

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 24<sup>th</sup>, – March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2006**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** As expected, sturgeon, smelt and salmon catches, mostly in the mainstem commercial fishery, have dramatically slowed since the infusion of arctic air to NW Oregon. Temperatures are expected to moderate and given the current water conditions, fishing on the Columbia could improve for salmon and sturgeon. Although too early for conclusions, anglers remain hopeful that the early show of spring Chinook in the commercial fishery and a few in the sport sector may indicate a better-than-expected return this year.

Water clarity in the lower Willamette has improved dramatically, currently topping the two-foot mark. While it is still a bit murky in the Multnomah Channel, it's much better than a week ago. Sturgeon fishing remains spotty but a few keepers have been taken.

Register early to ensure a spot for your team in the 14th Annual Fisherman's Marine & Outdoor Sturgeon Derby to be held on Saturday, March 11th, 2006. Hopefuls may sign up at either Fishermen's location or call (503) 557-3313 or (503) 283-0044 for information. A registration fee is required.

Steelhead counts at the Willamette Falls held up well February 8th through 16th, pushing year-to-date totals well over 3,100. Counts dropped February 17th with low flows and lower water temperatures, as has the action for bank and boat anglers.

Springer fever is rampant at this time of year, further fueled by seeing a net or two flying at the Sellwood Bridge. A few have also been landed by plunkers fishing below the mouth of the Clackamas.

Steelheading has all but shut down in the high-thirty-degree water of the Clackamas River. Anglers anxiously await a warming trend to stimulate the steelhead bite. Fish should be distributed throughout the system and fishing should be improving as March nears.

A few steelhead have been taken on the Sandy but it's slow due in large part to low water levels from dropping freezing levels. The east wind has not made for pleasurable conditions.

The ODFW tank trucks are scheduled to deliver hatchery rainbow this week to Cottage Grove Pond, Creswell Pond, E. E. Wilson Pond, Junction City Pond, Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake.

**Northwest –** The cold snap has also effected north coast steelheaders. Low, clear and cold water has slowed steelhead action on most north coast streams. The mainstem Nehalem however was in perfect shape at mid-week and fishing well for native fish. Experienced steelheaders were starting late as air temperatures began to match water temperatures.

**Pro guide Kent Anderson (503-550-6303) and pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** report anglers in pursuit of hatchery broodstock steelhead remained vigilant on the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers. Successful anglers were working the lower stretches with light line and small offerings. Clear water has most steelhead in the deeper drifts and the bobber and jig technique excels in these conditions. Smaller streams will be a poor option until measurable rain improves water levels. Forecasted rain may improve conditions on the larger streams by the weekend.

A minus tide series will greet weekend anglers in pursuit of coastal sturgeon. Tillamook Bay is one of the best options where anglers scored quality fish last Sunday. The fish are clearly on the move however as enthusiastic anglers struggled to find them again early in the week. Afternoon ebb tides will favor a late start but motivated harvesters can take advantage of improved crabbing conditions on Tillamook Bay during morning incoming tides. Netarts Bay remains a good option but results aren't as consistent as they were just a week ago.

**Pro guide Bill Kremers (541-754-6411)** reports ocean bottomfishing has once again become an option and results have been good. Lingcod are in good condition and a few are being taken from area jetties. Weekend ocean forecasts are mixed so check bar and ocean conditions before going out and consider the extreme tide series scheduled for this weekend.

The Alsea has been quite productive this week, with one angler reporting multiple steelhead encounters using a bobber to present cured salmon eggs. The majority of the fish present are natives.

If surf conditions continue to moderate, razor clam digging could be productive on Clatsop area beaches. The digging should be best on the front side of the series so consider going before Sunday. Crabbing on the lower Columbia is poor.

**Southwest -** The lower stretches of the North and South Umpqua were kicking out good numbers of steelhead last week. These fish will continue to provide action to anglers as they move upstream. Sturgeon fishing is fair to good out of Reedsport.

The Coos, Chetco and Coquille rivers are badly in need of rain. Similar conditions are reported on the Elk and Sixes.

Steelheading is rewarding on the Rogue River for anglers targeting steelhead around Grants Pass. The lower river is producing fresh winter steelhead to plunkers and plug-pullers.

