

Northwest Oregon's most complete and accurate fishing forecast

Forecasting for the fishing week of **March 4th – March 10th, 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>.

Columbia River sturgeon fishing remains poor below Bonneville and good in the Bonneville Pool (upstream of Bonneville Dam). Smelt are still a no-show so good bait is hard to come by. The water is still cold and even the gillnet fleet is having a tough time getting into targeted species.

Smelt dipping on the Cowlitz has been curtailed to Saturdays only. Other Washington rivers have been closed to this activity with the run apparently a non-event this year.

The north coast continues to improve for steelhead and those employing low water tactics are finding good success. A mix of broodstock and wild fish are available to salvage the season.

Bottom fishing has been good. Surf perch angling is improving coast-wide when conditions allow.

Good tides for sturgeon have paid dividends for the few anglers working Tillamook Bay. A minus tide series will likely bring out a few more folks over the weekend and clamming on the Clatsop Beaches may also produce well. Crabbing in most estuaries is challenging.

There are fish available in the Alsea but like the north coast streams, a stealth approach is the only option.

Most South coast rivers are extremely low and steelheading has stalled. The Umpqua seems to be one of the few fisheries which is holding up in the drought.

Steelhead fishing in the water stricken east part of the state remains surprisingly good. The Wallowa and Grande Ronde Rivers are producing well for this time of year. It is however getting close to the spawning time of those fish so action may begin to taper off.

SW Washington streams like the Lewis are producing consistent numbers of wild steelhead. The Cowlitz River should start to pick up for second run steelhead.

Puget Sound anglers are finding consistent success keeping hardware close to the bottom. Downriggers are the only way to go when fishing here.

Steelheading on the Clackamas and Sandy Rivers has shown some improvement as time, rather than conducive conditions, drives the fish to run. Summer steelhead and spring chinook are now being counted at Willamette Falls

Cape Meares, Coffenbury, Cullaby, Hebo, Lost (in Clatsop County), Lytle, North Lake, Smith, South, Spring, Sunset, Town, Hagg and Vernonia Lakes, Huddleston, St. Louis, E. E. Wilson Pond and Junction

City Ponds, Alton Baker Canal and Cottage Grove Reservoir. There's a free trout derby at Hagg lake this Saturday, March 5th.

Soapbox Update:

Have you noticed our upgrade? We now are including **SW Washington** and some **Puget Sound** reports for our readers! Great thanks goes **to Kevin Newell, Erik Brigham, Mike Jamboretz and Pete Grace** for helping out with this great information. These are great guides so we hope you will give them a chance to show you around the wonderful state of Washington!

Thanks to regular reader **Chris B.** for telling us how he feels about our improvement. Chris commented, "Thank you for adding SW Washington reports! Love it.

Columbia River Fishing Report – It is status quo on the mainstem Columbia River. Sturgeon fishing remains poor below Bonneville and the spring Chinook fishery, although improving, is far from "underway" and now we have gillnets to put up with.

Pro guide Dan Ponciano (360-607-8511) reports very poor action for sturgeon below Bonneville. Dan fished 2 days for a total of 5 shakers last week using smelt. Effort remains light and ODF&W checks indicated another week of no keeper catch for the creel census. The water remains cold and there is still no sign of smelt appearing in the lower river. The Bonneville Pool however remains the bright spot on the mainstem Columbia River where ODF&W checks showed four legal sturgeon retained, plus 195 sub-legal fish released for 16 boats, and two legal sturgeon kept, plus 51 sub-legal fish released for 57 bank rods. Dan verified fair results but admitted the fish are certainly concentrated and hard to find catchable numbers.

On the salmon side of things, with the water remaining cold, the bulk of the run still weeks away and the gillnets involved in their full blown fishery, there isn't much of a chance for a sportangler.

For all the effort that took place downstream of the Portland area, only 2 keeper spring Chinook were tallied in the creel census this weekend. Those came in the Portland to Longview stretch and that was for 114 boats! As previously mentioned in this newsletter, it just doesn't make a lot of sense to target spring Chinook in the mainstem yet for 3 reasons:

1) The water is still too cold, The number of Columbia springers in the system is so small right now that in such a big body of water, they will be hard to target. The gillnets are fishing!

