

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 23rd – December 29th, 2005**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

ANGLERS may want to consider getting your 2006 licenses and tags this week!

Have a VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS from The Guide's Forecast ! ! ! ! !

Willamette Valley/Metro- Sturgeon effort has been next to nothing since the foul weather hit the gorge last week. **Pro guide Dan Ponciano (360-607-8511)** expressed optimism for fair fishing since gorge sturgeon have not been hit hard recently and water temperatures are moderating. Some keepers are still being taken by boat and bank anglers but the weather must settle before ODF&W gets an accurate count as to what's going on.

Rainfall can only improve the water conditions in the lower Willamette where the level has been down along with water temps. Sturgeon fishing still isn't happening but hopes are high that the precipitation this week will kick-start this overdue fishery.

Counting of winter steelhead crossing Willamette Falls has resumed but showed no improvement as of December 18th. Rainfall will have a positive impact. Bank anglers at Meldrum Bar are taking the occasional steelhead with upriver natives mixed with fin-clipped fish bound for the Eagle Creek hatchery on the Clackamas River.

Anglers casting spinners on the Clackamas near the mouth have nailed a few steelhead. This fishery will improve in the weeks to come.

Pro guide Jack Glass (503 666 5370) reports, "The Sandy river is still low and clear and windy on the lower river. We look forward to the weather change this week to bring some rain- just not too much." Don't forget your season passes for Oxbow and Dabney parks for our regular anglers. Daily passes are available when you enter the parks.

Huddleston Pond in Willamina received 350 rainbow trout 16 inches or better this week.

Mid Columbia - The lower John Day River and pool remained productive for both bank and boat anglers last weekend. Despite low effort, catch rates hovered around a fish per boat while bank anglers scored just under a fish per rod. The weather change may even improve this fishery.

Northwest - Adverse weather conditions are keeping most anglers from fishing the Tillamook district. River levels are on the rise and the first good push of winter steelhead should be available on the Wilson, Kilchis and Nestucca Rivers. **Pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** reports, "Three Rivers should also be primed for returning hatchery steelhead. The deadline near Cedar Creek will be bustling this weekend."

Flows should get high enough for driftboats to float on the Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem as well. High winds often put hazardous trees in the water so navigate with caution.

The last push of fresh Chinook should also be available on the Wilson and Kilchis Rivers. High flows will keep the Chinook in the softer edges and tailouts- ideal locations for anglers running plugs.

The tides are ripe for great crabbing over the weekend but the marine forecast is not calling for user friendly conditions. High seas will keep boats from navigating near the bay entrances and winds will frustrate crabbers.

Good sturgeon tides for Tillamook Bay anglers begin on Monday. Wind will hamper success however as a swinging boat challenges anglers to notice interested fish.

Pro guide Bill Kremers (541 754 6411) reports steelhead are moving on the Alsea with the precipitation this week. Anglers should be cautious of a rumored navigational hazard on the Mill Creek to Campbell run. A tree is said to be blocking most of the river.

Siuslaw anglers will also find steelhead on the move with the freshet. Start low and follow the fish as they travel upstream.

Southwest - Please note: Conditions changed rapidly this week. Most South coast streams are currently blown out from rains this week. Check the conditions before traveling!

A few sturgeon have been taken out of Reedsport. Precipitation this week will further improve this fishery where it's just as likely to hook an oversized fish as it is a shaker.

Between the drawdown process at Diamond Lake and the precipitation this week, steelheaders will find plenty of water in the Umpqua River. Decent flows have resulted in winter metalheads entering for a month now however fishing has been slow. Like most coastal systems, the warm front should stimulate success rates.

Catch numbers should ramp up on the Coos and Coquille Rivers. Peak success rates happen after the first of the year but with the significant rain freshet, the run should be underway.

Although it is getting late for Elk and Sixes River Chinook, fresh fish should once again become available for late season anglers. Continued rainfall makes the Elk River the better option. The Sixes will become fishable about a day after the Elk clears.

Fishing for summer steelhead on the upper Rogue is holding up while plunkers down low are seeing steadily increasing numbers of fresh winter steelhead in the system. Most of the fresh winter run fish are falling to backrolled plugs from boat anglers.

Southwest Washington- Winter Steelhead fishing on the Cowlitz river has been fair to good depending on the flows states **pro guide Bob Barthlow (509-697-7125)**. The days that the utility keeps the flows steady, the fishing has been good. When flows suddenly raise or drop, the bite shuts off. Sidedrifting cured eggs are taking many of the steelhead.

The Lewis and Kalama Rivers suffered from low, cold water conditions last week but the warm front will improve anglers success on both systems. The Kalama seems oddly absent of fish this year while the Lewis is tracking above last years run.

Eastern - Pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688) reports the Grande Ronde River should fish again this week. After a two-week rest, the river should provide a few days of excellent Christmas-season fishing before the word spreads. Anglers can expect good fly fishing and great gear fishing now as temperatures moderate into the 40s in the canyon.

