

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 10<sup>th</sup>, – February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2006**

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** With many professionals obligated to the annual Sportsmen's Show this week and prime conditions existing on most of Oregon's river systems, anglers should be excited about this weeks prospects.

Columbia River sturgeon anglers are struggling to find success. Gorge anglers drew a blank over the weekend and boaters in the Portland to Longview stretch didn't fare much better. Some of the best sturgeon fishing remains in the Bonneville Pool where 11 boats tallied 2 legal fish retained with 1 legal and 41 shakers released. Smelt remains the best bait but sand shrimp will produce results as well.

Conditions on the Sandy River are prime, with fin-clipped broodstock steelhead entering along with unmarked fish providing catch-and-release action.

Clackamas water levels continue to drop with excellent color. Fresh steelhead are available to the persistent angler. In these conditions, all techniques will take fish.

Several regulars at Meldrum Bar confirm the 12-pound spring Chinook taken there by an unnamed angler on the morning of February 5th. The 2006 springer return is forecast to be down this year, however. About 35 rods were seen along the banks on Tuesday, February 7th, with four hatchery steelhead taken and one wild fish released.

Sturgeon fishing has shown some improvement on the lower Willamette with several keepers taken recently above St. Johns Bridge on Saturday. The area near Cathedral Park has also been productive. Reports indicate plenty of action with small sturgeon on Multnomah Channel but a conspicuous absence of legal-sized fish.

**Northwest –** Many north coast streams experienced their best fishing on the last drop in river levels about 10 days ago. Steelheading was still fair at mid-week but it was evident that we are between runs of fading hatchery fish and the first strong push of natives.

The Trask, Kilchis and Wilson were both fair on Tuesday as anglers took a mix of wild and spent hatchery steelhead, a few broodstock fish and even a rare late fall Chinook. The larger systems like the Trask, Wilson and particularly the Nestucca should fish well into the weekend. With flows dropping, the lower drifts may produce better results especially with the favorable tide series this weekend.

Smaller streams like the Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem fished fair last weekend but most fish were spent hatchery steelhead. These systems will be too low for driftboats by the weekend.

Siletz anglers experienced improved fishing over the weekend. This should be a rewarding destination for a mix of wild and fin-clipped fish.

Anglers were taking a few steelhead on the North Fork Alsea early in the week while the mainstem was clearing. This section of the river should be in great shape for the weekend and a mix of wild and hatchery fish should be available.

A minus tide series and favorable weather conditions may give Tillamook Bay sturgeon anglers their first good opportunity to test the waters. The lack of crab in the estuary will only aid anglers

in the pursuit of keeper fish.

Favorable tides will offer clamming opportunities for Clatsop area beaches. Surf conditions should favor area diggers but minus tides will go into the evening hours so prepare accordingly.

**Southwest** - Following a slight setback overnight on February 4th when precipitation caused South coast streams to swell, the water levels are dropping with most rivers fishing well.

Expect good things from the Coquille as it drops and clears. Steelheading was great here prior to the last storm fronts.

The Rogue River, having pushed to nearly 15 feet at Agness on February 1st, is currently below the 9 foot level. Plunkers from Agness downstream are catching fresh steelies this week.

With the steelhead run still on the upswing in near-perfect water conditions, Chetco anglers are finding consistent success.

Although the ocean swell remains intimidating, jetty anglers may find improving success for bottomfish. The prime winter target is lingcod, as they draw closer to shore to prepare for the winter spawn that take place in February and March. Jigs will take these fish but drifted herring work equally well. Be sure to practice extreme caution and observe the new bag limits for bottomfish.

**Eastern** - A brief rise in river levels put steelhead success on hold. Improving conditions will offer anglers opportunity primarily on the Grande Ronde but the Umatilla and Imnaha Rivers also show promise according to **Pro guide Mac Huff (1-800-940-3688)**.

**Southwest Washington**- The Cowlitz River is returning to favorable condition but much of the hatchery run has faded. Anglers anxiously await the run of spring Chinook but the big news from this river is the confirmed catch of the seasons first smelt. Although only a few were netted, recent commercial success indicates this may be the weekend that ample numbers of smelt show in the river.

