

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2005 – January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2006**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** Sturgeon effort was low over the holiday weekend. Success was poor as those that ventured out found mostly undersized fish to occupy their time. Keepers continue to be difficult to find in the mainstem and Willamette Rivers. It is highly likely that many of the mature fish have sought out other food sources in coastal estuaries. With a poor forecast for smelt this winter, success for keepers will likely continue to drop.

Predictably, the lower Willamette is high, muddy and full of debris. Despite the conditions, winter steelhead are being caught from the bank below the mouth of the Clackamas. Not daily, but it won't be long until multi-fish days are the norm.

Although the Clackamas is swollen, the water level and clarity are gradually improving with steelheaders encountering a few fish down low on the river. Steelhead have returned to the hatchery on Eagle Creek.

**Pro guide Trevor Storlie (503-307-5601)** reports, although the Sandy River looked to be in ideal shape over the Holiday weekend, motivated anglers came up with little to show for their efforts. Interest continues to increase on this metro stream and although some hatchery steelhead are available, recent changes to the management of the Sandy will have the bulk of the harvestable steelhead run returning after the New Year.

**Mid Columbia -** A new year means fresh quotas for sturgeon in the impoundments upstream of Bonneville Dam. Beginning January 1<sup>st</sup>, sportfishing for sturgeon opens 7 days per week from Bonneville Dam upstream to McNary Dam. The size slot for keeper sturgeon from Bonneville to The Dalles Dam is 42 to 60 inches while anglers in The Dalles to McNary stretch are allowed to keep fish from 48 to 60 inches. The daily bag limit river-wide is 1 fish per day, 5 per year.

Bonneville Pool sturgeon fishing will likely be one of the best bets of the New Year as fish haven't been pressured and don't have the opportunity of migrating to the more productive feeding grounds of the coastal estuaries.

The creel program has ceased for the mid-Columbia River but anglers continue to take fair numbers of steelhead in the John Day Arm. Flows however are forecasted to rise significantly which will likely put fish off the bite.

**Northwest -** As of the 28<sup>th</sup>, coastal streams have yet to fall into fishable conditions for any length of time. Even smaller streams like the North Fork Nehalem and Necanicum Rivers remain volatile due to heavy rainfall.

**Pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** reports, Three Rivers near Hebo remains high but bank anglers are scoring a few hatchery steelhead near the deadline at the hatchery on Cedar Creek. Traffic is heavy and adequate amounts of lead are required to fish effectively.

Larger river systems are forecasted to be too high for effective fishing through the New Year's weekend. Saturated watersheds will keep river levels high until the northwest experiences a dry spell. If levels do drop by early next week, the hatchery winter steelhead run will be in full swing. The most productive rivers will be the Necanicum, Three Rivers, North Fork Nehalem, Wilson,

Nestucca and Trask Rivers, in that order. Wild fish make up the bulk of the catch on the Trask but hatchery strays are fairly common. Fair numbers of wild winter steelhead have already been landed on the Trask.

Favorable tides for sturgeon fishing begin on 12/28 for Tillamook Bay anglers. Ebb tides begin in the afternoon so a late start is recommended. Forecasted high winds may keep success levels low however as the delicate bite of a shrimp caught sturgeon takes a trained eye in rough water.

Crabbing was good on the Tillamook, Netarts and lower Columbia estuaries last weekend. Poor weather kept most crabbers dockside but those willing to brave the adverse conditions found favorable results. Extreme tides will limit success on most estuaries this week and commercial pots may begin soaking in the ocean and lower Columbia River as early as 12/28.

**Southwest** - Winter steelhead are available on the Alsea River which is dropping and clearing. Barring another high water event, it should fish well this weekend.

Sturgeon hopefuls should be rewarded fishing the late-day ebb out of Reedsport. Good flows and minus tides will encourage the bite.

Steelhead are showing in good numbers on the Coos system with scores of winter metalheads falling to anglers over the last week. Watch for fin-clips as many of these are wild fish which must be released unharmed.

Conditions on the lower Rogue have improved and anglers will find fluctuating levels. The river has dropped to about 8.5 feet at the Agness gauge from over 11 feet as recently as Thursday (12/22) last week due to heavy South coast rains. Winter steelheading success will improve as the river stabilizes.

