still very early in the season for optimism. The numbers of winter steelies being taken has started to decline. Sturgeon fishing remains slow.

Trout have been stocked this week at Big Creek Reservoirs #1 and #2, Olalla Creek Reservoir, Cottage Grove, Creswell, E. E. Wilson, Junction City, and Walling Ponds and Walter Wirth Lake

Washington guides fishing the mainstem Columbia are reporting 40 degree water and little success for spring Chinook and sturgeon. Their best success is noted closer to the Multnomah Channel entrance.

The Kalama River remains low and clear and steelheading has dropped off from the early season success. Light gear is a must and a rain would certainly improve things.

The Lewis River is producing consistent catches of winter steelhead as more wild fish are present than those of hatchery origin. Colder, clear water calls for modified technique.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Sturgeon fishing remains poor on the big river with exception of the Bonneville Pool. Angler success from both boat and bank was exceptionally poor this week as ODF&W personnel checked NO keepers in the Bonneville to Longview stretch of the river. Where exactly are those fish? No real sign of smelt either and many are beginning to worry about their fate. Commercial shrimp catches north of the Columbia River are often an indicator of smelt stocks and neither species is looking particularly good. When we see an absence of smelt to the Columbia River, the growth rates for sturgeon are clearly affected. We may not have the recruitment of keepers into the summer sport fishery that most of us expected this year. The water is still cold however so the jury is still out on whether or not the smelt will show.

Anglers seem to be getting a bit more excited about salmon fishing on the big river. And with catches that we have witnessed in the Willamette, that is understandable. As talked about last week, one must realize however that these fish will respond much better in the warmer water temperatures of the Willamette- where most of these fish are destined for this early in the run. There was however, some success witnessed for the 41 boats checked in the Portland to Longview stretch. Two spring Chinook were retained by these 41 boats. It certainly looks like this is going to be a low water year which will give the boat anglers the advantage this season.

For those wanting to avoid any conflicts with commercial gill-netters, here are the seasons:

6 AM 2/22 to 6 AM 2/23 and 6 AM 2/24 to 6 AM 2/25

There will also be a spring Chinook demonstration fishery on February 27th.

The Guide's Forecast – We're just coming off a small minus tide series which likely will have pushed some more spring Chinook into the Willamette River. With the water temperatures remaining cold, don't look for sturgeon or salmon fishing to pick up dramatically. A rare fish will come from the mainstem this week- and I'm talking salmon or sturgeon. It's not even really worth our time or yours to define a "best bet" in this section because your best bet for salmon will be in the Willamette River and your best bet for sturgeon will remain in the Bonneville Pool. As a matter of fact, if catch statistics remain like they are in that pool, the anglers fishing there will likely experience a closure before mid-April. With poor action downstream of the dam, effort is concentrated up there and catches are fair using smelt or shrimp. The mainstem anywhere else for any other species will be a waste of time.

No smelt were seen on the Cowlitz Tuesday, February 22nd. It will be open again on Saturday,

February 26th from 6 A.M. to 10 P.M., but with the possibility of a no-show this year, sturgeon fishermen would be wise to consider frozen smelt or alternative baits. Even without smelt in the river, sturgeon still have to feed sometime

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – At Willamette Falls, the ball seems to have been dropped as there are no updated counts for the month of February.

Pro guide Jay Daly (503-341-9571) reports from the lower Willamette, "Friday 2/19 was my first day out for springers. We saw only two landed for the area we fished in the Lower Mult Channel. One was in my boat. It was a clipped 15lb hen. I definitely ate too much of it last night."

The North Santiam offers little in angling opportunities at this time of year under the best of conditions. Low, cold, clear water would definitely move this one down on the list of preferences. A few native winter steelhead are available and fewer summers. The counts at the Falls will not reflect summer steelhead until March 1st.

There's still no worthwhile sturgeon fishing to speak of in the Multnomah Channel or lower Willamette River.