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**Columbia River Fishing Report** – Columbia River anglers are getting tired of the challenging fishing for sturgeon. Effort has dropped off for gorge anglers as only a rare keeper and handful of shakers are being taken by area participants. Some of the best sturgeon fishing remains in the Bonneville Pool and a mix of baits is taking fish. Fresh smelt when available has been the best bait and commercial landings indicate more should become available in the near future. On the last commercial opener, the season's best catch was recorded by commercial netters which may drop the price and increase their availability. February 6th commercial smelt netting yielded 1,143 pounds with 1,608 pounds taken February 2nd. A cumulative total of 11,538 pounds have been netted from the Columbia since late December.

Sturgeon anglers working the Portland to Longview stretch have also struggled to put a good fishing trip together but a few more keepers are being taken along with fair shaker action. As the smelt run comes to fruition, the bite may pick up better in coming weeks. Suspicious activity was reported in the mainstem Columbia above the I-5 Bridge. Sealions and birds were seen working a school of baitfish indicating smelt may be bound for the Sandy River.

Unfounded rumors of sport-caught springers were coming from Davis Bar just across the mouth of the Willamette River. It is likely some excited sportanglers wanting folks to get out and test

the waters to see if viable numbers are present. I am guessing not but what else would one want to do over a sunny weekend than catch the seasons first springer on the mainstem Columbia?

**The Guide's Forecast** – Sturgeon fishing is not likely to improve in the next several weeks despite the perception that decent numbers of smelt may be showing up. The best bet will remain the Bonneville Pool using fresh smelt when available. The Dalles Pool will also produce an occasional keeper for those versed in this fishery.

Anglers fishing downstream of Bonneville Dam will find their best action near the mouth of the Cowlitz and downstream. Fresh smelt will also be key in this fishery but anglers should try and get their baits to stand out by tipping fresh smelt with sand shrimp. Effort will likely remain low until better success rates are experienced but we shouldn't rule out the fact that if the smelt do show in any great numbers, sturgeon fishing may see a resurgence in success rates in the middle river below the mouth of the Willamette. The mouth of the Willamette itself may be a good bet as the Willamette itself seems to be improving in action.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – Sturgeon fishing us finally seeing overdue improvement on the lower Willamette as several keepers have been taken above the St. Johns Bridge and near Cathedral Park.

Smelt is by far the preferred bait for sturgeon at this time of year as the baitfish are available in the Columbia. They remain hard to find and expensive if they can be found. Prospects for dipping this Saturday at the Cowlitz show a glimmer of hope but biologists remain pessimistic regarding the return this year.

Daily winter steelhead counts at Willamette Falls are nudging into the double digits with year-to-date totals approaching the 500 mark. The ODFW predicts these numbers will jump in the next few weeks.

Several regulars at Meldrum Bar confirm the 12-pound spring Chinook taken there on the morning of February 5th. Extensive inquiries failed to find out this guy's name, an unusual situation because this is considered a big deal. He's missed his 15 minutes ....

The North Santiam remains high and swift this week although it's exhibiting perfect color.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Although 2006 is forecast to be an "off year" for the springer returns, that prediction has done little to reduce angler's anticipation of the run. Beautiful and hard-fighting, spring Chinook are unparalleled table faire, particularly when grilled. This is due to springers having a combination of the mildest flavor along with the highest moisture and oil content. My apologies for salivating as I write.

Hatchery winter steelhead are the prime target in the lower Willamette now and pressure is increasing as the water clarity improves and levels drop about a foot daily. Around 35 rods were seen along the banks on Tuesday, February 7th, on which day at least four hatchery steelhead were taken and one wild fish released.

Bank anglers plunking the Willamette below the mouth of the Clackamas are using either Spin 'n' Glos or shrimp rigs. Some are switching to heavier tackle, hoping their offerings tempt another early-running spring Chinook.

The Army Corps of Engineers reports Detroit at the headwaters of the North Santiam to be 70 feet **below** normal summer level, so will stem the outflow soon which will have a positive effect

on the water levels in the river. As the numbers of wild fish increase at Willamette Falls, so will the population in the North Santiam shortly thereafter.