It makes much more sense to target Willamette spring Chinook right now because this is where the bulk of the salmon are destined for this time of year and the water is warmer. There have been reliable reports from the Astoria area that fish are frequently being taken and about half of those hooked are ending up in the mouths of our "furry" friends. Herring and plugs on anchor are effective in the mainstem this early in the season, it's just too bad there aren't more biters around!

The gillnets even had poor results on their March 1st fishery. Nets realized 61 drifts for 12 Chinook and 2 steelhead. Twenty five percent of those Chinook were upriver salmon with a 75% mark rate.

Crabbing continues to be a rewarding endeavor out of Hammond where limits are possible for those investing plenty of time at the task.

The Guide's Forecast – The big sturgeon derby is coming to town this week so plan on a lot of competition this Saturday. Also boats will be looking for fish prior to the tournament so expect activity to pick up as we ride into the weekend. Action however should remain mediocre as anglers scramble for good bait and a productive place to soak that bait. There really isn't a productive place to target sturgeon below Bonneville but with the number of boats that will likely participate in the derby this weekend, someone will inevitably land on a pod of keepers. The best opportunity will remain in the Bonneville Pool using the highest quality smelt you can find. If you don't sit down on them in short fashion, you should move from your location. That is, if you are serious about finding your fish. The numbers of biters present are in short order so don't have high hopes for sturgeon this weekend. The weather should be nice however!

The smelt outlook is grim. On February 23rd, the Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife announced a reduction in the opportunities for this prized baitfish in light of a run which has not materialized. On the Cowlitz, which normally offers the best prospects and easy limits in season, dipping has been restricted to Saturdays only from 6 A.M. to 10 P.M. The pursuit is closed completely on the Grays, Kalama and Lewis rivers. Prior to this latest change in regulations, smelt dipping in Washington State had been allowed both Tuesdays and Saturdays on all these rivers.

While the Columbia remains open for smelt seven days per week with a daily limit of 25 pounds per person, few dip them in the Big River.

For salmon, hopefully, you have better things to do than sit in the boat all day. At least bring some good company along cause you will have a long wait between bites- and for most anglers, it will be a matter of angler days.....Stay below the mouth of the Willamette for your best opportunity. Trolling herring at the mouth of the Willamette or the head or bottom of the Multnomah Channel will offer the best (albeit poor) opportunity all weekend.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Teasing sprinkles of rain this week had virtually no impact on streams or rivers on the coast and inland. February, 2005, made it into the record books as the driest ever. It's tough fishing, but not impossible.

Steelheaders who continue to think summertime techniques are catching fish. Often bobber 'n' jog is most effective. Sometimes a dime-sized bait o' eggs will turn the trick.

Steelheaders fishing very light and long are taking the rare biter in conditions during which steelhead have been much easier to see than to entice into taking bait or lure.

Springer fever continues to plague anglers with only periodic relief in the form of the actual dispatching of a hatchery-bred chinook, which treatment provides an instant cure and inevitable rapid relapse.

Shorts and T-Shirts were de rigueur for Columbia and Willamette fishermen late last week. Sunshine and light wind provided spring-like weather in the midst of a late winter drought. Fishing was fair, but slowed, as usual, into the weekend.

A few spring chinook have fallen in the St. Helens area on the Columbia under very light pressure. While not hot (yet), prospects are better below the Sellwood Bridge on the lower Willamette although boaters may expect plenty of company in this popular spot.

Springers have been taken as well by anglers who have risked life, limb and lower units seeking current near Willamette Falls to those seeking solitude in vain at Multnomah Channel.

Water temperatures remain low, although had increased to 46 degrees at Willamette Falls as of February 28th, the last data available. If the air temperatures hit the 70s this weekend as predicted, the water temps should improve as well.

A jump in the daily numbers resulted in winter steelhead counts approaching 1,900 at Willamette Falls. A few summer steelhead (which have been crossing for a month or more) have been included in counts which started on March 1st.