**Southwest Washington-** Success rates on the Cowlitz and Kalama Rivers continues to drop although broodstock returns on the Kalama are beginning to offer anglers some late season opportunity. Success on the East Fork of the Lewis River is also gaining momentum. In these clear water conditions, bobber and jigs are an effective method for taking fish.

Smelt dippers continue to grow impatient on the Cowlitz River. The recent cold front will likely delay entry into the Cowlitz River but smelt are due for a good showing here.

**Eastern -** Cold conditions have also put Eastern Oregon steelhead on hold but warmer temperatures will likely trigger positive results by the weekend. The Grand Ronde and Imnaha Rivers remain top bets.

**Soapbox Update -** Break-ins have become a common occurrence at popular parking areas on inland and coastal rivers alike. Take extra steps to stow gear out of sight. Better yet, take only what's needed and take it with you.

**Columbia River Fishing Report –** Anglers are clearly getting excited over recent reports that the commercial fleet is catching some spring Chinook. Although effort has been light, anglers do stand a chance at hooking up an early salmon. Catch in the commercial fleet dropped off dramatically however with the onslaught of arctic air. Keep in mind that when we are talking

about the commercial fishery, we are talking about "incidentally" caught salmon in the target sturgeon gillnet fishery. This fishery has been going on for about 9 weeks now and has netted the commercial fleet 21 spring Chinook and 216 keeper sturgeon. Keeper sturgeon in the gillnet fleet need to be a minimum of 45 inches long. You might be asking yourself why I am spending so much time talking about the gillnet fishery? Well.....it's the only thing TO talk about! Sport effort and catch was next to nothing last week partly due to cold, windy weather. Although weather conditions are improving, fishing for sturgeon will likely continue to be poor.

Sturgeon and walleye fishing was also reported to be poor over the weekend. Cold weather was likely a factor.

The bigger news is anglers pursuing spring Chinook on the mainstem. Effort remained light but there was effort out there. One angler reported witnessing a sealion eating a salmon, keeping him motivated that he may indeed catch one - he didn't. Plunkers along the lower Columbia beaches did tally 2 wild steelhead over the weekend but that was for 30 bank rods.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Conditions should improve for anglers seeking an early spring Chinook from the Columbia. Although likely not worth running out there and really getting after 'em, the weekends minus tide series and warming temperatures may offer bank anglers a fair chance at one of these prizes. The stronger the outgoing tide, the closer these fish will hug the shoreline giving beach plunkers opportunities they don't usually get. The minus tide series peaks on Saturday. The first commercial opener for spring Chinook starts on noon, the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February and goes until 6 a.m. on the 24<sup>th</sup>. It shouldn't have a big impact on success rates over the weekend and we may even get an idea if there are going to be salmon this year! We'll have results in next weeks newsletter.

I'm thinking.....don't even waste your time on sturgeon. But really, there may be a small improvement in the shaker (and a few keepers) catch with the warming trend. The most productive area will remain the Portland to Longview stretch with as fresh of smelt as you can get your hands on. That may be tougher this week as commercial netters did poorly last week- they landed only 15 pounds! This is likely an indication that the smelt moved out with the arctic blast that hit us last week.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – A springer or two a day doth not a hot fishery make, but these are springers, after all, which invariably generates intense interest. Drive over the Sellwood or I-205 Bridge anytime and you'll see a few boats trying.

While winter steelhead counts at Willamette Falls haven't been updates since the 17th, the water temperature as of February 21st had dropped below 40 degrees. That'll slow 'em down, for sure. Steelies will remain lethargic, soft biters until the water warms. Just like everywhere else this week, the Willamette would benefit from rain.

Smelt remains the best bait for sturgeon but squid is also attracting bites.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Look for the spring chinook season to be worthwhile starting in March as numbers at this time are too low to provide anything but relief from work or household chores. Hey, that isn't bad.

**Pro Guide** (and TGF co writer) **Bob Rees** sent me this with the subject 'Fun Fact': "Of the 11 spring Chinook sampled for Columbia River springers, 100% were the "white-faced" variety indicating that they were destined for the Willamette Valley."

This bodes well for an early run and builds hope that the run numbers this year will exceed predictions.