Extended sunny weather may trigger an early March Brown hatch late in February.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – The Clackamas River flows are still a bit heavy but the color is excellent.

Having fully recovered from any effects of the last rainfall, conditions at the Sandy River are very good now.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Steelhead catches are picking up at the Clack. Boats were starting to line up at the mouth earlier this week, forming the first "hog lines" to be seen this year in that area. The hatchery on Eagle Creek has seen returns of winter steelhead topping the 400 mark. This is will be a productive destination for many anglers, with emphasis on "many." The creek will drop and become gin clear quickly, but should still be a possibility into the weekend.

Anglers plying the waters of the Sandy River will find a typical mid-season mix of fin-clipped broodstock and wild fish. The upper river was fishing very well on Wednesday this week.

**North Coast District Fishing Report** – Prior reports indicated that the North Coast streams weren't as productive on this recent moderating of water levels but I have since heard of more productive fishing. Some guides are now reporting good numbers of fish in the Wilson River of both wild and broodstock fish. Also, some large natives, exceeding 20 pounds were reportedly taken from the Wilson. With the consistent high flows and the good fishing many experienced from the rain freshet about 10 days ago, I didn't expect great results to come from this reprieve. Early reports from the smaller streams like the Necanicum indicated only mediocre results and many of the fish being caught were spent hatchery fish. They bite really well this time of year. Just a few days ago, fishing wasn't quite as good as **pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** reported landing a nice wild fish in the upper Trask. Chris later took out and floated the Kilchis River hooking another 2 steelhead (that got off) and landing a chrome bright Chinook salmon on a drifted rag and egg combo. The river was clearing by this time (Monday) so fish were already getting on the spooky side.

The upper Nestucca drifts were starting to fish well by mid-week and the water above 6<sup>th</sup> Bridge was a good choice. Good numbers of steelhead were spread throughout the Nestucca River but higher drifts were best bets as they were the first sections to clear after the extended high water. Bait is a good method in higher flows but if plug pullers worked appropriate water, they could find results.

Tides on Tillamook Bay were once again becoming favorable for anglers in pursuit of sturgeon. And get this, the weather has been nice too! No reports as of late but they should be forthcoming in next weeks report. Large amounts of fresh water remain in Tillamook Bay keeping crabs in the saltwater and away from sturgeon anglers working the bottom with shrimp or baitfish.

Crabbing remains best on Netarts Bay, which has few fresh water tributaries entering it. Stronger tides are keeping crabbers from taking large numbers of keepers and pressure is high with the recent change in weather.

The Siletz River looks very promising this weekend for anglers getting up as high on the system as possible.

Alsea steelheaders scored this week. Water and color should be right on target for fishing by the weekend.

**The Guide's Forecast** – A stable weather pattern will offer steelheaders a good chance at quality fish over the weekend. With the exception being the mainstem Nehalem, larger river systems like the Wilson, Trask and Nestucca will offer the best chances at both wild and hatchery fish. Broodstock fish should begin showing in larger numbers on the Wilson and Nestucca and as flows drop, plugs may become an excellent option. The new K-11 Xtreme Kwikfish was tested extensively before recently coming to market. They are hard to find as orders begin to fill but they are a great choice for steelheaders these days. Fisherman's Marine and Outdoor should be getting an ample supply any day now. Drifted baits are of course a good option as well and as the technique of side drifting takes off on the North Coast, success is climbing. Crowds will be dense over the weekend- especially if the weather holds so anglers can't afford to overlook every piece of water when fishing. In the dropping flows, fish will become more concentrated in the holding water and will be presented more offerings so innovation will pay dividends. The larger Nehalem may become a good option after the weekend after it has had a little more time to clear. Steelhead however have had ample time to head upriver in the higher flows which makes the Salmonberry a viable option for catch and release anglers.

