

Northwest Oregon and Washington's most complete and accurate fishing forecast

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 2nd – December 8th, 2005**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Steelhead counts at Willamette Falls through November 23rd indicate little change. Passage remains in the low single digits. The year-to-date total has topped 100 since counting commenced on November 1st. Sturgeon fishing in the lower Willamette and Multnomah Channel is mostly a shaker show. With so few winter steelhead available, the few bank fishermen below the mouth of the Clackamas River are idle. Eagle Creek on the Clackamas closes to coho angling on December 1st.

It's between seasons on the Sandy with coho closed and the winter steelhead just beginning. One boat fishing over the weekend was pleasantly surprised to have 3 opportunities in the Oxbow to Dabney float- the steelhead they landed were all wild.

Columbia River Gorge sturgeon success remains the best option available. Catch rates have dropped however for both bank and boat anglers reports **pro guide Bill Kremers (541 754 6411)**. Success should continue to drop as keepers get culled and water temperatures chill. The Columbia at Bonneville was 47 degrees over the weekend.

Mid Columbia/Deschutes River - Upriver, the Deschutes has slowed dramatically for steelhead. Those trying have a better chance mid-day at this time of year rather than at dawn and dusk. That's when water temperatures match air temperatures.

John Day area steelheading slowed somewhat from the previous weeks' peak. Boat anglers averaged about 1 steelhead every other boat while 9 bank anglers were checked with one wild and one hatchery fish. This fishery is still viable but is passing its peak time.

Pro guide Jeff Knotts (509-547-7450) reports McNary steelhead are present and accounted for. He took 8 nice fish just before Thanksgiving on orange Hot Lips plugs soaked in shrimp oil.

North Coast - Foul weather has slowed effort in the Tillamook district but anglers found some success in the Ghost Hole and the jaws over the weekend. Fresh Chinook were also taken on Tuesday's slight rise in the Wilson River below Sollie Smith Bridge. **Pro guide David Johnson (503-201-4292)** also reports the fish have been hitting both plugs and bait. Pass conditions have been dangerous on Highway 6 so use caution when traveling.

Keeper sturgeon have also been taken on Tillamook Bay but mud shrimp is no longer available. Between an introduced parasite and low demand, don't count on finding mud shrimp anytime soon. Sand shrimp is a great alternative however but more susceptible to sculpin and crab. The West Channel offers an angler the best opportunity for keepers.

The Nestucca also gave up Chinook on Tuesday in the lower stretches and winter steelhead have been taken on the Nestucca, Wilson Three Rivers and the Necanicum Rivers. The Three Rivers fishery has good access for bank anglers but plan on company. **Pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** reporting.

Despite being so late in the season, the Nehalem gave up fresh Chinook to driftboaters working the lower stretches but most fish are on the spawning beds by now. North Fork Nehalem

steelhead are present but not in large numbers.

Crab limits were common for boats working the lower Columbia before the holiday. Pressure was heavy near buoy's 20 and 22 but limits came from the areas where fewer crabbers were working.

Mid-Coast - It's early for the Siletz to turn on for winter steelhead. Look for action to be decent and improving around Christmas. Steelies have started to show at the hatchery on the Alsea, an indicator of a potential early opportunity for winter hopefuls.

Alsea tidewater is producing fair to good catches of Dungeness. Yaquina Bay has slowed.

Siuslaw steelheaders will see fish start to enter in December. Last year, fishing was very good in January at this location.

The quota in the wild coho fishery at Siltcoos Lake is about 40% filled. Trollers can score with spinners or plugs at tributary mouths. With 90% of its quota remaining, the native coho fishery at Tahkenitch is expected to remain open through the 15th of December.

South Coast - Anglers on the volatile Elk and Sixes landed a few chrome winter Chinook over the weekend. Conditions on these tiny rivers improve rapidly with precipitation, dropping and clearing just as quickly between weather fronts. More Chinook will be entering into December. A decent tidal exchange this weekend should improve fishing prospects. Another set of minus tides will occur mid-month.