Columbia River Fishing Report – The winter doldrums continue to plague the lower Columbia with exception of the John Day area. Steelheaders are still enjoying high success rates in the John Day Arm itself. Many anglers stayed away from the mainstem Columbia this week due to bad weather conditions. Effort was down considerably but for the anglers who fished, action was good. Boats averaged 1.25 fish/boat while bank anglers took .8 fish/rod. All the steelhead that the bank anglers landed were of hatchery origin while the majority of the fish taken in the boat fishery were wild and had to be released.

Meanwhile, sturgeon anglers below Bonneville Dam are still hard pressed to put a great trip together. Poor weather has kept most anglers away but success rates are still low. Bank anglers were still taking a few fish close to the deadline and boat anglers kept vessels trailered due to high winds and cold weather. Some anglers did fish the Portland to Longview stretch however but only came up with 5 shakers for a dozen boats checked over the weekend.

Poor weather conditions also kept many crabbers from exploring the lower Columbia River. Although not on par with years past, this fishery is still quite viable given the fact that the commercial pots have yet to harvest the estuary.

Here is a list of the upcoming commercial gillnet seasons targeting sturgeon:

Season:	6 PM	Tuesday January 10	to	6 PM	Wednesday January 11	(24 hrs)
	6 PM	Tuesday January 17	to	6 PM	Wednesday January 18	(24 hrs)
	6 PM	Tuesday January 24	to	6 PM	Wednesday January 25	(24 hrs)
	6 PM	Tuesday January 31	to	6 PM	Wednesday February 1	(24 hrs)
	6 PM	Tuesday February 7	to	6 PM	Wednesday February 8	(24 hrs)
	6 PM	Tuesday February 14	to	6 PM	Wednesday February 15	(24 hrs)
	6 PM	Tuesday February 21	to	6 PM	Wednesday February 22	(24 hrs)
Area:	Zones 1 - 5.					
Sanctuaries:	Sandy River sanctuary is in effect.					
Gear:	9" minimum and 9-3/4" maximum mesh size restrictions.					
Allowable Sales:	Sale of sturgeon and adipose fin-clipped salmon allowed.					

The Guide's Forecast – The weather change we are currently experiencing will do nothing but improve the fishing in the weeks ahead. Waters should warm a little and the influx of fresh water should stimulate fish to feed and migrate.

Sturgeon effort will likely remain low however the lack of effort should put interested participants in the drivers seat. Since so few people are in pursuit, action should be fair for shakers and fair (at best) for keepers. The fish are well scattered in search of a consistent food supply so don't expect great action. You'll have to dedicate a good part of your day to find a keeper. Use smelt and shrimp for bait. The gorge is an anglers best bet but the Portland area near the mouth of the Willamette River may also put out an occasional keeper.

Although smelt are still a few weeks away (if they show at all), the run is not forecasted to be great either and sport dippers will likely see a 1 day/week fishery in the Cowlitz this spring. Look for smelt to be expensive for bait as demand will outpace supply. Lamprey is officially illegal to possess in the 2006 regulations.

The tides are right for good crabbing in the lower Columbia River. The weather however does not

look to be cooperating and conditions may be dangerous for anglers in the Hammond area. Be sure to check conditions before departing your home to make sure it will be worth the trip. The tides turn more extreme on Monday (12/26) when clamming becomes a better option than crabbing. The surf is forecasted to be big however so clams may be pounded down and digging challenging.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Winter steelhead counts at Willamette Falls have hovered near, well, zero. That is to say the daily numbers of winter steelhead passing over the Falls is much closer to zero than, say, five.

The Guide's Forecast – Yeah, it's dismal, but consider that the hatchery steelhead in the lower Willamette don't cross the Falls but rather turn left into the Clackamas River, bound for the hatchery on Eagle Creek from whence they came. 'Tis the season as numbers of hatchery fish improve as their biological clock drives them.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Spinner flingers picked up a few steelhead on the Clackamas near the mouth earlier this week.

It's still early for Sandy steelhead to appear in significant numbers although optimistic anglers have managed to take a few. As of today (12/22), the water level is rising and is predictably opaque. It'll be a while before it recovers.

Pro guide Jack Glass (503-666-5370) adds this, "Sandy river is still low and clear and windy on the lower river we look forward to the weather change this week bring some rain just not too much. There are steelhead available drifting bobber and jig also bobber and pink worm has been producing most fish, Oxbow and Dodge Park areas, Don't forget your season passes for Oxbow and Dabney parks for our regular anglers, Daily passes are available when you enter the parks. Shuttle services are with Grant Brown at 503-312-9204. Please tell him you got this number from The Guides Forecast. I fished the Willamette last Sunday with costumers and they caught 5 steelhead 4 hour trip."