A nice minus tide series may make sturgeon fishing a good option on Tillamook Bay. Although we have no recent reports, everything is adding up for some strong potential for success. The tides are occurring later in the afternoon and early evening so prepare accordingly. Crabbing will most likely remain poor on Tillamook until fresh water levels drop more but crabbers may find success closer to the entrance of the bay. Surf forecasts, although calming may still pose a safety factor so use extreme caution. A commercial boat capsized off of Tillamook Bay earlier this week and lives were lost.

Bottom fishing out of Garibaldi may be a good option over the weekend as wind waves and a big swell is forecasted to subside over the weekend. Larger charter boats are the best option as they know if the bar is safe to cross and can negotiate bigger seas. Ocean crabbing just outside of Tillamook Bay should also be productive.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – This is the week to get out and catch some fish. Many of the professional fishing guides are obligated to spend Wednesday through Sunday this week at the Sportsmen's Show. Anglers who would otherwise be crowding the rivers will feel the need to crowd into the Expo Center, creating additional opportunities for those who chose instead to fish.

Anglers are taking rockfish at this time of year casting into saltwater from rocky outcroppings and jetties. This is an option in the milder weather such as that we're experiencing this week providing the ocean lays down. The prime winter target is ling cod, larger specimens of which enter the shallows to spawn in January and February. Jigs with soft plastic bodies or baits of herring will take them.

Ocean crabbing has been very good and should reward in this nice weather providing wind and waves don't make for dangerous bar crossing. Crabbing in the bays is improving as the salinity levels rise following the last freshet.

Following a slight setback overnight on February 4th when precipitation caused South coast streams to swell, the water levels are dropping with most rivers fishing well. Most of the South coast streams will continue to fish well for winter steelhead through February.

Umpqua anglers are experiencing good and occasionally phenomenal winter steelhead fishing. The South Fork has produced multiple catches for some. North and South Forks are in good shape now and steelheaders can keep one wild fish a day up to five per year in the North Fork. Plunking the mainstem will be effective this weekend where the water is still a bit high.

Expect good things from the Coquille as it drops and clears. Steelheading was great here prior to the last storm fronts and it's improving daily this week. The South Fork of the Coos River was kicking out steelies Tuesday and Wednesday this week with some limits reported.

Elk and Sixes steelheaders report catches good and improving this week.

The Rogue River, having pushed to nearly 15 feet at Agness on February 1st, had fallen to less than eight feet by mid-day Thursday, February 9th and this magnificent ocean tributary is just coming into its own for the winter steelhead season. Plunkers from Agness downstream are catching fresh steelies this week although the water will remain higher than normal through the weekend. Winter steelhead have traveled, thanks to the high water, scattering then through the middle and upper stretches. Well over 300 had been counted at Gold Ray Dam as of the end of January. With the upper river coming into shape first, the river downstream of the Dam will produce for steelheaders.

With the steelhead run still on the upswing in near-perfect water conditions, Chetco anglers are having a ball with them, often experiencing multi-fish days. Wild fish are in the mix here as with most anadromous rivers at this time of year with some of these fish topping the 20-pound mark.

"Rain, rain has kind of gone away. Rivers are dropping and fishing is getting good. We are in prime steelhead season and if the rivers stay down the catch counts will come up.

**Pro Guide Ken Streater (800-797-4293)** sends this report on the Southwest: "The Chetco is approaching great fishing levels, having dropped from 10,000 cfs to just above 4,000 in the last few days. At 5,000 and below this time of year steelhead fishing is generally good. Those that have been out when the river is lower over the last two weeks report good hook-ups of steelhead, with three fish per rod common.

"As usual, the Elk river is dropping faster than the rest but it still is not real clear, but this will change as we speak and the fishing will be good there as the steelhead runs are solid.

"The upper Rogue river should be better this week for steelhead as flows drop. Coho are pretty much done. Since February 1 one wild (non fin clipped) steelhead can be kept a day, as long as it is over 24 inches. Agness to Gold Beach on the lower Rogue has been good to plunkers in spots and this stretch should improve for boaters as well.

"Throughout southern Oregon, when the water drops the fishing has been good, with reports of up to 12 fish being landed per boat. Weather reports indicate a relatively dry week ahead, so get fishing while it is good!"