Most keeper sturgeon are coming from around 50 feet of water, but as levels drop further, sturgeon will seek even deeper holes. The stretch from the Freemont bridge to the mouth along with Multnomah Channel will be the areas to target in the coming weeks.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – With water levels down on the Sandy, steelheading has been slow.

Clackamas steelheaders should be thankful for late running broodstock which will be available into April, because the bite will be off until the water conditions improve.

Come April, springer will be in the river along with winter steelhead (hopefully) with the Clackamas producing best chinook catches in April and May.

**The Guide's Forecast** – It remains to be seen if the showers currently in the weather forecast materialize into precipitation sufficient to rejuvenate the Sandy, Clackamas and all fisheries state-wide.

**North Coast District Fishing Report** – Mixed reports for steelhead came out of the north coast this week. Cold weather kept steelheaders chilled and steelhead lethargic. Memories of the ice in the rod guides kept me stoking my woodstove but the few avid anglers that did venture out, had to work for their quarry. **Pro guide Kent Anderson (503-550-6303)** reports, "Fished the Nestucca for a couple days late last week. Besides spending half the day breaking ice out of the guides, it was tolerable fishing conditions (not really). Fortunately not all the steelhead had their lips frozen together. Thursday produced 6 steelhead (5 wild, 1 broodstock) spread out between 1st Bridge and Cloverdale. All were caught drifting eggs (no success at all on either plugs, jigs or shrimp). Friday was an afternoon float from 1st Bridge to 3 Rivers, resulting in 2 landed (1 wild 1 broodstock). Both caught drift fishing eggs. Water conditions were near perfect except very cold (39 degrees). Both Nestucca River pros are working more on their comedic personalities than honing their fishing skills. **Pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** reports, "The Nestucca is very low and clear, as well as cold. There are a mixed bag of fresh fish and also some darker fish. The fishing has taken a major down turn since the cold snap. We have caught just a few each day, and are hoping for a little rain. I never thought I would say we need rain after the last month or so, but it will improve things. Look for the best action to be on the extreme lower river, and light gear and stealth tactics should be in order. If one person blows down over the run, it will be off for a long period of time. Both bait and jigs have produced, but fishing is quite slow."

Similar reports were coming in from the Wilson and Trask Rivers with most guides getting skunked or just getting one or two opportunities.

I fished the Nehalem River on 2/20 with Association of NW Steelheader member Alan Flannigan. He brought fishing buddy Phil with him and we put in at the Beaver slide with our final destination at Mohler Sand and Gravel. We opted for a late start to beat the freeze and hopefully get away from any sort of boat traffic that might go with an early start. Well, it all worked out fine but most of the traffic (there was only another 4 or 5 boats on the float) started late too. Most anglers were side-drifting and although I didn't get the chance to converse with them to hear how their success was, I heard later that one boat went 3 for 5 and they had never even done that float before. We spent most of our time pulling plugs and found favorable results with 6 opportunities, landing 4 of the fish. Only one of the fish was a run-back with the largest of the

freshest fish going about 9 or 10 pounds.

With water conditions on the drop for most streams, the larger Nehalem River was the better bet for our area. The river was in ideal shape and should continue to produce into the weekend. Slight rises in river levels are forecasted but they are not significant enough to put the rivers out of shape.

Sturgeon anglers on Tillamook Bay reported great results on Sunday, February 19<sup>th</sup>. Despite cold conditions, the wind wasn't blowing hard so anglers could fish without much trouble. Those fishing in the south channel were pleased with their success but by Monday, action seemed to have dried up. These fish are very opportunistic and always on the hunt. Sturgeon anglers have a tendency to stay put when they too should be on the hunt unless they just know the fish will come washing through. Sand shrimp are making up the bulk of the bait used by anglers.

Crabbing on Tillamook Bay has improved much since our last edition. Crabbers working the lower bay are reporting good success and a safe bar allowed some folks to get outside after them. Be sure to obey the safe bar crossing on the coast guard shack and tower. There have already been significant losses on Tillamook Bay this YEAR! Crabbing also remains good on Netarts Bay but some folks are reporting better results than others.