Sturgeon fishing remains universally poor. Even the Bonneville pool which has produced a few keepers in weeks past has slowed to a crawl. Until the water temperature improves, there will be little reason to expect any improvement in the bite. As with the foolish youth of any species, shaker sturgeon will keep anglers busy re-baiting hooks in search of that rare fish over the minimum length requirement.

The Guide's Forecast – For a shot at spring chinook with low water resulting in poor current conditions, trolling rather than anchor fishing is often the only choice. Plug-cut herring dragged within a couple of feet of the bottom is a best bet under these conditions. Some trollers have experienced close encounters of the salmon kind with prawn spinners and wrapped Kwikfish and while hardware will be a logical alternative later in the season later in the season, early on it's wise to tempt these fish with meat.

If the water temperatures rise as expected, anglers should see an improvement in the sturgeon bite, particularly in the lower river and Multnomah Channel. With numbers of spring chinook improving weekly and numbers of salmon increasing, pressure by sturgeon fishermen is expected to be light.

Although summer steelhead have been in the North Santiam and have been caught there occasionally for over a month, it won't be a premier fishing destination until summers start arriving in worthwhile numbers. This weekend would be a great time to find out how the pros do it, however, during the next monthly "Learn the River" trip Saturday, March 5th. The local chapter of Northwest Steelheaders will team up with the North Santiam River Guides for this free event which is open to all. Either join them for breakfast at the Plantation in Jefferson around 7:30 A.M. or have your boat at Green's Bridge at 9 A.M. for this easy, 16-mile, educational drift. For more information, contact Bill Sanderson (503-897-3301).

Summer steelhead, most destined for the North Santiam, have been crossing Willamette Falls for several weeks will appear in counts now that these fish are being differentiated from winter fish, the latter of which numbers will decline in March.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Time may be the only factor which is on our side. Biological clocks must keep ticking even in the most adverse of fishing conditions. So it is with the anadromous runs resulting in a steelhead catches over the last week on the Clackamas River.

On the Sandy, a steelhead two has been landed every day, but seemed to come to the net shivering from the 40-degree water.

The Guide's Forecast – The jump in Willamette Falls winter steelhead counts late last month would be a good indicator of additional metalheads available for angler's pleasure in the Clackamas in the upcoming week. Without any benefit forthcoming in the form of precipitation, concentrate on holding areas where fish will be better concentrated in the low water.

Steelheaders will see better numbers of steelhead on the Sandy River this week and even without any improvement in water level or clarity we should see a few additional degrees in water temperature with the unseasonably warm weather this weekend. While few in number, many of these fish are of respectable size. Anglers should thoroughly work the holes with jigs or diminutive baits to score.

North Coast District Fishing Report – The north coast continues to improve despite the less-than-friendly water conditions we continue to experience here. Steelhead numbers are much more steady on north coast streams but it certainly helps to be the first boat down in these conditions. Early rising guides are posting near double digit opportunities on the Wilson as of late. It is a lot easier defining steelhead holding water in these conditions but you have to approach these fish in a stealth like fashion. Light line and small baits or bobbers and jigs have been the best producers. Biting fish can also be found at the heads of the holes where the water is broken and ideally shaded. Bigger river systems like the Nehalem, lower Wilson and lower Nestucca have been producing nicely. It is a clear indication that these wild fish do follow suit with the wild coho returns we experienced last fall. The wild steelhead fishery on the north coast is underway and it should be a good season for those willing to modify technique to match water condition.

In the southern part of our county, **pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** reports, "The Nestucca has been low and clear for some time now. Hopefully this shot of rain will help. There are fish available, both wild fish and brood stock fish. Most everyone has been fishing the lower end of the river and camping out on the holes. So, it has been tough to fish at times because no one will move. I personally have dropped to summer gear, and have been doing fair. I have been moving fairly fast, and have been focusing on the little tight spots to pick up fish. Small clusters of eggs, shrimp tails and jigs have all produced at certain times."