**Central and Eastern Oregon – Pro guide Mac Huff (1-800-940-3688)** reports, "The catch rate remains in the single digits on the Grande Ronde. There will be a little glitch during the week while Monday's runoff clears out and then it's "business as usual." I had an outing during the week and we matched the 3-hours per fish catch rate during the morning fly fishing that the gear guys are reporting. Water levels are good. Water quality is superb. The fish are there. The water temperature when I was on the river was 35 degrees. When it warms up a degree or so the

fishing will be even better."

**Pro Guide Rick Arnold** reports, "Looks like Billy Chinook is lighting up on some bigger bulls. We have boated 12 bulls in the last two trips (Thurs. and Mon.) with the biggest 3 going 8.5, 10.5 and 12 LB. Look for them to be working over the kokanee schools that are balled up around the boundary area of the Metolius and Crooked River Arms. Plugs that imitate the kokanee have been the ticket. It should only get better in March!"



**Northwest Trout** - Waters in the Northwest Zone scheduled for stocking this week include Alder Lake, Buck Lake, Carter Lake, Cleawox Lake, Dune Lake, Elbow Lake, Erhart Lake, Georgia Lake, Lost Lake (Lane County), Munsel Lake, North Georgia Lake, Perkins Lake, and Thissel Pond. Walter Wirth Lake and Walling Pond will get "a few More" brood rainbows.

**SW Washington** - The "**smelt** watch" is intensifying on the Cowlitz River. With the river dropping and commercial landings mounting in the Columbia River, the popular fish could start entering the Cowlitz at any time, said Joe Hymer, WDFW fish biologist. "We had one unsubstantiated report of some guys getting smelt in the river last Saturday, but nothing's confirmed yet," Hymer said Jan. 24. "All I can say at this point is the conditions are right."

The recreational smelt fishery in the Cowlitz River is open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturdays only, with a 10-pound daily limit. No other tributaries are open to smelt dipping, but the mainstem Columbia River is open seven days per week, 24-hours a day, with a 25-pound daily limit. Updates on the [smelt fishery](#) are posted on WDFW's website.

Lower stream flows are also improving **steelhead** fishing, particularly on the smaller rivers. No

current reports were available for the Cowlitz River since water levels started dropping, but anglers reported good steelhead fishing on the Kalama River during the weekend of Jan. 21-22. However, Hymer noted that a majority of those fish were wild, unmarked steelhead, which must be released unharmed. During the previous week, hatchery workers recycled 217 hatchery winter steelhead into the river below Kalama Falls Hatchery, planted 74 hatchery fish into Kress Lake and passed 70 wild fish above the hatchery.

Despite high water, 28 bank anglers caught 31 catchable-size rainbow trout in Klineline Pond that week. Those fishing in the swimming area with worms or Rapala lures had the best results. Since Jan. 17, WDFW has planted 1,250 catchable-size rainbows in Klineline Pond, 1,500 in Kress Lake, 5,200 in Battleground Lake and 1,000 in Kidney Lake near North Bonneville.

Anglers are also catching some legal-size **sturgeon** on the mainstem Columbia River, notably in the pools above Bonneville and The Dalles dams. Sturgeon retention is allowed seven days per week below the Wauna power lines and on Thursdays, Friday and Saturdays from the power lines upriver to Bonneville dam. For regulations above Bonneville Dam, see the 2005-06 [rules/efishrules/index.jsp" target="\\_blank">Fishing in Washington rules pamphlet.](http://www.wdfw.wa.gov/rules/efishrules/index.jsp)

For anglers who want to stay dry, WDFW will have a booth Feb. 8-12 at the Pacific Northwest Sportsmen's Show at the Portland Expo Center.

**North Central Washington** – Upper Columbia River **steelhead** fishing has slowed a bit due to cooler temperatures, said WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff of Omak. "But anglers should keep a close eye on any warming trends," he said, "since a few degrees can make a big difference in fish activity and success rates." That fishery includes portions of the Okanogan and Methow rivers; steelheaders should check all [regulation details](#) of the season on WDFW's website. **Whitefish** fishing can also be productive at this time of the year on both the Methow and Similkameen rivers, Jateff said. But whitefish anglers need to remember that in sections of the river that have an ongoing steelhead fishery, selective gear rules are in effect. Jateff also noted that Rufous Woods Lake continues to be good fishing for **triploid rainbow trout** up to five pounds for both bank and boat anglers. The daily limit is two trout.