Steelheading continues to improve on the upper mainstem Umpqua with fish available into the North Fork where anglers will find a few coho in the mix. Winchester Bay is producing limits of Dungeness to recreational crabbers exalting the delay of commercial efforts until December 15th or later. Coos Bay has also been good for crabbing.

Rogue River steelheaders are taking fish in the Grants Pass stretch, but these are nearly 100% wild, requiring release. The lower Rogue offers nothing of interest to anglers at this time. Upper river steelheading is fair to good in both the flies-only stretch and where bait is allowed.

Eastern Oregon - Pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688) reports, "The Grande Ronde continues to put out steelhead and although gear anglers are dominating the banks, the low, clear and cold water has die-hard fly anglers finding success." Last weeks creel checks have Oregon anglers averaging 1 steelhead for every 7 hours invested

Trout fishing- No trout stocking is scheduled this week.

SW Washington- Steelhead action on the North Fork of the Lewis is picking up but still weeks away from peaking states **pro guide Pete Grace (888-688-4386)**. Thick fog has been observed on the water so use caution when navigating.

The Kalama River recycling program is already underway for winter steelhead. Twenty-five fish were "inducted" on Monday. The returns are tracking equal to the recent 5-year average.

Columbia River Fishing Report – The Columbia slowed dramatically for sturgeon last weekend. A drop in water temperatures were to blame. Couple this with weeks of great keeper action and the result is the expected slow-down. **Pro guide Bill Kremers (541-754- 6411)** reports, "I did give sturgeon fishing a try last Saturday in the Gorge. The fishing is slowing

rapidly as the water temperature dropped to 47 degrees (probably lower now). We did manage a few shakers on the Oregon side by Horsetail Falls. Only action I saw was sea lion devouring a sturgeon about seven feet long." **Pro guide Dan Ponciano (360-607-8511)** echoed Bill's report stating that the fishing was near a standstill last weekend. Dan knew of a few boats that got keepers but the action significantly slowed and that bites were far less aggressive than previously witnessed. This is a clear indication that water temperatures are playing a role. The temperature was recorded at 47 degrees over the weekend. Smelt and shrimp remain the best bait but anglers may need to find alternatives if they are seeking keepers.

Crabbers in the lower Columbia found mixed results over the weekend. We did quite well on the day before Thanksgiving but we were sure to stay away from competition. Crabbing around the favored Buoy's 20 and 22 did not pan out like it usually does this time of year. The extensive sand bar on lower Desdemona Sands paid dividends through the weekend and fresh bait had a lot to do with it. With so much competition, you have to have the best out there to expect good results. I stuck to the 28 to 34 foot of water and incoming tide was clearly the best- even with the weak outgoing flow.

Steelheaders still have some great options in the John Day Pool and the John Day Arm itself. Although catch rates have dropped somewhat, action remains good enough to warrant a trip. Anglers may wish to check weather however as inclement weather is very possible this time of year. Bobber and bait seems to be the outstanding option.

The Guide's Forecast – Despite the drop in catch rates, the Columbia River Gorge remains the best place to entice a keeper to the boat. Overall action has slowed for keepers and shakers in the gorge but smelt and shrimp will take shakers and an occasional keeper from Horsetail Falls to the deadline. Anglers will notice fish are harder to hook with dropping water temperatures. It may pay to switch to smaller baits. The Willamette River may become a viable option when the Columbia cools like it has.

Crabbers should continue to have ample opportunity in the lower Columbia River. Keep in mind to avoid other crabbers for best catches. Weather forecasts should dictate safety and the only time it is safe to crab out there when wind is a factor is when it is coming from the south. Crabbers not wishing to venture west towards Clatsop Spit should crab just upstream of the Hammond Boat Basin as keepers can be common there.

Steelheaders will have about 2 more weeks of opportunity but the bulk of the action should now be taking place in the John Day itself. Bobbers and shrimp will take most of the fish but the water continues to drop and clear so stealth tactics are strongly recommended. Bobbers and jigs will also work well if bait is hard to come by.