The Guide's Forecast – Most spring chinook hopefuls have been concentrating efforts below Sellwood bridge and in and around Multnomah Channel. These efforts have gone mostly unrewarded, but catches are very gradually improving. The rare springer has fallen to trolled, plug cut herring fished just off the bottom with a flasher. Anglers are reminded that in addition to unseasonably cold water (all together now), it's early yet.

See the **Inbox**, below, for a local Meldrum Bar report.

A series of minus tides will start up the first weekend in March which may boost the lackluster sturgeon and spring chinook opportunities in Multnomah Channel and on the lower Willamette. This will create much-needed additional current on the outgoing tide and sometimes that's enough to encourage these fish to take a bait.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – It's been slow, but a few anglers have taken steelhead on the Clackamas and Sandy Rivers. The East wind is definitely a detriment to the pursuit of fish on the Sandy, so check reports prior to venturing out.

Pro guide Jack Glass (503-666-5370) adds this, "Sandy still low 8.6 today drift boats are dragging in shallow spots. fish are there, bobber and jig is most productive, drifting small baits or casting spinner and the fly guys are picking them up mostly wilds and some broodstocks."

The Guide's Forecast – OK, so the water is low and clear. There's no rain in the forecast. Is anybody catching fish? You bet!

Think summer. Long leaders and light line combined with bobber and jig or drifted pink plastic worms are taking bright steelhead daily from drought-stricken Oregon rivers. Diminutive baits of sand shrimp tail or cured salmon egg have also been effective. Low water limits the areas where steelhead may comfortably hold, confining them to the few remaining deeper slots or bubbly water where they feel concealed. Think summer. These fish can be taken, but conditions require covering much more water than when the level is up.

This week steelheaders have a better chance on the Clackamas and if the East wind is blowing as expected, the Sandy will definitely be a poor choice. Check the weather forecast.

North Coast District Fishing Report – Action is finally starting to pick up around here. Although too early to cash in all the chips, it DOES look like the wild run may materialize after all on the coastal tributaries. The Wilson, Nestucca and Nehalem Rivers haven't exactly "come-alive" with steelhead but compared to the action prior to this week, things are looking much better! Some guides reported multiple fish days on the Wilson and although it took 4 days to accumulate, one guide reported over 14 fish to the boat! It is clearly a tactical game at this point as low water pursuit is the name of the game. **Pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-551-2716)** reported 5 – 7 fish/trip opportunities in select areas of the Nestucca River. Keep in mind Jesse is a great low water guide and has dropped down to light line to prevent spooking fish. These fish are concentrated now which makes them easier to target but they are also more wary than usual. Also the lower stretches are still producing the best as fish are slow to move upriver when the water is so low. These fish will also be responding to the tidal influxes.

The Guide's Forecast – The bigger rivers will still produce the best results with the Nehalem finally coming on line as a real opportunity. On the Nehalem, the Beaver slide to Mohler Sand and Gravel or Roy Creek will be a good option from now through March. Being so low in the watershed along with the fact it is such an extensive system, this drift is ideal and doesn't fall into the same categories as what you might expect on the Wilson, Trask or Nestucca Rivers. It is big water but becomes much more defined when the levels are as low as they are. The next best bet for the north coast will be the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers. They are both equally great options with extensive tidewater sections that very few anglers take the time to learn. Bobber and jigs can cover a lot of tidewater holes effectively but anglers just don't have the confidence they do in the fall when these river sections are choked with fish. The lower sections just above the tidewater sections is therefore some of the better water to check into. On the Nestucca, this will be Three Rivers to Cloverdale and on the Wilson, the Donaldson's to Sollie Smith Bridge and downstream will offer the best opportunities. The challenge with the water downstream of Sollie Smith Bridge is that the next available boat ramp is in

the bay itself. Don't bother with the Kilchis, North Fork Nehalem or Necanicum Rivers until we see some significant rainfall. And when we do, there will be a story to write.

Although not as impressive as earlier in the month, the low tide series we are currently on gives Tillamook Bay sturgeon chasers an opportunity to get after them. The weather is forecasted to continue to be bright and shiny making bay and ocean fishing more attractive. The ocean forecast for this weekend looks too good to be true- especially for February! Wind waves forecasted to be 5 foot with wind waves at a whopping 1 foot! This could make for some real good crabbing and bottom fishing opportunities this weekend. Although the sturgeon tides are not impressive (am or pm tides) they will certainly be low enough to produce some results.