WDFW district fish biologist Art Viola of Wenatchee said **yellow perch** and trout fishing through the ice at Fish Lake north of Leavenworth in Chelan County remains excellent but ice conditions have deteriorated. "There is at least 12 inches of water-soaked snow on top the ice, making walking very difficult," he said. "And the ice is beginning to weaken." Viola noted that the ice is unsafe on Roses Lake, another popular Chelan County year-round fishery north of Manson. He also noted that steelhead angling remains slow on the Columbia River between Rocky Reach and Wells dams.

**Walleye** and **yellow perch** fishing at the Interstate-90 bridge on Moses Lake has been sporadic, says WDFW district fish biologist Jeff Korth of Moses Lake. "It's still pretty much iced up," he said. "But things are starting to thaw."

**South Central Washington** - The catch-and-keep season for **sturgeon** got under way this month on a portion of the Columbia River from the Dalles Dam to McNary Dam in Benton County. Minimum size for keeping a sturgeon is 48 inches, maximum size is 60 inches, and the daily catch limit is one fish. The stretch of the Columbia from McNary Dam to the Old Hanford townsite wooden power-line towers are open year-round for sturgeon, under the same rules. Feb. 1 is the opening of sturgeon fishing on the stretch from the Old Hanford townsite wooden power-line towers to Vernita Bridge, also under the same size and catch rules.

**Whitefish** are available on portions of the Bumping, Klickitat, Naches, Tieton and Yakima rivers. Anglers can do fairly well on whitefish once they find the winter schools. Whitefish make for very tasty tablefare, especially smoked. 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.

Warmer weather and rain has melted most of the ice on the region's year-round lowland **rainbow trout** lakes, so they may be more accessible. Anglers are reminded that the region's winter-only fishery at North Elton Pond has a two-trout daily catch limit.

**Puget Sound** – As the weather improved, so did the fishing. And if the conditions stay favorable, anglers will continue to have more opportunities to catch fish. The recent respite from rain and wind gave anglers a chance to get out on Puget Sound and hook some **blackmouth**. "I've heard there's some nice fish out there," said Steve Thiesfeld, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "With a break in the weather, more people headed out on the sound to fish for blackmouth, and those that did seem to have had some success."

As participation in the saltwater fishery grows, so does the harvest. Catch counts at the Everett boat ramp showed 35 anglers checked in 12 chinook on Jan. 21, and 54 anglers accounted for another 12 blackmouth on Jan. 22. At the Camano Island public ramp 32 anglers hauled in 11 chinook on Jan. 21, and 44 anglers accounted for seven blackmouth Jan. 22.

Thiesfeld recommends pursuing blackmouth in Marine Areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay) and 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) through January. "Those are the areas where people are picking up fish right now," Thiesfeld said. "But once Marine Areas 7 (San Juan Islands) and 9 (Admiralty Inlet) open in February, anglers might want to consider those areas as well." Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) is also open for blackmouth fishing through Jan. 31. Marine Areas 7 and 9 are scheduled to open on Feb. 1, with a daily bag limit of one chinook in both areas. Marine Areas 8-1 and 8-2 each have a daily bag limit of two hatchery chinook, and wild chinook must be released. Anglers should check the 2005/2006 [Fishing in Washington](#) pamphlet for more information.

After nearly a month of rain, the region's swollen rivers finally began to subside. And if the weather continues to cooperate, **steelhead** harvests could pick up. "The rivers are coming back into shape, and the fishing should be getting better," said Chad Jackson, WDFW fish biologist. Anglers should have a shot at hooking hatchery steelhead in the Snoqualmie and the Skykomish rivers into February, Jackson said. Anglers might want to keep an eye on the area's stream gauges before heading out.

If river conditions don't improve, Jackson recommends dropping a line in one of the region's lakes that have been stocked with **kokanee**. "Winter is a good time to fish for kokanee because they are usually up high in the water column," he said.