The low, clear water changed rapidly to unfishable conditions with the winter storm. Southwest rivers are in decent shape now with winter steelhead action picking up. Chetco anglers report good conditions and results this week. Strong tidal exchanges over the New Years weekend means fresh fish entering on the incoming tide.

**Southwest Washington-** SW Washington steelhead streams remain too high for productive fishing. The season is well underway on these systems and fair action should resume sometime after the New Year when the flows are expected to subside. The Cowlitz and Kalama will be the best bets when river levels drop.

Clam diggers can expect good opportunity along the Washington coast. WDF&W announced scheduled digs Dec. 30, Dec. 31 and Jan. 1 at five beaches -- Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks and Kalaloch. Two of them, Twin Harbors and Mocrocks, will offer a fourth evening of digging on Monday, Jan. 2. Digging is allowed from noon until midnight.

**Eastern** - Anglers pursuing steelhead on the Grande Ronde River found favorable conditions late last week. Effort was down due to the holidays so catch was light. Conditions should remain fair despite a slight rise forecasted for this weekend. Gear anglers may have a slight edge over fly anglers in the higher flows.

In the mainstem Columbia, **pro guide Jeff Knotts (509-366-4052)** reports, "We decided to check on what few other boats were on the river fishing and found out there has been a fairly consistent bite for those who are back-trolling plugs along the many rocky points from Richland to Ringold.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – Anglers continue to shy away from sturgeon fishing on the mainstem. Poor catches and adverse weather, along with the holiday weekend kept many anglers roasting chestnuts. No keepers were reported in the weekend creel check from the gorge downstream to the Portland area. This may be an unwelcome trend as previous years, success has waned until late spring.

Crabbing the Columbia River estuary was a feasible option last week as weak tides offered ample opportunity for anglers to soak their pots in unconventional areas. The Columbia River bar offered up awesome catches for larger boats capable of working bigger water. More intelligent crabbers stuck to the river between buoy's 20 and 22 and across into Washington waters. Limits were easy during the right time of the tide and the quality of crab has gone up significantly. Commercial crabbers are chomping at the bit to drop their pots and it looks like they will finally get their season underway on January 1<sup>st</sup>. Commercials are allowed to begin soaking pots on the 28<sup>th</sup> and the lower Columbia is fair game.

Steelhead anglers in the middle Columbia and upstream are still enjoying decent steelhead opportunities. These fisheries are relatively un-tapped and as **pro guide Jeff Knotts (509-366-4052)** points out, "We got out on the Columbia Sunday & Monday in Columbia Basin. Sunday we actually hunted ducks in the three hundred area below Ringold. I watched one fellow tangle with a steelhead for a couple of jumps before he long line released it. So we decided to check on what few other boats were on the river fishing and found out there has been a fairly consistent bite for those who are back-trolling plugs along the many rocky points from Richland to Ringold. Monday (12/26) we fished McNary Dam for two nice natives before being blown off the river. Both fish were caught on silver & orange Hot-lips plugs."

**The Guide's Forecast** – Sturgeon anglers upstream of Bonneville will get a fresh slate of sturgeon opportunities to draw from. New regulations are as follows:

Bonneville Dam upstream to The Dalles Dam: In the Bonneville pool, the retention of sturgeon is prohibited through December 31, 2005 because the white sturgeon catch guideline has been reached. Catch and release fishing will be allowed throughout the remainder of the year.

**Effective January 1, 2006 the Bonneville pool will be open to the retention of sturgeon seven days per week. The daily bag limit is one fish between 42 and 60 inches in length and the annual limit is five fish. The catch guideline for the Bonneville Pool will be announced in early 2006.**

The Dalles Dam upstream to McNary Dam: In The Dalles and John Day pools, the retention of sturgeon is prohibited through December 31, 2005 because the white sturgeon catch guidelines have been reached. Catch and release fishing will be allowed throughout the remainder of the year. **Effective January 1, 2006, The Dalles and John Day pools will be open to the retention of sturgeon seven days per week. The daily bag limit is one fish between 48 and 60 inches in length and the annual limit is five fish. The catch guidelines for The Dalles and John Day Pools will be announced in early 2006.**

The Bonneville Pool has a history of good production for sport anglers just upstream of the dam itself this time of year. Smelt is a good choice even though it is not a staple for keepers in this stretch of river. Sand shrimp is also a good option. The best catches in these sections of river are from the opener to the spring months. These fisheries often don't make it into late spring due to the catch guideline being met. It likely won't be any different this year either.