I received reports of a few lingcod being taken off the north jetty (inside Tillamook Bay) last week. Jigs will work well for fish that are beginning to stage on nearby rocks in preparation for their big spawn. Mooched herring will also work well.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Look for steelheading action to pick up slightly with the increase in temperatures. The forecasted precipitation coupled with a good tide series may bring in bigger numbers of steelhead this week. Fish seem to be more tidal dependent when water levels have remained stable for a while. Unless we get more rain than forecasted, the lower stretches of most of the north coast streams should produce the best. The Wilson and Nestucca will remain the best bets for hatchery (broodstock) steelhead while the Trask and Nehalem should produce some nice wild winter steelhead catches. Fish should become responsive to plugs as the native strains tend to bring with them a strong territorial instinct. As a general rule, stick to the dark plugs on the dark days and metallic colors when the sun is shining. Also, don't be too anxious to get out early as that is what most anglers will be doing. It can really pay dividends to start later as you can get to water that hasn't been worked for a while and do it when air temperatures better match water temperatures. Other techniques that will produce well this time of year are side-drifting and the bobbers and jigs will effectively work the other stretches of water that you would normally bypass.

Sturgeon anglers should prepare themselves for some good opportunity over the weekend. Good afternoon tides will provide some excellent chances for anglers willing to hunt down keepers in the estuary. Sand shrimp in the channels will produce the best results but don't give up when the tide turns and starts coming in. The shallows on the incoming tide can produce nicely too. If you are into crabs, you are not near sturgeon so plan on moving if you are fishing in the lower estuary. Crabs and sturgeon don't mix well- just ask the 9 small Dungeness that I pulled from the stomach of a Tillamook Bay 54 inch keeper last year.

Crabbing should also remain fair over the weekend but the larger tide series may put some of the keeper crab down for the tide rush. Keep your eye on the ocean as the ocean forecast is mixed but may provide some opportunity for those willing to spend the extra gas money to get out there.

Razor clam digging should be good during the next minus tide series. This series begins on

February 23<sup>rd</sup> but digging should remain good into the weekend- particularly if the surf remains calm. The best digging will be between the mouth of the Necanicum River and Fort Stevens State Park.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – Rivers are in need of rain. Low, clear water has challenged steelheaders following a cold, windy week that offered pretty decent action. Larger rivers will offer possibilities to stealthy anglers. Those who know and apply low-water steelhead tactics will do well this week. Those who don't, well, won't. Bobber and jig rigs shine in these conditions, as do tiny baits and lures on long, light leaders.

Here's the annual reminder that diver and bait are often lethal to fish hooked on this combination. It's wise to refrain from using these rigs this time of year to spare those wild fish so they may complete their spawning run.

As recently as Monday, February 21st, reports of multiple steelhead catches came from the Alsea, but the water's getting skinny.

Offshore bottomfishing has been excellent coast-wide when conditions allow. Large ling cod, black rockfish and cabezon are available now. Rock and jetty fishing is rewarding with lings in the shallower water to spawn.

This led **Pro Guide Bill Kremers (541-754-6411)** get creative, seeking a viable alternative while waiting for rainfall: "while the Alsea Rivers remains too low and clear for good steelhead I decide to try some bottom fishing out of Depoe on Sunday. After a quick stop at Government Point where we a couple of small ling cods I decide to head north towards Lincoln City. In less than three hours of fish we limited out the boat on rock cod, plus we got into some nice ling cod. Anglers here need at least a 6 oz jig for the lings. I rig my jig with a large double tail chartreuse worm and a herring or shad fillet. Now I just have to wait for another calm day."



Photo of happy clients Don Wenzel (left) and Jerrod Sapp (right) showing off some of their catch of lings, cabezon, and copper rock fish.

The Umpqua system has slowed for steelhead as the water conditions now showing the effects of

the lack of precipitation. Sturgeon fishing is fair to good out of Reedsport for keeper-sized fish and hooking oversized specimens is common here. Despite rumors to the contrary, a confirmed catch of a spring chinook has yet to occur.

The story is the same for other South coast streams and rivers which will benefit of the rain materializes as predicted in weather forecasts.

Only the Rogue River has enough flow to provide decent steelheading prospects. Boaters below Grants Pass are scoring by side drifting and back-trolling plugs. The water in the lower river is clearing so plunking has become less effective as boaters outscore bank fishermen with plug-pulling effective now.

Crabbing is worthwhile in South coast bays and estuaries which have recovered from the last rain freshet.