**Olympic Peninsula** – After a record-breaking 35 days of rain, fishing prospects are finally looking up. Rivers began dropping back into shape and clam diggers were busy booking motel reservations for a series of evening razor clam digs in late January. Still, conditions remain uncertain in the days ahead, prompting words of caution from fishery managers.

Three ocean beaches - and maybe four - will open to **razor clam** digging on evening tides Jan. 27-29. As of Jan. 20, WDFW had approved digs on evening tides at Long Beach, Mocrocks and Twin Harbors beaches after marine toxin tests confirmed that the clams on those beaches are

safe to eat. Heavy surf earlier thwarted efforts to test clams at Kalaloch, delaying a decision on opening that beach to a public dig until the afternoon of Jan. 26. WDFW will announce the decision on its Shellfish Hotline (866-880-5431) and post it on the department's [razor clam season](#) website.

Because the surf remains heavy, diggers planning to hit the beach during the three-day opening should make sure to take a good lantern and raingear, said Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager. "It's important to come prepared," Ayres said. "Particularly during night digs, we also ask people to keep a close eye on young children."

Washington State Parks is also advising beach goers to remain 300 feet away from the toe of bluffs where slides have occurred or could occur. Since the last clam season, a major bluff has fallen into the ocean near Roosevelt Beach access road, south of Moclips.

As in previous openings, no digging will be allowed at any beach before noon. Evening low tides during the three-day dig are:

Friday, Jan. 27: 5 p.m. (-0.3 ft.)  
Saturday, Jan. 28: 5:49 p.m. (-0.7 ft.)  
Sunday, Jan. 29: 6:34 p.m. (-1.0 ft.)

Copalis Beach will remain closed to digging in January to ensure that enough clams are available for harvest in April, when the tides allow for morning digs, Ayres said. The closed beach lies between the Grays Harbor North Jetty and the Copalis River, and includes Ocean Shores, Oyhut, Ocean City and Copalis.

Meanwhile, **steelhead** fishing picked up quickly after the rain clouds parted and the rivers became "fishable" again. "Rivers have been dropping into shape throughout western Washington, drawing an increasing number of anglers," said Mike Gross, WDFW fish biologist. One popular choice was the Sol Duc River, where checkers interviewed 63 anglers with 29 wild steelhead (including 25 that were released) and nine hatchery fish Jan. 20-22. By comparison, checkers counted just 10 anglers on the river - with just five fish among them - during the previous four days. The story was much the same on the Bogachiel, Calawah and Hoh rivers, although catch rates were considerably lower than those on the Sol Duc.

Improving conditions have also brought a flood of steelhead anglers to rivers in the Grays Harbor area, said Scott Barbour, another WDFW fish biologist. "There were lots of boats on the Wynoochee (River) last weekend, and I know a lot of people were catching fish. Barring another torrential downpour, steelhead fishing in other area rivers - including the Satsop, Humptulips and the Chehalis - should also be good in the days ahead." **Sturgeon** fishing on the Chehalis River should also pick up, now that smelt are moving in, he said.

Another change, noted by anglers and fish biologists alike, is that wild steelhead are becoming predominant in the catch. As most anglers know, retention of wild steelhead is limited to one fish per licensing year (April 1-March 31), taken from one of the following rivers: the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Goodman, Green, Hoh, Hoko, Pysht, Quillayute, Quinault or the Sol Duc. (The retention period for wild steelhead on the Green River closed Nov. 30). Elsewhere, they must be released. Wild steelhead can be distinguished from hatchery fish by their intact adipose and ventral fins.

Rather catch a salmon? **Blackmouth** fishing opens Feb. 1 in Marine Area 9, and should afford some good opportunities, said Tim Flint, WDFW statewide salmon manager. "These fish haven't seen a bait or lure since the end of November," Flint said. "That, together with the fact that catch rates are picking up in the chinook selective fishery in Marine Areas 8-1 and 8-2, suggests that

fishing in Marine Area 9 could be good." Popular areas include Possession Bar, Midchannel Bank and Point No Point.