Rob Brown, who purchased Jack's Snack 'n' Tackle in Troutdale on the banks of the Sandy River from Jack Glass, didn't open the landmark store on Monday, December 19th. It was so icy in the area he couldn't get out of his driveway. Give Rob a call at 503-665-2257 to check river and road conditions.

Jack Glass and his son, Brandon will giving a winter steelheading seminar at Hayden Meadows G. I. Joes (at Delta Park) Thursday, December 22nd at 6:30 PM and again at the same time on Thursday, December 29th at the Johnson Creek G. I. Joes location. He'll be "providing info about winter steelhead fishing boat and bank fishing technique and the science behind these methods." Everyone attending is sure to pick up a few useful tips and techniques, and Jack has a supply of "give-aways" for those who attend!

The Guide's Forecast – Look for catches to improve on the Clack with the better flows and as water temperatures moderate.

Rain will surely serve to improve the mid-30-degree water temperature as measured over the chilly weekend.

North Coast District Fishing Report – I never thought rain sounded so good. The big question now is, when will it stop? The much welcome precipitation has anglers on edge. Even

smaller streams are on the rise keeping driftboaters trailered until flows stabilize. On Wednesday (12/21) Tillamook area streams were on the rise. If the rise wasn't so rapid, fishing could be decent but heavy rainfall will put steelhead on a fast pace to get nowhere until the spawn later in February.

Pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808) supplies this report, "The Nestucca is on the rise, and coming into beautiful shape. Three Rivers is still a little on the low side. As the weather pattern improves, look for fresh fish to be on the lower river, and a good bunch of hatchery fish to be headed for Three Rivers. There are fish around but they are in shifty little moods. Look for fish to continue to spread through the entire river. Bobbers and jigs will get bit, as well as good drifted baits of eggs or shrimp."

43 Alsea stock hatchery steelhead were recycled from Cedar Creek hatchery back into the mainstem Nestucca last week.

Low flow fishing is no longer an option and few anglers took advantage of it. Most salmon and steelhead anglers have been waiting for the rain we are now experiencing.

Estuary sturgeon anglers have been out but less than ideal conditions have not translated into good opportunity. Mud shrimp is hard to find but sand shrimp is working well as an alternative.

Crabbing remained fair before the influx of fresh water. Although it doesn't look like flood conditions will occur, the closer crabbers are to the ocean, the better their catch will likely be. Soft tides will make Friday and Saturday good options but a huge forecasted swell should make anglers wary of dangerous conditions. No crab is worth injury.

The Guide's Forecast – When the flows do subside, the Wilson, Kilchis and Nestucca Rivers should produce good catches of hatchery winter steelhead. The Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem Rivers will also be viable options. The smaller streams like the Kilchis, Necanicum and N. Fork Nehalem will be the first to clear and therefore become fishable. Hydrograph forecasts indicate that may happen as early as Christmas Eve Day. Christmas Day is often a great time to go fishing as most folks are spending time with family and friends (and shouldn't you be too?). It will be hard to do however for the avid steelheader as this will be the best conditions we have seen in several weeks- and really the first of the season for steelheaders!

Driftboaters should be aware that smaller streams like the Necanicum and N. Fork Nehalem are more susceptible to downed trees impeding passage. High winds have hit the coast recently which certainly causes hazardous navigational obstacles. It may be wise to carry a hand saw but be wary - you are cutting away fish habitat so use discretion.

By Sunday, the larger streams like the Wilson, Trask and Nestucca may fish well. The Wilson should get a few hatchery steelhead and they will be spread throughout the system. Anglers used to congregate near the acclimation pond but hatchery fish are frequently trucked downstream for the South Fork trap indicating they are making a significant trek through the main body of the Wilson. Nestucca anglers are better off fishing the water below Three Rivers as most of the hatchery fish are bound for Cedar Creek hatchery on Three Rivers. There will be a few hatchery fish available above the mouth of Cedar Creek but wild fish will be available for catch and release fisheries. This is also the first year of the Nestucca Broodstock returns. Fin-clips for Tillamook district hatchery winter steelhead are as follows:

Wilson River Winter steelhead fin marks

Stock	Brood Year	Fin Mark	Release Year	First Returns
Alsea	2000	AD	2001	Winter 02/03
	2001	AD	2002	Winter 03/04
	2002	ADLM	2003	Winter 04/05
	2003	ADLM	2004	Winter 05/06
Wild	2000	ADLV	2001	Winter 02/03
	2001	ADLM	2002	Winter 03/04
	2002	AD	2003	Winter 04/05
	2003	AD	2004	Winter 05/06

Nestucca River Winter steelhead fin marks

Stock	Brood Year	Fin Mark	Release Year	First Returns
Alsea	2000	AD	2001	Winter 02/03
	2001	AD	2002	Winter 03/04
	2002	ADLM	2003	Winter 04/05
	2003	ADLM	2004	Winter 05/06
Wild	2000	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2001	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2002	ADRM	2003	Winter 04/05
	2003	ADRM	2004	Winter 05/06

The Trask will get a few hatchery strays and some years the fishing can be quite good. Pressure of course is usually a fraction of what we witness on the Wilson and Nestucca.