### **Central and Eastern Oregon –**

**Northwest Trout** - Cottage Grove Pond, Creswell Pond, E. E. Wilson Pond, Junction City Pond, Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake have been stocked with hatchery trout this week.

Henry Hagg Lake will open Saturday, March 4th, 2006. It'll be a holdover show for trout until April 30th unless the ODFW slides in an unscheduled planting prior to that date. Hagg is best known for producing several consecutive State-record smallmouth bass. While they grow large there, those lunker smallies are tough to locate.

**SW Washington** - As of today (Feb. 22), a month and a half into the season, dippers had taken only a handful of **smelt** from the Cowlitz River. "Conditions looked pretty good a couple of weeks ago, but the smelt just didn't materialize," said Joe Hymer, WDFW fish biologist. "It isn't over yet, but the current prognosis isn't that great."

Hymer, who has monitored the smelt run for years, cited several reasons for diminished expectations. First, the smelt harvest by commercial boats in the mainstem Columbia River has dropped off in recent days. Second, the assembly of seals and cormorants at the mouth of the Cowlitz have largely dispersed. And third, the water temperature in the Cowlitz, chilled by recent cold weather, is currently registering 37 degrees. "Smelt like it around 42 degrees or higher," Hymer said.

But there is still a chance that smelt could run up the Cowlitz in harvestable numbers before the season ends March 31, Hymer said. "We've seen the smelt arrive in March before," he said. "It's just a question of whether they show up before we run out of time."

Anglers fishing for **sturgeon** and steelhead haven't done much better, said Wolf Dammers, another WDFW fish biologist working out of the southwest regional office in Vancouver. Of 13 boat anglers fishing the Bonneville, The Dalles and John Day pools from Feb. 13-19, none landed a legal-size sturgeon although they averaged more than one sub-legal per rod.

**Steelhead** catches were also slow that week, largely due to low flows on the Columbia's tributaries, Hymer said. "First we had too much water, now we don't have enough," he said. "On most of the tributaries, we're back to hoping for some more rain."

Once the skies open up, the Kalama and Cowlitz rivers are probably the best bet for steelhead, Hymer said. "There's still time for some good fishing on those rivers if we get some rain."

Meanwhile, Hymer noted that Columbia River anglers have caught several **spring chinook salmon** in recent days. Fishing rules adopted by Washington and Oregon allow anglers to catch and keep adipose fin-clipped chinook caught below the I-5 bridge at least through April 19. The fishery runs seven days a week. "We're just starting to see the early arrivals," Hymer said. "We're hoping to see a lot more spring chinook in the weeks ahead."

**North Central Washington** – With 50-degree days - and nights barely below freezing - the Columbia Basin might just warm up enough to thaw ice on dozens of lakes that open to fishing on March 1. "A little wind would help, too," said WDFW district fish biologist Jeff Korth of Moses Lake. The largest and usually most popular of these early-opening lakes - Burke and Quincy on the Quincy Wildlife Area - were still solid as of mid-February, preventing hatchery crews from stocking the 5,000 catchable-size (9-10-inch) **rainbow trout** scheduled for each. Korth said both lakes were treated last fall to reduce an over-abundance of sunfish. "So until we get them back to growing trout," he said, "the only fish available this season will be those catchables." Once they do go in, Korth expects Burke and Quincy to provide a fair fishery for the first few weeks of the season. About 20,000 rainbow fingerlings will be stocked in each lake later in the spring, he said. "We do the best we can after a rehabilitation treatment," he said, "but the real payoff comes a year and more later."

Korth said the best bet in the Basin for the second year running will be Martha Lake near the town of George. "Last year's opener was good there with an average of 4.1 trout per angler," he said. "This year we've added some catchables as 'insurance,' although Martha has to make it on the strength of the 11,200 fingerlings we put in there last spring."

Fish-eating cormorants have not been as big a problem at Martha as in the past, he noted. The Caliche lakes - Upper, Lower and West - have had inconsistent fingerling survival, possibly due to cormorant predation. But Korth thinks fishing in those lakes could be good this year if the fingerlings planted last spring survive. Upper Caliche received 6,500 fingerling rainbows, Lower Caliche got 5,000 and West Caliche 500 last spring.