Surf perch fishing can also be a great option over the weekend as regular reader **Keith Jansen** reported decent fishing in Tillamook County. Keith states, "2 incapable fishermen disgusted with low water steelhead conditions ventured into the surf off Rockaway beach today (2/19). A dozen perch, half of them filletable size, were caught during two hours of fishing at high tide. Several others were lost and missed bites were common. Mud shrimp and prawn pieces bathed in shrimp scent worked best." I can vouch for the "incapable" part but nothing else in Keith's report.....

Central & South Coast Reports – Steelheaders on the Siletz report little to show for their efforts. When a fish is landed here, there's a 50/50 chance it'll be fin-clipped. Tiny spinners have accounted for a few over the last week for anglers working from Moonshine Park upstream.

The Umpqua River around Elkton is seeing considerable pressure as quite a few steelhead are being caught, but the majority of these are wild fish.

With the lack of rain, the Elk, Sixes, Chetco, Coos and Coquille Rivers remain in poor shape for steelheading.

The Rogue River is also suffering from yet another dry week. Steelheading has stalled in most normally-productive stretches, although there are a few to be had from above the Illinois River to Foster Bar. Bait is definitely the way to go in the skinny, clear, cold water. Expect mostly half-pounders although a few adults are also being taken.

Mild tides over the weekend make crabbing a logical alternative. It's been poor out of Newport and Waldport with most of the take females but crabbing remains excellent at Coos and Winchester Bays. Another alternative might be rock fishing. Limits have been taken over the last week off the South Jetty at Yaquina Bay. Check the wind and wave forecast before venturing out. Flows continue to be restricted in order to conserve water for what is shaping up to be a drought year.

Preliminary data on the 2005 halibut seasons has been released from the National Marine Fisheries Service, indicating a quota about 10% less than last year but in line with the 2002-2003 season. The halibut fishery is tentatively scheduled to begin on May 1st inside the 40-fathom line with the first all-depth fishery of the year on May 12th. We'll keep readers updated as the final decisions are made in April.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Subscriber and **avid angler 'Dobe'** writes this week, "On Wednesday of this last week(Feb 16th) I drove up to Wickiup for a look around. The road in past South Twin Lake is still packed snow but plenty passable with a rig with good ground clearance. The road up from Burgess is muddy but free of snow as is the whole area at the Dam. Wickiup is only down about 6 feet from full and 1/4 ice free. South Twin is covered with ice as yet and North Twin has ice on most of it, but real thin. If this weather keeps up, we can be bank fishing there in a couple of weeks, or maybe sooner. North Twin is one Lake in the area that is open year round. Good place to build a campfire on the beach, break out the lawn chair and coffee and soak some bait. Yesterday (2/18), I hooked up with a friend that has a cabin near Crescent Lake Jct and we spent the afternoon on Crescent Lake. I had never been on the lake before even though I go over that direction often to fish Odell. The Lodge at Crescent is open and they keep the road plowed. Snow isn't a problem now, but the public ramp is closed. You can access the beach right at the Lodge and launch there (for a fee, of course).

What's nice is that they still keep a dock right there. Crescent Lake is totally ice free. Even the shoreline is free of snow on about half of the lake. The weather was beautiful with the air temp about 45 degrees and the water temp at 39. We launched at noon and fished till 4. Trolled large plugs hoping to pick up a Brown or maybe a Mack. About 3:30 we spotted a school of Kokanee jumping and rolling and we trolled around that area for about a half hour. I got two hard strikes but no hookup. Again, if the weather holds, this is a great destination for some early season fishing. Call Crescent Lake Lodge for the latest information at (541) 433-2505. They also have a guide available."