Anglers should also be aware that this rain freshet will provide the last good opportunity for a winter Chinook. The Wilson and Kilchis Rivers will provide the best bets for these late returning fish and they can often be found in steelhead type water in the higher flows anglers will be witnessing over the weekend. As flows subside, they will be found in their more traditional lairs consisting of deep holes and pockets and deep runs. Females, despite being bright in color, will be ripe and ready to spawn. Their flesh will likely be pale and even their eggs can be loose. Bucks however may still be in prime shape inside and out. Please be selective of your harvest. Egg hunting is for cavemen!

Target Chinook in the tailouts of drifts using plugs. As waters subside, bait will become more effective in the deeper water.

Tides will improve for estuary sturgeon fishing beginning on Monday, December 26th. Afternoon tides will allow for local anglers to sleep in and really give the weather a look before deciding to leave the comfort of their wood stoves. The influx of fresh water may keep bacteria levels high so clammers may want to consider not recreating in Tillamook Bay during such conditions.

When extreme tides return, crabbing will likely go to pot (pun intended). Fresh water will also curb success. Netarts Bay may be the best option for holiday delight as very few streams drain into this estuary.

Those two uniformed ODFW officials approaching on the banks of the Nestucca aren't teaming up on anglers. They're biologists surveying to determine the success of hatchery efforts and the impact of the broodstock run at this location. Give them a couple of minutes of your time. They know how important fishing is to all of us.

Central & South Coast Reports – Conditions on all of the South coast rivers have changed dramatically from reports even as recent as Monday, December 19th. Put fishing plans on hold and call ahead as blowouts are nearly universal on the South coast. This will also put crabbing on the skids as the fresh water causes a drop in estuary salinity, driving those tasty crustaceans out to the Big Pond.

The torrential rain which started Sunday in Southwest Oregon had drenched the area with 4 1/2 inches of rain by Thursday evening. Forecasts indicate a moderation in the Weather by the evening of Thursday, December 22nd.

That said, what follows is the latest reports we could glean from various sources. We do our best but things changed rapidly this week!

Between fishing trips, cast your weary eyeballs to the ocean. It's the peak of the seasonal whale migration as these giant critters travel from the frigid Northern waters to sunny Mexico. Good plan.

Pro Guide Bill Kremers (541-754-6411) reports that he "did not get out on the river this past week because of the weather. We do however go crabbing one morning at Waldport where we pickup up a dozen firm crabs. Not sure how large the crabbing will last, but it sure beat hanging around the house. With some rain finally coming thru along with warmer temperature and a waning moon I expect the steelhead fishing to improve big time this week and next week. Also according to reports on I-Fish there is a very large tree blocking about 90% of Alsea on the Mill Creek to Campbell (Pink House) run. So boaters should use extreme caution when floating this section of the Alsea."

The for wild coho fishery at Siltcoos and Tahkenitch lakes is over with quotas unfilled at both locations. In light of recent concerns over fewer number in this run, the future of this fishery is up in the air.

Siuslaw anglers will find steelhead on the move with the improved flows following the high water. Steelhead are likely to be scattered once the flows moderate.

A few sturgeon have been taken out of Reedsport as well with precipitation this week further improving this fishery where it's just as likely to hook an oversized specimen as it is a shaker. These fish are lovin' life as high, muddy water is to their liking.

Between the drawdown process at Diamond Lake and the precipitation this week, steelheaders will find plenty of water in the Umpqua River. Decent flows have resulted in winter metalheads entering for a month now, spreading fish throughout the system. Catch rates, however, have been low. Rainfall will raise chilly water temperatures along with steelhead's metabolism. Reports as recent as Monday, the 19th, indicate cured eggs drifted above Elkton were taking some very large steelhead, although the river is currently blown out from the winter storm.

Winter steelhead action should ramp up on the Coos and Coquille Rivers this week, once the water returns to fishable level from the current high flows. Peak success rates will occur after the first of the year.

Got a particularly hard-to-buy-for outdoorsman on your gift list? How about buying a radio transmitter to help track the habits of wild steelhead on the Coquille. It costs \$150 and it is a worth cause. That this allows for naming of your tagged fish put a grin on our kissers: Call the Charleston Fish and Wildlife office at 541-888-5515 for all you'll need to know..

Although it is getting late for Elk and Sixes River Chinook, fresh fish should once again become available for late season anglers. Continued rainfall makes the Elk River the better option. The Sixes will become fishable about a day after the Elk clears.