Steelheaders should again have good opportunity in the middle reaches and the John Day Arm this week. With moderate temperatures, lethargic fish should once again become active allowing plug pullers and drift fishermen to take fair numbers of fish. This fishery should begin to drop off

however as fish begin to think more about migration than holding. We are also due for another bout of cold weather which seems to put motivated biters on hold.

Crabbers in the lower Columbia shouldn't get too excited about their prospects in coming weeks. The lower river should become inundated with commercial crab pots which simply out-compete sport pots by sheer numbers. The crab are quality but extreme tides will keep most crabbers from effectively fishing.

Extreme tides however mean good opportunity for clammers. If it wasn't for the high seas and pounding surf, the situation would be ideal. Big weather will likely keep clams from making an appearance close to the surface and success will likely be minimal. If the seas do calm down during the series running from 12/28 through 1/2, the best results will be on the first part of the series. The beaches from the mouth of the Necanicum to the south jetty will produce the best results.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – The four winter steelhead which crossed Willamette Falls Monday this week pushed the year-to-that-day total over 150. Hatchery steelhead don't cross the Falls in wintertime, however. The latter are bound for the hatchery up the Clackamas River on Eagle Creek.

It's the finclipped fish that bank fishermen at Meldrum Bar hope to encounter. Metalheads have been caught, though this isn't occurring on a daily basis. Yet.

As of December 27th, the temperature of the lower Willamette was up to 44 degrees, up from 38 only a week earlier. The visibility has been reduced to less than a foot. This should improve prospects for sturgeon fishers.

Come mid-January, winter steelies of hatchery origin will be caught in the stretch of the lower Willamette from the mouth of the Clack downstream in sufficient number to jam the bank with anxious lead-slingers. On the other hand, if scenario does not come to pass by that time, the run may be officially considered a dud.

No worries at this point. A decent showing of early fish indicates the 2005-2006 winter steelhead run will be decent.

**The Guide's Forecast** – The place to be is the lower Willamette 'cause those sturgeon will be enjoying the high, muddy conditions and warmer water. Keep an eye upriver as the lower Willamette is sure to have trash and trees washing downstream. Reports as of today (12/29) indicate extremely high water and hazardous conditions for boaters. More rain is forecast for Friday, December 30th. Err on the side of caution.

Plunking off the bank for steelhead will be more productive every week. These fish are caught in fairly muddy conditions, but it'll be a while before there's any bank from which to fish at Meldrum Bar. The Blacktop or Bulkhead are elevated.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – Although the Clackamas is swollen, the water level and clarity were gradually improving early this week with steelheaders encountering a few fish down low on the river. Steelhead have also returned to the hatchery on Eagle Creek.

Rains have returned to hamper anglers efforts as streams swell and turn from steelhead green to cafe-au-lait.

It's still early for the Sandy so the high, dirty water is coming at a good time. Certainly better

now than in mid-January when this fishery will actually get underway.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Forget the Sandy and Clackamas this weekend. They are blown. Neither will fish worth a darn. With a break in the weather, steelhead will be available on Eagle Creek.

If you missed Jack and Brandon Glass at their free steelhead seminar this evening (Thursday, 12/29) at the Johnson Creek G.I. Joes, be sure to catch him at another Joes location in January. He'll be at Gresham on the 5th, Beaverton on the 12th and Salem on the 19th. Everyone will learn something from a fella who's fished the Sandy River professionally for 20 years.

**North Coast District Fishing Report** – I know we asked for it, but when is enough, enough? North coast rivers continue to run high as sporadic precipitation isn't giving anglers an opportunity to pursue their favorite winter pastime- steelhead fishing! Even the smaller streams have yet to reach good condition since the rain began falling a week ago. High winds and saturated stream banks will create navigational hazards on many of the north coast's smaller streams. Be cautious on your drifts and it may be wise to bring a saw with you in case of any downed trees.

Very little fishing information to report as high waters have kept salmon and steelhead anglers inside, anxiously awaiting fishable conditions. The season for salmon closes on 12/31.

**Pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** offered up this information, "The Nestucca is totally shot. It has been high and mighty since this hammer down of rain and wind. Look for fish to be here as soon as we get a little dry trend. Three Rivers is fishable, but a little on the high side as well. There are fish being caught, but just a handful each day. Most people are going away empty handed. The fish being caught are at the extreme end of the deadline, so expect some company. Drifting heavy leads and corkies in that stretch is the only way to fish, or you will be out of the mix. I love drifting eggs here, but the conditions and the crowds need to less. Should be fishing hard starting next week, lets hope the weather cooperates."

Poor tides kept the potential for sturgeon effort low. Fortunately, that will change in the upcoming week. Crabbers however took advantage of the weak tides and cleaned house on Tillamook and Netarts Bays. Most crabbers averaged around 20 keepers per boat for their effort. We crabbed near the jaws on Friday afternoon (12/23) getting 20 keepers for 12 pots and Saturday morning (12/24) in the south channel on an overnight soak, getting another 17 keepers. The crab are in ideal shape- big, hard and filled out. The weather left a lot to be desired and was likely partially responsible for our success due to the fact it kept our competition away.

Bottomfishing opens up once again beginning January 1<sup>st</sup>. New regulations regarding bag limits are as follows:

***Beginning Jan. 1, bottom fishing is reopens at all depths. The marine daily bag limit is six fish (including rockfish, greenling, flounder, sole, cabezon and other marine species) and two lingcod. Canary rockfish and yelloweye rockfish may not be retained.***

**The Guide's Forecast** – It goes without saying that once river levels drop, steelhead fishing on the North Coast should be good. Results will vary but top prospects will be smaller streams first. Three Rivers, the Necanicum and the North Fork of the Nehalem will be the first to fish and that may happen as early as Friday if the weather forecast comes to fruition. Following those streams, the Kilchis, Wilson and Nestucca will produce decent catches for the next week. Anglers

are reminded that incidental Chinook must be released on all North Coast rivers after January 1<sup>st</sup>. Three Rivers will be best right at the hatchery deadline and anglers should use heavy lead to effectively fish here.

Anglers should also be made aware that even though prospects are good, hatchery plants of winter steelhead continue to be on the decline for the Alsea stock. Fortunately, plants of the broodstock steelhead will ramp up to compensate for the loss but run timing will shift dramatically to the late January – March timeframe. Broodstock fish are a superior strain given the fact that they are more aggressive and their behaviors don't mimic that of the traditional hatchery strains that "make time" to get to their final destinations. This limits angler success as opportunity wanes with each recycle effort. It will be a challenging transition but overall, it is the best thing for sportfisheries on the north Oregon coast.

Anglers should look at the minus tide series we are about to come into. I would be more optimistic about the outlook if it weren't for the weather forecast. Good tides are scheduled to hit North Coast estuaries beginning on 12/28. The afternoon outgoing might provide some excellent opportunity for sturgeon angling if it weren't for gale force winds in the forecast. As the tide nears low slack, fishing should be best. With the early sunset, this makes Wednesday – Friday the best opportunities for a keeper in Tillamook Bay. Clams are another good option but serious clammers may need to wait for the lowest tides of the series which are scheduled to happen on New Year's Eve.

Crabbing will likely drop off as fresh water persists in our estuaries and the commercial crab season opens. If the ocean ever does calm down, ocean prospects are good if the commercial crabbers don't fish near the bay entrances.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – It's Winter Whale Watch Week on the Oregon coast. Over 1,000 knowledgeable volunteers will be available at 28 locations daily from 10 A.M. to 1 P.M. through Monday, January 2nd. Look for the "Whale Watching Spoken Here" signs or call (541) 765-3407 for specifics.

Steelhead fishing was improving on the Alsea prior to this week's deluge. Today (12/29) it's at flood stage.

The low, clear water on the South coast changed rapidly to unfishable flood conditions with the last winter storm. Southwest rivers were in decent shape recently with winter steelhead action picking up.

Rains improved the steelhead bite on the Umpqua system over last weekend as strong flows raised water temperatures. The combination got fish on the move and in the mood to strike. When the water one starts to drop and clear again, fishing will be good. Sturgeon hopefuls should be rewarded fishing the late-day ebb out of Reedsport. Good flows and minus tides will encourage the bite. The great crabbing at Winchester Bay was hosed with the influx of water but will bounce back when the weather moderates.