Northwest Trout - Trout have been planted this week at Big Creek Reservoirs #1 and #2 and in Olalla Creek Reservoir on the North coast. Cottage Grove, Creswell, E. E. Wilson, Junction City, and Walling Ponds as well as Walter Wirth Lake in the Willamette Zone have all been stocked for your Power Baiting pleasure. Load up the kids and go get 'em.

SW Washington Report- Pro Guide Erik Brigham (360-513-2331) reported on Lewis River winter steelhead success. Erik's clients have been hooking 4-5 steelhead and typically landing around 3 fish for an all day effort. "It's mostly wild steelhead right now, about 3 wild steelhead to every one hatchery fish" said Erik. The fish tend to be little slower to bite in this cold water, so we have slowed the presentation down and switched to pulling plugs which has worked well.

Sturgeon fishing on Fri. the 18th was pretty slow near Kelly Point on the Columbia. "About 15 shakers are all we had and we were the hot boat!"

Pro guide Kevin Newell (866-864-3836) reports, "Sturgeon fishing in the Multnomah Channel has been spotty. Some days have been decent with several short fish and a keeper in the mix and other days have been poor."

On salmon fishing, Kevin stated, "I've seen a few springers picked up around the head of the channel and also around Coon Island. I expect the springer fishing to continue to improve with the numbers of fish available increasing by the day. This low clear water is really going to hurt us this fall when the fish are trying to make their spawning run up the tributaries, but its going to make for some great Spring Chinook fishing! Clear water is the number one factor affecting a capable angler's ability to catch a Spring Chinook in the Columbia River. Fishing is usually pretty good when visibility is greater then 3 feet and there are decent numbers of fish around."

The Kalama River continues to put out fair numbers of steelhead but not like what we were seeing earlier in the season when we had a little bit more water. If we get a good rain expect a fresh push of wild and broodstock steelhead to enter the river. There are steelhead available in the Kalama River canyon for anglers willing to use stealth techniques, fluorocarbon leaders, small baits and accurate casts. When fishing in the canyon, being on the water at first light can really make the difference.

Pro guide Pete Grace (1-888-688-4386) was excited to join Kevin and Eric in stimulating some reports for SW Washington. Pete states:

"I must say that I was honored when I received a call from a fellow guide and neighbor Kevin Newell and asked if I would care to contribute to The Washington Guides Forecast. After I enthusiastically accepted the offer Kevin informed me on the criteria of the content, "They are to be timely, accurate and to the point reports and never to be embellished." he said. When I heard this, I knew this was my style as I have read other reports that have been inflated and now I don't bother with those subscriptions. So here is my personal promise to the readers here, I will share with you my success and frustrations as they happen. I will also share with you my methods and tactics that are working and those that aren't working at the time. And when it's hot, and when it's not, I will share that as well. With that said the following is about a trip on February 20th, 05.

My two clients and I launched at the Port of Kalama at daybreak. Water was a cold 40 degrees and we had an out going tide that would last till 3 PM. First I set out three rods with sardine wrapped K-15s and a two foot dropper on each. At this time my "fish finder" was starting to act up and when I got

things straightened out it read that I was in 40+ feet of water, time to move. We located a nice drop-off in about 20 feet and deployed the same sets. As the sun rose I was gaining more confidence that this was going to turn out to be a good day, but as it turned out, I ended up moving six times, changed to cut-plug herring with and without several types of flashers and finally ended the day trolling plugs by the mouth of the Kalama. After nine hours of pounding the water we pulled into dock where I spoke with about five other fishermen and all had similar stories of no bitters. One man said the only fish he saw caught that day was by a seal....But that's for another report."

The Guide's Forecast- The Lewis should see a push of fresh steelhead come into the river as we move into March and there should be a few springers starting to show up soon. This is all dependent on us getting a little bit of rain.

Sturgeon action should pick up if we ever get some smelt. "I haven't written the smelt off yet, we still have a few weeks. Hopefully they will show," Erik said.

No smelt as of yet in the Cowlitz and it's starting to look like they may not show up this year.

Kevin Newell forecasts, "A good shot of rain will likely bring a few springers into the Kalama, Lewis and Cowlitz River. This said, I still think that an angler hoping for a Spring Chinook would be better off fishing the lower Columbia River around Cathlamet.