Further upriver, **pro guide Jeff Knotts (509-547-7450)** reports, "Fished Ringold last Sunday and while we only took one steelhead, we saw three fish taken off the bank and two others taken out of boats. We fished McNary on Wednesday and sure enough another batch on fish showed up. We scored eight all fishing with orange Hot Lips plug dowsed with Mikes shrimp gel."

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Fickle weather conditions recently should have drivers on alert state-wide as icy roads create hazardous driving conditions. Those towing a boat should be particularly cautious. With anglers thinking winter steelhead and this year's run just beginning, anglers want to know where early fish have been landed.

Willamette Valley anglers are playing a waiting game at this time of year.

Steelhead counts at Multnomah Falls through November 27th indicate little change in the scant handful crossing daily. The year-to-date total has topped 120 since counting commenced on November 1st. With so few winter steelhead available, the numbers of bank fishermen below the mouth of the Clackamas River has dwindled. Those present are idle.

The temperature of the Willamette at the Falls was a frigid 42 degrees as of Tuesday, November 29th, whereas the Columbia temp is 47 degrees at Bonneville. Most years, sturgeon fishing will improve on the lower Willamette as the warmer water draws sturgeon in to feed. Obviously, this is not the case so far this season. Sturgeon fishing in the lower Willamette and Multnomah Channel is mostly a shaker show. For those ill-equipped to tackle the Big River, however, the best bet in the Willamette for a long shot at a keeper is the lower end of Multnomah Channel.

The Guide's Forecast – With a winter storm warning on deck as this is written (mid-day Thursday, December 1st), the possibility of any warming precipitation is remote, yet that's what will be required to tip the temperature scale in favor of the Willamette, enticing sturgeon from the chilly Columbia and kick-starting this overdue fishery. Maybe next week.

Time is on the side of those who enjoy the laid-back bank fishery below the Clackamas River mouth on the banks of the lower Willamette. The Blacktop, Bulkhead and Meldrum Bar, all familiar landmarks to those who frequent this stretch, will soon be lined with fishers. There will be plenty of bank space this weekend, however, and for very good reason. No steelhead. Look for this fishery to improve over the next few weeks as the population of winter steelhead becomes sufficiently dense to create some action.

A reminder that the latest Willamette Falls Fish Counts are available by telephone at 503-657-2059.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – It's between seasons on the Sandy with coho closed and the winter steelhead run over the horizon. A few early fish have entered and while the majority of these have been wild, a couple of fin-clipped fish were landed over the weekend. With the first hatchery fish having been taken so early, this run is shaping up to be most rewarding this year. It'll only get better as December progresses and should be great in January.

The latest ODFW report regarding the Clackamas outlook indicates that with winter steelhead in the lower Willamette, "the determined angler could find an early fish." Savvy anglers have determined the coastal streams offer much better odds of an encounter, although a scant number of hatchery fish have surely found their way into the lower Clack.

North Coast District Fishing Report – Anglers seeking Chinook in the Tillamook district found hit or miss opportunities. Ghost Hole patrons did have some success over the weekend as avid angler Sharon Harmon found herself a dandy 37 pounder! She and husband Gary Kish managed to fish their way to 4 opportunities over the weekend, releasing a chrome hen to seed the stock and keeping the big buck. They fished along the north jetty (inside) as well. Crabbing was also fair to good in Tillamook Bay for many sport anglers. The weak tides didn't aid success for estuary trollers but the Wilson River came up a little bit after the weekend. This stimulated some fresh Chinook to find their way into the river and we went 1 for 3 on Kwikfish for a few hours of fishing on Tuesday (11/29). All fish came on Kwikfish- chartreuse head and butt and chartreuse head/pink butt K-16 XTreme's. These plugs dive great without any additional lead or divers in water up to 10 feet deep. The bait rods never got touched. Additionally, we spoke with another boat of 2 anglers that limited their boat by noon time. All bright hens ranging from 14 to 22 pounds. They took their fish on plugs as well. There were very few people on the river this day due to poor weather conditions. It made for a nice day between squalls however! The day before (11/28), I did a half day float with a group from the Seattle area. We floated from Donaldson's

Boat Ramp to Sollie Smith Bridge. We drew no strikes and only saw one dark fish landed that day.