Fishing for summer steelhead on the upper Rogue is holding up as steelhead are being recycled from the hatchery. These fish are colorful but viable. While plunkers down low had been seeing steadily increasing numbers of fresh winter steelhead in the system and boat fishers had success with backrolled plugs. The rains this week have blown out the lower river, putting steelheading on hold until conditions moderate. Call 800-472-2434 for current level and flow conditions.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Baby, it's cold outside! Fly-flingers so inclined can bundle up and toss the tiniest flies to soft water on the Deschutes although results for those doing so have only been fair. Blue-winged Olives and midges are the bugs to have in your arsenal and nymphing deeper water will be effective. The land adjacent to Warm Springs Reservation will close on December 31st. Deschutes can fluctuate in winter time. Make a last-minute check before making a long trip.

Pro Guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688) sends this from the East side, "The Grande Ronde opens for business again this week. After a two-week rest the river should provide a few days of excellent Christmas-season fishing before the word spreads. Anglers can expect good fly fishing and great gear fishing now as temperatures moderate into the 40s in the canyon."

SW Washington - * * * Pro guide Bob Barthlow (509-697-7125) states, "Winter Steelhead fishing on the Cowlitz river has been fair to good depending on the flows. Days that TCL (Tacoma City Light) has kept the flows steady, the fishing has been good. Days when they suddenly raise or drop the water the bite shuts off. We're getting our fish on sidedrifted cured eggs, from "the Wall" @ Blue Creek, down through "Hinkley drift". With the coming rains forecasted, the fishing should improve the next couple weeks. * * *

Through mid-December, winter steelhead fishing was generally slow, although anglers were starting to see some action in some areas. At Blue Creek on the Cowlitz River, 30 boat anglers caught 14 winter-run steelhead in five days of fishing, Dec. 5-9. "That's not bad, but it's still a little early," said Joe Hymer, WDFW fish biologist. "Usually the first big bump is right around the holidays." Or the bite could begin sooner if the area gets some rain, said Hymer, noting that most rivers in the area - except the Cowlitz and the Lewis - have been running low and clear. "Fishing should perk up once we get a decent rain," he said.

Hymer noted that Grays River is scheduled to open for hatchery steelhead fishing Dec. 15 from the Highway 4 Bridge to the South Fork and from mouth of the West Fork to the intake/footbridge of the Grays River Salmon Hatchery. The North Fork of the Lewis River will open Dec. 16 from Colvin Creek to the overhead power lines below Merwin Dam.

So how is the winter steelhead season shaping up at this point? "The jury's still out," said Hymer, noting that early returns in November were a "mixed bag." More fish returned to the North Fork of the Lewis and Elochoman rivers than a year ago, but numbers are down in the Cowlitz, Kalama

and Washougal, he said. "Again, we'll have a better idea once we get a decent rain."

Sturgeon anglers, meanwhile, have been fighting strong easterly winds with little to show for it below Bonneville Dam, but will have some new options come Jan. 1. Starting New Year's Day, sturgeon retention will be allowed from Bonneville Dam to McNary Dam with a one-fish daily limit. Minimum size limits vary on that stretch of the river, so anglers are advised to check the Fishing in Washington rule pamphlet before they head out. A new sturgeon-management policy approved Dec. 5 by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission maintains most of the same guidelines in effect during the current season, including catch allocations and size limits. It does, however, call for the creation of a new sturgeon spawning sanctuary from McNary Dam downstream to the Highway 82 Bridge and a possible expansion of the existing spawning sanctuary below Bonneville Dam during the 2006-07 season. Again, anglers are advised to check out specific rules for the season ahead once the 2006-07 pamphlet becomes available.

Lake Scanewa on the Cowlitz River is still attracting some salmon anglers, but most of the coho they're catching are in dark condition, Hymer said. A better bet may be area lakes and ponds, some of which WDFW is still planting with good-sized rainbow trout. On a recent day at Kline Pond in Vancouver, 17 bank anglers scored a fish apiece after the department planted 1,500 catchable-size rainbows. The department plans to plant about 1,000 fish in Kline Pond every other week throughout the winter, said John Weinheimer, another WDFW fish biologist. Other lakes recently planted with rainbows include Battleground (3,000), Lacamas (5,000), Sacajawea (1,500), Rowland (3,000), Fort Borst (2,400) and Icehouse (1,500). "But we want to caution anglers not to venture out on lakes that are iced up," Weinheimer said. "No lake in the region is safe for ice fishing."

North Central Washington – WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff of Omak says steelhead fishing has slowed considerably due to colder water temperatures and ice in both the Methow and Okanogan rivers. "But steelhead are still being caught in the mainstem Columbia River between Chief Joseph and Rocky Reach Dams," he said. Jateff also notes that an additional area just opened Dec. 13 to steelhead fishing in the upper Columbia from the Highway 17 bridge at Bridgeport to 400 feet below Chief Joseph Dam. Anglers are permitted to harvest only hatchery-origin steelhead with a clipped adipose fin and a healed scar in the location of the missing fin. Adipose fin-clipped steelhead with a disk tag may not be harvested. The daily catch limit is two fish with a minimum size of 20 inches. All steelhead with an intact adipose fin must be immediately released unharmed. Statewide gear rules and night closures are in effect.