Steelhead were showing in good numbers on the Coos system with scores of winter metalheads falling to anglers over the last week. Watch for fin-clips as many of these are wild fish which must be released unharmed. Even with blowouts, the Coos along with the Coquille are just getting started for the winter. There are plenty of steelhead yet to come.

Conditions on the lower Rogue have improved but anglers will find fluctuating levels. The river has dropped to about 8.5 feet at the Agness gauge from over 11 feet as recently as Thursday (12/22) last week due to heavy South coast rains. Winter steelheading success will improve as

the river stabilizes. With passing storm fronts, it's a good idea to check levels and color before heading out.

Chetco anglers reported good conditions and results earlier this week. Strong tidal exchanges over the New Years weekend means fresh fish entering on the incoming tide.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – Fly anglers are catching trout with stealthy presentation of midges or nymphs between the sheets of ice on the Owyhee River. While fishing is actually quite good at this time of year, proper preparation for harsh weather is a must.

High water flows have stalled fishing action on the Deschutes and Crooked rivers. A break in the weather will inevitably mean a dip in the temperature on the East side, so watch the water levels and bundle up against bitter cold. Snow will be a consideration accessing the Metolius but the reward is decent action for rainbows and bull trout.

**Northwest Trout** - Once again, no trout stocking this week, but broodstock should remain available in Willamina's Huddleston Pond from those planted on December 19th. On the Southwest trout scene, trout in the 14 to 16" range have been stocked recently at Saunders and Empire Lakes, and in Powers Pond.

#### **Reader Email**

Kapt Kan keeps us abreast of the lower Willamette conditions in this Email from December 27th. "OK, thanks for the rain, but...The Willamette River is FULL of water, now. The levels are just about right, except for a few thousand obstacles floating downstream in the flow. Fishing is picking up at Meldrum Bar with an occasional Steelie being taken every day or so. There were even a couple of adventurers at 'The Black Top' today. No fish, yet. Visibility is naturally skewed quite a bit right now because of the heavy rains coming down everywhere. I've seen fish caught, though, in years past when you would swear a fish couldn't even make it through that stuff. But, they do. Shallow presentations are the key. You don't really "cast" your offering as much as you "Lug it out there" about 10'-15' out in the "Deep Brown" water from waters edge. The "Deep Blue" is a few days off, at least until the water level subsides a bit and the rains become a bit gentler. I've caught more Steelhead in 4'-8' of water than I ever have in the TEN+ range over and over again. Think about that when you're slinging your gear 30'-40' out. The Steelies are close to shore as there is less current. They are a bit tired by now and seek the path of least resistance. No matter what, it's nearing the time of "Steelhead Stew!" Fish on the Barby...Fried Steelhead and Taters...Smoked Steelhead on a Cedar Plank...Or, however you like to fix them...Personally, I like to catch'em...The 'fishing' is a bonus...Wait a minute...Did I get that backwards??? Gotta go...I'm off to Meldrum...I know the river isn't quite ready for us, but you know the ol' saying: "You can't catch a fish unless your line is in the water!" See you there!"

Since Ken wrote, the Willamette has risen further. It's not only high, but since this is the forest real flushing of the year, it's chock full of debris, including logs. This creates a hazardous conditions for boaters, so use the greatest caution in these conditions. Inexperienced boaters should sit this one out.

Thanks to all subscribers who contribute reports, stories photographs and items of interest to other readers.

Have a fine and fish-filled New Year!

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**Random Links**

More on those giant mammals for Whale Watching Week: \*<http://www.whalespoken.org/>

Surfer beats up white shark South of Seaside:  
<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/10600884/>

In a previous TGF, I mentioned the 2006 Fishing Regulations were not yet available on the ODFW website. They are now, along with rule changes and additional resources:  
<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/>

Thanks to Kapt Ken for this link to an unbelievable "fishing" video:  
[http://www.pescarondonia.com.br/videos/Pescaria\\_Meques.wmv](http://www.pescarondonia.com.br/videos/Pescaria_Meques.wmv)

**Weekly Quote** – "The fish is an animal that grows excessively fast between the moment when it is taken and the moment when the fisherman describes it to his friends."

**GOOD LUCK!**