Steelhead have been reported in the Wilson as reports came in from 2 local fishing guides. On the Wilson, **pro guide Dave Johnson (503-201-4292)** reports, "We are continuing to get lots of bright chinook from the Tillamook system on both Kwikfish and bait. There should be plenty of salmon available through December. There has also been a trickle of winter steelhead in so I'd expect it to be decent for them in a week or two."

Further south, **pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** reports, "The Nestucca is in great shape after a brief blow out. Some Chinook are still available, but there are some steelhead around. Look for the best results for the early fish to be from the mouth of Three Rivers or Farmers down. All normal steelhead gear will work, and stick to holes for a while, and see if fish come to you. Some will also stage, so if you find them, hit the spot hard. There have also been fresh fish caught in Three Rivers itself, but expect some company."

Reports of sturgeon in the bay are real. There is very little pressure for them but they are on schedule as they showed up in fishable numbers last year about this time. Sand shrimp will have to be the bait of choice as mud shrimp as simply not available. I recommend bringing lots of bait as you may have competition from crab and sculpin in many areas of the estuary. The West (or South to some) Channel will offer the best opportunity for keepers but those anglers that have invested time in knowing where the channels are in the bay will have a strong advantage over others. The last half of outgoing tide and the first part of incoming will be the most productive.

Crabbers working the north coast should still have decent opportunity for keepers but fresh water influence is forecasted to hit the coast by the weekend and may damper success. Larger tides are also the rule this week which will also put crab down.

The Guide's Forecast – The forecasted rise in river levels may provide some good driftboat fishing for anglers still seeking late running Chinook and early returning steelhead. The Wilson would be the obvious first choice as a larger system will have greater returns. The Kilchis however will also offer anglers fresh Chinook and a few hatchery returning steelhead- particularly if the Wilson gets too much precipitation over the weekend. Remember to target Chinook in the tailouts of holes if the flows are high. Otherwise, on a dropping river where holes are clearly defined and visibility is better than 3 feet, Chinook will be in their classic locations- deep, boily water and runs. A good option for this time of year is to run Tadpolly plugs in all fishy looking water. Both steelhead and Chinook hit these plugs well this time of year. The steelhead will be holding in different water than the Chinook. Seek steelhead out in the shallower, broken surfaced drifts- even below spawning Chinook. There will be lots of spawning Chinook this week so pay attention as to where you drop your anchor and wade! Be mindful of large, wild coho that can be mistaken for Chinook.

Sturgeon anglers will have their best opportunity in the afternoon tide series. A minus tide will offer up good chances for sturgeon and estuary clamming. Razors should also be available in the Clatsop district. Use shrimp when pursuing sturgeon and with little daylight during the peak fishing times, anglers may wish to move around in search of keepers. Their numbers should grow into the winter months.

Crabbing, although an option, will not perform to peak standards. Big tides and the possibility for precipitation will slow success.

Central & South Coast Reports – It's early for the Siletz to turn on for winter steelhead. Look for action to be decent and improving around Christmas. Steelies have started to show at the

hatchery on the Alsea, an indicator of a potential early opportunity for winter hopefuls. Alsea tidewater is producing fair to good catches of Dungeness while Yaquina Bay has slowed.

Pro Guide Bill Kremers (541 754 6411) sent this last-minute report the afternoon of Thursday, December 1st, with some interesting information: "... a friend and I fished the Alsea today. The river is full of coho right now. We landed a dozen and had several more strikes. We also landed one native steelhead."

Thanks, Bill. Go get 'em, readers!

Hundreds of sports and commercial boats launch out of the ports of Depoe Bay and Newport every year, seeking sport offshore. Over fishing of some species has resulted in limit reductions and selective closures in an effort to protect dwindling numbers of certain bottom-dwellers.

According to the Pacific Fishery Management Council, populations of ling cod have rebounded since catch restrictions were put in place about six years ago. Despite strong numbers, current bag limits will continue in order to protect canary, yellow eye and other rockfish which are caught incidentally in the same areas fished for lings. Still, it's good news for anglers who may see relaxed regulations in the future.