Jateff reminds whitefish anglers that in areas where there is an ongoing steelhead fishery, normal whitefish gear rules do not apply. In the open steelhead sections of the Similkameen and Methow Rivers, during the Dec. 1 to March 31 whitefish seasons, selective gear rules will apply, with no bait allowed.

"Continuing cold temperatures in the Okanogan should provide good opportunities for rainbow trout ice fishing into the new year," Jateff said. "Little Twin and Davis lakes in the Methow area, and Sidley and Bonaparte lakes in the Tonasket-Oroville area, are good bets for nice catches." Jateff advised ice-fishers to keep fishing holes under 10 inches in diameter to avoid creating hazards on the ice.

South Central Washington - The region's winter-only fishing season is at the North Elton Pond alongside Interstate 82 near Selah in Yakima County. The pond should provide good catches through the holidays after receiving 2,000 half-pound hatchery rainbow trout this month. Anglers are reminded that North Elton Pond has a two-trout daily catch limit. For those who want to take home more fish, several of the I-82 ponds in the same area are open to fishing year-round with the standard five-fish daily catch limit. With hatchery stocking last month, one of the

best producers is Pond #4. Also still producing rainbows are Rotary and Myron lakes in Yakima. Whitefish season is open on portions of the Bumping, Klickitat, Naches, Tieton and Yakima rivers. Only one single hook 3/16-inch or smaller measured point to shank (size 14) may be used to avoid hooking off-limits fish such as steelhead or salmon. There's no minimum size limit on whitefish and up to 15 can be taken daily. As a highly under-used resource, WDFW fish biologists say whitefish may be one of the best kept fishing secrets in Washington. Anglers can do fairly well on whitefish once they find the winter schools, and they make for very tasty tablefare, especially smoked. The long season, Dec. 1 - March 31, is a good excuse to get out of the house and escape the winter doldrums or hectic holidays.

Puget Sound – An early surge of steelhead kicked off the holiday season in North Puget Sound rivers. However, after a couple weeks of better-than-expected fishing, harvest numbers fell. "I was hearing a lot of good reports on the Snoqualmie and upper Snohomish rivers in late November and early December, but that has tapered off a bit," said Chad Jackson, WDFW fish biologist. "Water levels have dropped to summer-like flows, and we haven't gotten that push of new fish." Fishing might be slow now, but the steelhead run is expected to increase in the coming weeks, said Jackson. "It usually picks up around Christmas time," he said.

Blackmouth fishing might be the best bet for anglers while they wait for those river levels to rise and bring in steelhead. Decent catch reports are coming out of Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton), and nice size fish are being hooked in marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay) and 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner), said Steve Thiesfeld, a WDFW biologist. "Anglers taking their time to learn the area are having pretty good results when it comes to blackmouth," Thiesfeld said. Several 15-plus-pound blackmouth have been hooked in 8-1 and 8-2. Thiesfeld reminds anglers that the key to catching blackmouth is finding the bait. "Hit the historical spots and check them out, but if there are no bait or fish in the area, it's best to move on," he said. "You have to be flexible."

Blackmouth catch counts at the Everett boat ramp gave some indication of angler success. On Dec. 9, 13 anglers checked in five chinook, and 23 anglers accounted for seven chinook on Dec. 11. Elsewhere, 28 anglers brought in a total of four chinook at the Camano Island ramp on Dec. 11, while eight anglers accounted for three chinook on Dec. 10 at the island's Maple Grove ramp. Marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands) and 9 (Admiralty Inlet) remain closed for blackmouth. Anglers should check the 2005/2006 Fishing in Washington pamphlet for more information.

While out saltwater fishing, why not drop a crab pot? The crab fishery is currently open Wednesdays through Saturdays in marine areas 7, 9 and 10, but will open for seven days a week beginning Dec. 21. The season closes at 6 p.m. on Jan. 2, 2006.

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>

Winter-run hatchery steelhead are steadily returning to north coast rivers and elsewhere in the region. In WDFW creel checks conducted Dec. 1-Dec. 11, the catch rate was .58 steelhead per angler (238 anglers/138 fish) in the Bogachiel and Quillayute rivers and 4.7 (194 anglers/91 steelhead) in the lower Hoh River. (Creel checks can be viewed on the WDFW website. The Queets has also been giving up fish, said Mike Gross, WDFW fish biologist.

* * Recent creel checks indicate steelheading is getting more productive on the Olympic Peninsula. Weekend checks showed the lower Hoh river to be a great option for anglers. 104 anglers caught 75 steelhead over the weekend with the majority of those fish taken being of hatchery origin. The upper Hoh yielded an average of 1 fish/angler (all fish were released). The Bogachiel/Quillayute River creel check also yielded nearly a fish/angler of which all of the

fish caught were of hatchery origin. Over half of the fish were released. * * *

Gross noted that the north Olympic rivers have been fishable since the steelhead season opened on Dec. 1, but a lack of rainfall has kept the water clear, low and less than ideal. A good downpour should start moving more steelhead up the streams, Gross said. He suggests fishing the riffles and the seams between quiet water and current, as well as the usual places - overhanging roots, behind rocks and along logs.