Jesse also gave this report from a Willamette Valley favorite, "I have also heard a rumor of some fresh summer steelhead in the Santiam. Yes, it sounds early, but historically, there are fresh fish there at the end of January. So this may be an option here soon."

I have recently been inspired to hit Tillamook Bay in search of sturgeon and it paid off last Friday (February 25th). I had 4 rods fishing the south channel of the bay and we came up with 3 keepers- 44, 46 and 51 inchers got tagged that day and we got them all on sand shrimp. With the lack of mud shrimp available, we have been doubling up on sand shrimp and doing very well. I went out again on Monday with friends Joel and Gail from Sisters, OR and we got overwhelmed by the weather and a late onslaught of crabs competing for our baits. We had a couple of early opportunities but didn't end up landing any fish.

We also dropped the crab pots in the ocean on the 25th and surprisingly with all the commercial success, we only came up with 13 keepers. They were good, hard-shelled crab however and it allowed me to venture out to a small group of boats fishing just off the bay entrance for a chance at some bottomfish. We jigged our leftover sand shrimp and came up with 7 black rockfish, 2 ling cod and a red Irish lord. The 25th was very productive for us. Since then, the

ocean has turned itself upside down and is clearly not friendly to bar passage.

The Guide's Forecast – Steelhead fishing on the North Coast may just improve this week as large flood tides and a subsequent minus tide may bring fish into the lower stretches of all area streams. The tide series starts on the weekend. Steelheaders will have to keep to the lower stretches if they plan on good success and certainly low water techniques will have to be employed. Bobbers and pink/white jigs will continue to produce well but plan in dropping down in line size. Small drifted baits will also produce well but light line will also be the rule. Target deep, slow water with bobbers and jigs or small, deep diving plugs like the K-12 Kwikfish. Bright colors like orange work well in these clear conditions but the metallics should produce good results as well. Stay to the lower stretches and plan on "low-holers" trying to get the best of every drift. On the Wilson, Donaldson's to Sollie Smith Bridge and downstream (keep in mind you will have to cross the bay to the Oyster house if you go downstream of Sollie Smith) will produce results. Also, the mainstem Nehalem from the Beaver slide to Roy Creek (Mohler Sand and Gravel is closed on the weekends) and Three Rivers to Cloverdale should also produce some fish for anglers. The lower Trask will also offer some promise for those willing to just target wild fish.

The minus tide series will likely get some additional sturgeon effort out there in the bay. The middle and south channels of Tillamook should produce some good opportunities for sturgeon anglers. Bring lots of bait however as there will be competition for your goods. Don't hesitate to target sturgeon in 3 to 4 foot of water- especially on the flood tide. These fish will be feeding on the shrimp in the area so match the hatch! You will also get away from the crabs more often in that shallow water. Call Garibaldi Marina at (503) 322-3312 or Tillamook Bait at (503) 842-5031 to check for "what's on the menu".

In the realm of coastal alternatives, consider Cape Meares which been productive for surf fishers recently according to Marie at Tillamook Bait who mentioned that in addition to nice perch, one fellow caught a cabezon weighing 11 1/2 pounds over the weekend. For those not familiar with this specie, it's as uglier than a boot but as tasty as any rockfish, with green flesh which turns snowy white when cooked. Pass the tarter sauce.

Crabbing will remain fair at best as many people have come down to enjoy the bounty and the nice weather.

Central & South Coast Reports – Siletz anglers continue wondering where the hatchery winter steelhead went. When the rare steelhead has been landed here, it invariably possesses too many fins for keepage. Yes, that's a real word. It must be ... after all, you saw it on the Internet.

Consistent reports up and down the coast as **pro guide Bill Kremers (541-754-6411)** reports, "Hopefully the storms will get the Alsea up enough to fish. There are fresh steelhead hanging out in the lower river as a friend caught two in a hour last week Friday. He was drifting eggs. I managed to get out of Newport for some bottom fishing off of Seal Rock. We were primarily fishing with jigs and rubber worms. A fun way to fish, especially once the drift slows down and you can keep on top of the fish. We also caught some ling cod and cabezon.