Siuslaw steelheaders will see winter steelhead start to enter in December. Last year, fishing was very good in January at this location. With rain, there may be a shot at a late Fall chinook here as a few have been taken over that last week.

The quota in the wild coho fishery at Siltcoos Lake is about 40% filled. Trollers can score with spinners or plugs at tributary mouths. With 90% of its quota remaining, the native coho fishery at Tahkenitch is expected to remain open through the season which ends December 15th.

Anglers on the volatile Elk and Sixes landed a few chrome winter Chinook over the weekend. Conditions on these tiny rivers improve rapidly with precipitation, dropping and clearing just as quickly between weather fronts. More Chinook will be entering into December. A decent tidal exchange this weekend should improve fishing prospects with another set of minus tides occurring mid-month.

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The Coos and Coquille rivers are getting the first of their winter steelhead runs. Plunking Spin 'n' Glos has been effective. Coos Bay has been good for crabbing.

Plunkers from Agness downstream are starting to pick up the first of the winter steelhead to show up here. Rogue River steelheaders are taking fish in the Grants Pass stretch, but these are nearly 100% wild, requiring release. Upper river steelheading is fair to good in both the flies-only stretch and where bait is allowed. If fishing the bait section from the hatchery down to Shady Grove, use long, light leaders, at least until the next decent rainfall gives the water some color.

With anglers still catching Fall chinook on the Chetco and the winter steelhead run has starting up, a mixed bounty awaits anglers here.

As of Thursday, December 1st, the South coast is getting heavy rainfall. Watch for a break following this precipitation and hit the rivers while they're on the fall!

Central and Eastern Oregon – Pro Guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688) reports, "The Grande Ronde River in northeast Oregon and southeast Washington continues to fish well in late November, particularly for gear anglers, but very respectably for fly anglers, which might expect catch rates in the single digits. Last week's creel survey shows Oregon anglers averaging about seven hours per fish and Washington anglers roughly doubling that average, but my outing with flies on Sunday in Washington matched Oregon's average catch rate. The water level in the Grande Ronde remains low and recent cold weather has cleared the water. Most of the fishing effort has shifted from fly fishing to gear fishing. Although water temperatures are in the 30s I continue having good success fly fishing with a floating line."

The Deschutes was running very clear as of Wednesday, November 30th. Fly anglers will find the tiniest patterns most effective and mid-day most productive as air temperature will be similar to the water temp at that time. Think midges and cadisses from size 18 down. There won't be many hatches to speak of from now 'til early spring, so keep some micro-nymphs in the arsenal. Although the White River is not effecting visibility in the lower Deschutes, steelheading is extremely slow.

Weather this week will restrict access to much of the East side for anglers. Be sure to carry chains where required or prepare to pay a fine.

SW Washington - Pro guide Pete Grace (888-688-4386) reports on the North Fork of the Lewis River. Pete states, "winter steelhead is picking up but not in full swing as of today. There is thick fog on the river early in the morning, so please use caution."

Creel counts over the weekend are still showing both adult and jack coho are being retained at the Cowlitz Falls Reservoir. Twenty-five boats landed 25 adults and 4 jacks. Almost half of the adults landed were released due to poor meat quality.

On the Kalama River, steelhead action is beginning to pick up as well. On Monday 25 hatchery winter steelhead were recycled to the lower river, while 4 wild winter steelhead were passed upstream of Kalama Falls Hatchery (KFH). From October 20 though November 28, 2005 a total of 19 wild winter steelhead have been passed upstream of KFH, this is twice the 5-year average and equal to the 10-year average. From November 10 though November 28, 2005 a total of 43 hatchery winter steelhead were recycled to the lower river, this is equal to the 5-year average and twice the 10-year average.

Eastern Washington – On the Snake River, effort has dropped slightly from previous weeks but the best bet for steelhead remains on the Walla Walla River. Weekly creel checks showed 14 anglers with 5 steelhead on the Walla Walla. 114 anglers fished the Ice Harbor to Lower Monumental section tallying 20 steelhead. Lower Monumental Dam to Little Goose netted 15 steelhead for 72 anglers while Little Goose to Lower Granite produced 6 fish for 46 anglers.