**Eastern Washington** - Snake River **steelhead** fishing is picking up on tributaries that are running high and fast. Latest creel surveys showed an average of just two-and-half hours per steelhead caught on the Touchet River, just under three hours per fish on the Walla Walla River, and a little over four hours per fish on the Tucannon River. The [full report](#), which includes Snake River mainstem stretches, is on the WDFW website.

WDFW district fish biologist Chris Donley of Spokane reports that most of the ice has melted at the district's winter-only **rainbow trout** lakes, Fourth of July on the Lincoln-Adams county line and Hog Canyon in western Spokane County. "Go get 'em," Donley said, "but be careful out there." Boat launching and shore fishing continue to be challenging with thin shoreline ice from freezing nights. Donley recommends fishing Lake Roosevelt for **kokanee** and rainbow trout, either by boat trolling or bank fishing from the mouth of the Spokane River up to Grand Coulee Dam. Donley also noted that Whitman County's year-round Rock Lake continues to produce **brown** and rainbow trout.

WDFW district fish biologist Curt Vail of Colville said Williams Lake in Stevens County has about four inches of ice covered with almost as much slush and water. "It's pretty risky to walk out on," he said. Those managing to get a line in are doing well, with near limits of **rainbow trout** that run from just under 10 inches to 14 inches.

#### **Reader Email**

Subscriber and regular contributor KaptKen Johnson chimed in on Tuesday this week, " \*\*\*FISH ON!!!\*\*\* It has been reported that the FIRST Chinook of the season was caught a few days ago, and to date, I cannot find out who caught it!!!! Obviously, I wasn't there! The word on the beach is it was caught by a young man with blonde hair and it weighed in at about 12 pounds. That is, unless you talk to another group of guys 100' away and it then becomes a 15 pounder! Or, the guys fishing upriver a bit, and out of sight of where the fish was actually caught, I might add, who say is was just a freak 6 or 7 pounder so it doesn't really count! (Any animosity or sarcasm here guys???) On the Blacktop today, there was still about 5' of asphalt covered with water and only one bank fisherman there. He reported that a few guys dropped in from time to time throughout the day and those who fished only fished for about 30 minutes. I'm thinking, The Blacktop is going to be a hot prospect in a day or two as the Clackamas is just about looking close to perfect but still a bit murky. That being said, it is VERY FISHABLE! The guys working it upriver in Drift Boats are doing pretty good right now. There was even a 3 boat "Hog Line" in the mouth of the Clackamas bouncing prawn combo's, just today.



I think it will be just the beginning of 10-20 boat hog lines choking the mouth in search of the elusive Steelie, and now Chinook Salmon. Along the bank, the Long Guns (Rods!) are coming out too. Some of the Steelhead rods are being put away as the hint of Chinook is in the air.



Rigging is pretty much the same amongst fishermen, yet different too, if that makes any sense. They're tossing singles, doubles and a few triples along the beach as the guys want to get as much hardware out there as possible to entice the fish to bite.



Meldrum Judy hooked two Steelies today...The first was a Native she returned to the water and the other wasn't hooked deep enough and got away. Another four Steelhead were caught earlier in the same general area, with two "Natives" returned to the water and the other two sending

the fishermen home with smiles on their faces. The Willamette has dropped about 6-7 feet, at this writing, from about a week ago and is still a bit off color but quite fishable. Meldrum Bar is looking like the old MB of yester year and fishing will pick up and just get better as long as this dry spell holds. This will allow the water to clean up and lower just a bit. It's time...And, it's about time too! With Chinook right around the corner, it's going to get busy on the river. No excuses anymore...Quit Wishin' and go Fishin'! (Sorry!) See you out there!"

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### **Random Links**

Jennie Logsdon Martin has her ifish.net web cam set up again this year, but it's new and improved. Watch the attendees here:

<http://67.106.2.16:8080/>

The latest smelt reports courtesy of the WDFW:

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/smelt/feb0806.htm>

**Weekly Quote** – "No human being, however great, or powerful, was ever so free as a fish." - Ruskin, John

**GOOD LUCK!**