The top color worm was motor oil, but I think just about any color will work. The coast guard is also inspecting boats out on the water, so boaters need to make sure they have their boater registration card, good life jackets, a throw device, fire extinguisher and flares."

With the exceptions noted below, South coast streams and rivers are low, cold and offer little to steelheaders.

The Umpqua River is still rewarding steelheaders with metalheads despite a desperate need for rain on the South coast, just like everywhere else in Oregon this year. Many of the fish being caught are wild, but anglers are allowed to take one unclipped steelhead a day and five per year from this system.

Occasionally, good things happen even in the most adverse of conditions. So it was when pro guide Rob Ginno landed a steelhead on February 8th. At 43 inches in length and, 22 inches around, the wild buck tipped the digital scales at 28 pounds, 11 ounces, the largest taken on the Umpqua in three decades. The honorable Mr. Ginno never keeps a wild fish, even when legal to do so, however, so it was released to make more big 'uns. Kudos, Rob. See **Random Links**, below, for a photo and more on this remarkable catch.

More good news from the Umpqua. The first springer of 2005, a 25-pound football of piscatorial chromage, was landed on February 25th. A few more have followed, none as large as the first. Yet.

Rogue River steelheaders continue to struggle in this drought year. A few have once again been landed over the last week in the Agness area where a mix of smallish adults and half-pounders are available. Steelheading has been slow up high on the system and plunkers, usually successful at this time of year, are failing to score on the lower river. No improvement will occur until and unless rain falls.

Crabbing in the bays out of Newport and Waldport has been slow. Winchester Bay has been poor with mostly females showing, but those venturing across the bar into the ocean at 35 to 40 feet are faring well for keeper Dungeness.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Although you wouldn't think of much happening in the eastern part of the state right now but **pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688)** reports:

"The snow pack in the Wallowa Mountains ranges from about half of normal to slightly more than half for the two SNOTEL sites above the Wallowa Valley. Water conditions in the rivers, however, reflect a slightly more dire situation. The Grande Ronde River, at 1,000 cfs, is flowing at about one-third of average flow for the end of February.

"Anglers might anticipate that the lower water levels this winter could slow the migration of steelhead upstream in the rivers toward spawning grounds, but that doesn't seem to be the case. Wish occasional small spates during February and turbidity in the water for cover the fish seem to have continued their migration on schedule.

"During the last week of February the Wallowa River catch rate shows a substantial improvement, corresponding to the timely arrival of steelhead at Minam last week. Low, clear water in the Wallow River may seem like a deterrent to steelhead continuing up this tributary, but their arrival during the last week of February is nearly clockwork.

"The recent trend for steelheading on the Wallowa River is a statistical slowing of activity, but the five-hours per fish a couple weeks ago brought an influx of new anglers to the river last week and possibly the resulting drops in the catch rate to 13 hours per fish. The Wallowa River is undeniably the most popular destination in the region recently, with significantly more anglers fishing the Wallowa than the Grande Ronde River.

"Anglers on the Grande Ronde, however, are faring consistently well and typically turn in single-digit catch rates for steelhead. Oregon has had few weeks during February that were greater than five hours per fish, while Washington anglers' catch rates have varied widely between four and 15 hours per fish. Steelheaders fishing Oregon water have a few more days of good steelhead fishing before these fish move upstream into the Wallowa and Minam rivers and the headwaters of the Grande Ronde River, leaving fish scarce in the Troy area."

SW Washington & Puget Sound - Mike Jamboretz (425-788-5955) of Jambo's Sport fishing has been targeting blackmouth Chinook in Puget Sound's popular blackmouth fishery. Mike reports that fishing has been fair to good. Some days he has to work a little longer to find the fish but they have been consistently getting their one fish per angler limits.

Mike says "We launch in Everett and fish The Race Track; this is the area between Camano Head and Pat Island. We fish either there or around Pilot Point or Double Bluff."