Huge thanks go to Eric, Pete and especially Kevin for producing such fine, quality reports for a much needed addition to The Guide's Forecast. We look forward to their continued reports and we strongly encourage folks to take advantage of the professional guide services these fellows provide on those fine Washington and Oregon river systems.

Reader Email

Subscriber, regular reporter and proud Harley owner **Kap'n Ken Johnson** sends yet another "nearly live" report from the lower Willamette, "Things are picking up a bit in the Meldrum Bar area of the Willamette River. Yesterday (Wednesday) I watched a guide boat hook into a fish while back bouncing for Chinook about 50 yards upriver from the mouth of the Clackamas. He ended up netting a bright 7-8 pound Steelhead. Watching him work this fish, he reminded me of the new regulation that once netted, to NOT bring a fish out of the water at all. I watched this guide "gently" inspect the fish while it was still in the net and still in the water. He was being very careful to minimize "net pressure" on the fish until he knew it was legal keeper. IN the boat she went...About 30 minutes later he was drifting back with yet another fish on. Within about 15 minutes he was pulling in a nice slab o'chrome. We couldn't quite see all of the fish because he brought it in on the other side of the boat. We did catch a glimpse of its tail, however. With that and the size of the tail fin we could see, and from the commotion coming from within the boat, high fives and all, we guessed it was a Bright Sided fin clipped

Chinook. It too was quickly pulled into the 24' sled with it's 4 paying customers. Bank anglers are scoring a few fish each day. The Steelhead are slowing down with a couple, or so, being caught each day. Same can be said for Chinook. 1-2 are caught each day, which is a pretty low number for this time of year. But hey, there's no water out there!!! The big artillery out numbers the Steelhead poles about 10 to 1 now. No one wants to get into a 15-25 pound Chinook on Steelhead gear so the big guns are coming out. I would say that within a week, or so, there won't be any Steelhead Rods down there at all. There are still a few of "those guys" who bring their Noodle Rods out and then get right into the mix of things with "Seasoned Bank Maggots." The problem is, as it gets more and more crowded on the beach, pulling Chinook in on a Noodle Rod kind of upsets the locals. Everyone in the vicinity has to pull their gear in when a fish is on and, quite frankly, it's a pain. Generally, with rows of long rods out there, when you hook into a Chinook your neighbor, or two, will pull his gear in anyway so you have room to work your fish. 15 minutes later you're all back to fishing. With a Noodle Rod everyone up and down the bank has to pull their gear in because a 7'-8' Noodle Rod just doesn't have the backbone to yank in a Nooker in a timely fashion.

Everyone around you has to pull their gear because it's taking a half hour+ for "this guy" to get the fish even close to the bank. Fishing is great but Catching is still incredibly slow as the level of the Willamette slowly drops a little every day. Rain should change things dramatically but the forecast looks a bit bleak at least for another week, or so. I never thought I would hate to see this "Shining Face" on all the weather report pages on-line.



We need to somehow hide this little smiling face and get some clouds, colder weather and snow in them thar hills! I do have to say, it's been absolutely great for motorcycle riding, however!!! What fishing pole? Personally, I'm going to wait for another 2-3 weeks before I get into the "Fishing Frenzy." Maybe 4-5 weeks.....Now, where's my helmet???"

Thanks as always, Ken!

Write to the TGF staff:

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Random Links

A popular destination for anglers is Fishermen's Marine. Check out their new website which is nearly complete* <http://www.fishermans-marine.com/>

Raising the level of Hagg Lake is back in the news:

*<http://www.katu.com/stories/75028.html>

Thinking about a trip to the East side for trout? Here's where the ODFW stocks 'em:
*http://www.dfw.state.or.us/ODFWhtml/InfoCntrFish/trout_stocking_sched/ne_fishing_guide.pdf

Weekly Quote - "The best fisherman I know try not to make the same mistakes over and over again; instead they strive to make new and interesting mistakes and to remember what they learned from them." = John Gierach

GOOD LUCK!