Puget Sound – Fishing in the south sound is still an option but results vary for the effort being put forth. Pt. Defiance is kicking out a few Chinook for dedicated anglers.

Central Puget Sound showed the highest activity at the Everett Ramp with the best check coming on 11/27. 31 anglers landed 5 Chinook.

In the North Sound, effort and catch is very low with only an occasional Chinook coming from Camano Island Public Ramp and the Bellingham area.

On the Peninsula side of the Sound, Salsbury County Park Ramp tallied 2 Chinook for 7 anglers on 11/26.

Olympic Peninsula – The tribal netting schedule is not available for peninsula area streams. It is online at: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/tribal/index.htm>

Northwest Trout - Although there's no trout stocking scheduled for a few weeks, larger rainbows and steelhead will be delivered to valley lakes and ponds around the holidays. Surplus hatchery steelhead were planted in Town Lake, Lorens Ponds and Cape Meares Lake in the Northwest Zone recently.

Reader Email

Kapt Ken Johnson reports again this week from the banks of the lower Willamette, "Rain Rain, keep on'a'comin'!!! Light and steady, that is. The weather report for these last couple of days and the near future has obviously been for rainy days ahead. But, how hard is that rain going to fall??? The water levels came up in the last 4-5 days, but only a foot or since this time last week. The Willamette water level is still about 4'-5' below regular Winter conditions at this time of year. The daily count at The Willamette Falls Fish Passage is totaling about 5-7 Steelies per day a/o last Wednesday and picking up each week. The Winter fishery is still a bit ahead of us yet. Right now, the fishing pressure is extremely light with the low water and low fish counts to boot. We're getting the rain everyone has been praying for, but when it comes down hard, like it did last night, it discolors the water to the point of being impossible to fish. The Willamette is getting a bit off color, but the opportunities to hook a Steeie are getting better and better as each day passes as the number of fish heading upstream are slowly increasing. As long as we don't our typical rainy blowout creating muddy waters and tons of floating debris, we should have some good fishing right around the corner. Right now, the Willamette is quite fishable. Of course, this can change by the hour, depending on good ol' Mother Nature. Another 1-1/2 to 2 weeks and I predict a noticeable change, both in water conditions and the numbers of fish showing at the falls and on the ends of fishermen's lines. In a week or two, as the temperature drops too, Meldrum Bar will start to look like its old self again...Just a fisherman or two, with about 50-75 of his closest friends...Nothing better to do??? Quit Wishin'~Go Fishin'. Don't forget that your 2006 Fishing Licenses and Tags are going to be due real soon...Don't get caught without it come 1/1/2006! Makes a great gift from Santa, so encourage Santa to get you Gift Certificates from your favorite sporting goods store to cover the cost! Then, as all good fisherfolks do, go PROVIDE for the family and put Meat on the Table...Steeie Meat, that is!!!!"

Write to the TGF staff:

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Random Links

We've run this previously, but it's worth reminding road warriors to check the latest conditions before traveling:

*<http://www.tripcheck.com/Pages/RCmap.asp?curRegion=0&mainNav=RoadConditions>

A \$1,000 reward has been offered through Crime Stoppers for information leading to an arrest in a recent spate of crank call to the Coast Guard originating from Brookings Harbor. Calls have resulted in four separate rescue attempts of non-existent vessels at an immense cost in equipment and man-hours. Callers may remain anonymous. Tip Line: 888-974-0000.

Coast Guard Press Release:

<http://www.piersystem.com/go/doc/21/89616/>

To listen to an audio clip of one of the hoax calls, visit the Coast Guard's Web site at

www.piersystem.com/clients/uscg-13/48112.mp3

Weekly Quote – "I have made it a matter of policy to disbelieve all fishing stories on their first telling; they begin to have the ring of truth, however, after I've repeated them several times." - Paul Quinnett

GOOD LUCK!