That's also good advice for anglers fishing the Satsop, Wynoochee and Humptulips rivers, which are also producing winter-run steelhead as well as some late-run coho salmon. So are the Green and Puyallup Rivers, which year in and year out are the top bets for metro-area steelhead fishing, said Hal Michael, WDFW biologist. "If somebody wanted to fish steelhead locally, that would be the best direction to go," he said.

Gross noted that all but seven of the 229 steelhead counted in creel checks on the north coast rivers were hatchery fish, two of which can be retained per day. Anglers can retain one wild steelhead per license year on Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Goodman, Green, Hoh, Hoko, Pysht, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc rivers. Elsewhere, they must be released. Wild steelhead can be distinguished from hatchery fish by their intact adipose and ventral fins.

Steelheaders waiting for the rain to start falling might want to chase blackmouth salmon on Puget Sound, where clear days are welcome. "I think blackmouth are your best bet right now, with the rivers as low as they are," said Pete Topping, another WDFW fish biologist. "The fish are real fat and healthy this year, but there's practically no (fishing) effort. I'm sure if we had a fleet of anglers out there we'd be seeing some pretty darn good catches."

Topping recommends fishing Point Defiance north into Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton). Other good bets include Gibson Point at the south end of Fox Island, Allen Bank between Blake Island and the north end of Vashon Island, and Manchester, Topping said. But don't delay, because the season is winding down some areas. Marine areas 11 (Tacoma/Vashon Island) and 12 (Hood Canal) will both close to salmon fishing on Dec. 31. Marine areas 10 and 13 will remain open, but the catch limit will drop on Jan. 1 from two fish to one in Area 13 (South Puget Sound), the same as in Area 10.

Chum salmon fishing has all but wrapped up in most places, but is just beginning in the Nisqually River. The late run doesn't hit full stride until mid- to late December and generally remains strong until at least mid-January, said Larry Phillips, a WDFW biologist who monitors the river. The season ends Jan. 31. The limit is six salmon, no more than two of which can be adults. No fishing is allowed above the tank crossing bridge. "Given the relatively high preseason forecast, I would expect fishing to get good soon," said Phillips, noting that it generally peaks between Christmas and New Year's." Nets are in the river from noon Sunday to noon Wednesday, so anglers might want to avoid those days.

Nisqually chum enter the river much brighter than most chum, and are prized by many anglers for smoking, Phillips said. A green corky and yarn on an incoming tide is a good approach to hook one. "It's not a rocket-science fishery," Phillips said. "When they're in, they're in and when they're not, they're not." Phillips reminds anglers not to remove unmarked steelhead from the water.

The third razor clam dig of the fall season is tentatively scheduled Dec. 30, 31 and Jan. 1 at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks and Kalaloch beaches. A fourth evening of digging is set for Monday, Jan. 2, at Twin Harbors and Mocrocks only. Digging is allowed from noon until midnight. Final approval is contingent upon marine toxin tests determining the clams are safe to

eat. The test results will be announced about one week before the proposed opening.

"So far it's been a great season, with an average of 13 clams harvested per digger trip," said WDFW Coastal Shellfish Manager Dan Ayres, who is looking forward to the New Year's Day weekend opener. The last time digging was allowed over the holiday was in 2001. "That year, 35,000 diggers enjoyed a uniquely Northwest way of welcoming the New Year," Ayers said.

Sport fishing for Dungeness and red rock crab is nearing the home stretch in many inland waters. Marine Area 12 (Hood Canal) is open seven days per week through Jan. 2. Marine areas 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 9 (Admiralty Inlet), 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) and 11 (Tacoma/Vashon), which currently are on a Wednesday-through-Saturday schedule, will also go to seven days a week Dec. 21 before closing for the season Jan. 2. Marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu) and 13 (south Puget Sound) will remain open seven days per week through Feb. 28 unless the catch reaches state harvest share before then.

Eastern Washington - Continuous below-freezing day and night temperatures have frozen many lakes solid enough for ice fishing, although there's never any guarantee about ice safety from lake to lake. Ice fishers should use caution, care, and patience, and pack warm clothes and safety equipment before heading out. The region's two winter-only lakes near Spokane - Hog Canyon in southwest Spokane County and Fourth of July on the Lincoln-Adams county line - are producing limits of rainbow trout. Even though those fish are big and plump - most at Fourth of July are over 14 inches - fishing holes do not need to be more than eight inches in diameter, says WDFW district fish biologist Chris Donley of Spokane. "It's just not necessary to cut anything bigger," he said, "That way you're not creating a hazard for someone else." Fishers also need to remember that only two of the five-fish daily limit can be over 14 inches at both lakes. "That means you're likely to have to quit after two at Fourth of July," Donley noted.