The blackmouth have been averaging 7-10 pounds and Mike has been fishing deep to find them. "Were using down riggers and keeping the downrigger ball just above the sand." He says "Every 5 minutes or so, we will actually drop the ball down to the bottom and then crank it up just a little." This ensures that he is keeping the lure just off the bottom where the fish are. Mike starts out fishing with several different lures until he finds what the Chinook are hitting on. Tomic plugs, Coyote Spoons ("Red Racer" 188 color pattern) or Candlefish Squid are some of the lures that he finds effective this time of year.

The Guide's Forecast - Mike thinks the blackmouth fishing will remain about the same for at least the next week. Anglers should remember that they may have to do some searching for the fish because they won't often hang around in the same area for long.

Pro guide Erik Brigham (360-513-2331) reports that steelhead fishing on the Lewis River remains consistent. Erik's boat has been getting into 3-5 fish a day and most of those fish are native steelhead. Erik states, "This rain we are having is not much but should shake things up a little. We can't be too picky this year with the low water. We will take whatever precipitation we can get!" "This year with the low water it will be the battle of the baits! Whoever has the best bait will win." If you're interested in tips on curing bait or about what baits work best and when, then give Erik a call.

The Guide's Forecast - Erik reported "The Cowlitz River's second run of steelhead are starting to show and this fishery should get going good in the next week or so. The Cowlitz hatchery said the fishing for steelhead should be good until the Springers start to show."

Northwest Bass & Panfish - Temperate Northern coastal lakes are starting to see some largemouth activity. With warm weather in the forecast, it won't be long 'til the shallow water of valley lakes and

ponds warms in to the magic 60s at which time bass and panfish reports will start to roll in.

On the South coast, lakes are warm enough to encourage smallmouth and largemouth to start feeding. Recently, smallies have been taken at Lost Creek and both smallmouth and largemouth are biting at Emigrant Lake.

Northwest Trout - A popular, annual, free event occurring this Saturday, March 5th, is the trout fishing derby on opening day of Hagg Lake. Anglers of all ages may participate although registration at Boat Ramp 'C' is required. The fun starts at 6 A.M. and runs 'til 2 in the afternoon. Prizes will be awarded in various categories or pick up an instant win flyer at Hillsboro Bi-Mart for random interception by the waterborne Prize Patrol. Thanks to the ODFW, 18,000 trout have been added to those which have held over from earlier plantings. See **Random Links**, below, for more details and a Hagg Lake map.

Other locations which have been stocked this week include Cape Meares, Coffenbury, Cullaby, Hebo, Lost (Clatsop County), Lytle, North Lake, Smith, South, Spring, Sunset, Town and Vernonia Lakes, Huddleston, St. Louis, E. E. Wilson and Junction City Ponds, Alton Baker Canal and Cottage Grove Reservoir.

Reader Email

We love to get Email!. Please share your experiences with us.

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: drees@TheGuidesForecast.com

Michael Teague: SailCat@TheGuidesForecast.com

Random Links -



ESPN picks up story on huge Umpqua River steelhead:

*http://espn.go.com/outdoors/fishing/s/f_fea_steelie-mega_OR_Umpqua05_Freeman.html

March 5th Trout Derby info: *http://www.kuik.com/kuik_home_page_004.htm

Map of Hagg Lake: *http://www.co.washington.or.us/deptmts/sup_serv/fac_mgt/parks/haggmap.htm

For those who'd prefer to check frequently on counts at Willamette Falls rather than read it here weekly, the source used in TGF has had a much-needed facelift, putting the most recent data at the top rather than the bottom as it had been previously. Since the page took more than a minute to load on a broadband cable Internet connection, dial-up users must have had to take lunch while the old page loaded. They will be particularly thankful for the new layout. See it here:
*<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/ODFWhtml/InfoCntrFish/InterFish/Willam.html>

Weekly Quote -

"Around the steel no tortur'd worm shall twine,
No blood of living insect stain my line;
Let me, less cruel, cast the feather'd hook,
With pliant rod athwart the pebbled brook,
Silent along the mazy margin stray,

And with the fur-wrought fly delude the prey." - John Gay, Rural Sports, published in 1720

GOOD LUCK!