The majority of the rainbow caught at winter-only Williams Lake in Stevens County is also in the bigger range - 13.5 to 18 inches - but there's no size restriction on the five-fish limit. WDFW district fish biologist Curt Vail of Colville says those are "carryovers" from last year's fry plants and they've grown well in Williams. The other winter-only lake in the northeast district - Hatch - is a completely different story. "It's producing some puny little perch," Vail said, "but few to no trout since we didn't stock it last year and won't until we decide what to do with it."

Ice fishing is also under way on a few year-round lakes in the region. Sprague Lake's relatively shallow waters are frozen and producing crappie and walleye, along with a few nice trout. Eloika Lake in north Spokane County has good yellow perch and largemouth bass fishing through the ice. Crappie have a minimum size of nine inches and a daily limit of 10 fish at Eloika, and the bass are under the statewide "slot limit" - only those less than 12 inches or greater than 17 inches can be kept, and of the five daily catch limit, only one can be over 17 inches. Anglers fishing through the ice at Silver Lake in southwest Spokane County should be especially cautious, particularly near the boat launch, where areas of open water remain.

Waitts Lake in Stevens County is open through February and may be slower to provide safe ice. Earlier in the month one fishing party reported catching over 40 large (at least 20-inch) brown trout, casting into open water from Waitts' shoreline. Rock Lake in Whitman County is open year-round, both in terms of the fishing season and the water, since it lies in the direct line of prevailing winds. Good size rainbow and brown trout continue to be caught by anglers who know how to safely navigate a boat in winter weather on Rock Lake. Lake Roosevelt continues to provide open water fishing for big net-pen reared rainbows and a few kokanee.

Snake River steelheading is slow, according to WDFW fish biologist Joe Bumgarner. "Ice is forming along the edges of Walla Walla, Tucannon and Touchet rivers," he said. "Water

temperatures are just above freezing. Effort is way down because it's really cold out there.

Probably about half of the catch now in the Little Goose/Lyons Ferry area is from recently released adult steelhead not needed for broodstock at the hatchery." Bumgarner noted that some of the latest creel check numbers look good in terms of catch rate, but the number of anglers is very low. So statistically speaking, the chances of others achieving similar catch rates is not good. For example, the latest creel showed just eight anglers in four days on the Tucannon averaging about two hours of effort per steelhead caught. On the other hand, 98 anglers checked in the same four days on the mainstem Snake between Ice Harbor and Lower Monumental dams and averaged more than 27 hours of effort per steelhead caught. For the full report, see the Snake River creel surveys on the WDFW website.

Northwest Trout - Huddleston Pond in Willamina received 350 rainbow trout 16 inches or better this week.

Reader Email

Kapt Ken Johnson reports again this week from the lower Willamette: "Catching fish remains the problem while fishing at Meldrum Bar lately is still wonderful. I talked to the regulars (All two of them!) and found that one fish was caught on the bank a couple of days ago, a 7 pound "keeper." That's ONE!!! I haven't heard of any others being caught. It's early yet, with some of the best times to produce nice Chromer's beginning the end of the 1st week and 2nd week in January '06. The Willamette is still extremely low but fishable with visibility running at about 1.5' TOPS. Visibility changes as the rains fall harder so be ready for the water to keep getting a bit murky in the coming days. There were 3 fishermen spotted at "The Point" today...No fish reported yet. The "Black Top" still remains as one of the hottest spots, this season. Oh, not for fishing but for people stopping to eat their lunch after stopping at the local Burgerville or McDonalds nearby. I think "Painter Bill" is the only one who tried his luck at "The Blacktop," last week, and nothing happened then either! Don't give up...A little more rain, a couple of weeks or so, and stand back! I hope!"



It's worth noting that the conditions are changing on the Willamette as they are on most rivers around Oregon. The water is now rising and coloring - good for sturgeon, not so much for steelhead, although the increase in water temperature will be good for fish and fishermen alike.

Are you dreaming of a chrome Christmas? It may be a challenge this year with flood warnings for

some of the rivers in the valley. If you go, share your experiences!

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: drees@TheGuidesForecast.com

Michael Teague: SailCat@SailCat.com

Random Links

Free downloads of plans for do-it-yourself projects from our friends at the ODFW:

*<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/store/diy.asp>

Weekly Quote – "What do you want to do this afternoon, old man?" he asked. "Fish," I said. "But you can't always fish," he said. I told him I could and I was right and have proved it for thirty years and more. "Well, well, " he said, "please yourself, but isn't it dull not catching anything?" And I said, as I've said a thousand times since, "As if it could be." - Roland Pertwee

To all our readers at Christmas time, we wish you the happiest of holidays and all the magic this season can bring.

GOOD LUCK!

Peace on earth, out