Dusty Lake, on the Quincy Wildlife Area, is in great shape, but usually gets off to a slow start because it's so deep and fish remain suspended longer, Korth said. Since its 2003 rehabilitation, the lake has been well stocked with trout, including 1,000 one-and-half-pound triploid rainbows, 3,000 catchable-size rainbow, 8,000 fingerling rainbow and 1,000 fingerling **tiger trout** two years ago. "That means there should be a fair number of two and three year-old fish in the catches this year," Korth said. Last year Dusty was stocked with 8,300 rainbow fingerlings, 2,000 brown trout fingerlings, and 800 tiger trout fingerlings, so yearlings will also be plentiful. Anglers need to remember that selective fishery rules are in effect on Dusty Lake - no bait, a single barbless hook and a one-fish limit.

Two other waters that open March 1 under selective gear rules - Lenice and Nunnally lakes in WDFW's Crab Creek Wildlife Area just east of Beverly - should also be pretty good, Korth said. Both have been receiving regular plants of one-and-a-half-pound triploid rainbows to boost fingerling survival against an onslaught of sunfish. Last year's fingerling plant in Lenice Lake included 9,400 rainbows, 3,000 tiger trout, and 4,500 **brown trout**. Nunnally Lake received 12,000 rainbows and 4,500 browns. Korth says surviving yearlings from those plants should be 14 inches by now. There should also be some carryovers from earlier years' fingerling plants, now running 16 to 18 inches.

Lake Lenore, north of the town of Soap Lake, will also open March 1 under selective gear rules.

Korth says three to four year-old **Lahontan cutthroat trout** at about three to five pounds should be numerous this year. Lake Lenore, where fishing is catch-and-release until June, receives about 55,000 fingerlings annually.

Other waters opening March 1 in the Columbia Basin include the Quincy Wildlife Area's small "walk-in" lakes. Among them, Crystal, Cup and Spring lakes have been the most consistent. Fingerling rainbows are stocked as follows: Cascade, 500; Cliff, 1,000; Crystal, 1,000; Cup, 1,000; Dot, 500; Scout, 600; Lower Spring, 500; and Upper Spring, 1,000. Yearling trout from these plants range from 9 to 12 inches, and carryovers can be found from 14 to 18 inches. Korth notes that some Basin waters that used to open March 1 were rehabilitated in 2004, delaying their opening until April 1. These waters include the Hampton Lakes (Upper and Lower), Hen Lake and the Pillar-Widgeon Lakes (Pillar, Gadwall, Shoveler, Lemna, Poacher, Snipe, Cattail, Sago, Hourglass, Widgeon).

On the north end of the region, Spectacle Lake in Okanogan County also opens on March 1, but WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff says it won't have fish to catch until April. Spectacle was rehabilitated last fall, he explained, and it won't be re-stocked with trout until the ice is out near the end of March. "With our recent cold snap adding to the ice cover, Davis Lake in the Methow Valley and Sidley Lake near Oroville might offer some good rainbow trout fishing," he said. Jateff also noted that **steelhead** fishing in the upper Columbia River system has slowed due to lower water temperatures.

**South Central Washington** - Stocking of hatchery **rainbow trout** in Yakima Valley lakes and ponds begins Feb. 27 and will continue through March 17. "Since most of our lakes are open year round, anglers can start fishing immediately," said WDFW district fish biologist Eric Anderson of Yakima. Catchable-size trout, 10-12 inches long and weighing about one-third pound, make up the bulk of the plants. Limited numbers of larger jumbo trout (about a pound each) are also scheduled for some waters, Anderson said.

In the Yakima area, hatchery crews are stocking Granger Pond, I-82 Ponds 4 and 6, Myron Lake, Rotary Lake, Sarge Hubbard Park Pond and Wenas Lake. In the Kittitas Valley, the early stocked lakes include Denmark Pond, Fio Rito Lakes, Mattoon Lake, McCabe Pond and Woodhouse Ponds. Anderson said many of these lakes were stocked last fall and still have some carryovers from those plants. There should also be some rainbows in the one-and-a-half to five-pound range in a few of those lakes, including North Fio Rito, Mattoon, I-82 Pond 4, Rotary and Myron Lakes. Anderson said hatchery trout plants continue through early summer to maintain heavily-fished waters. The complete [fish stocking list](#) is available at WDFW's South Central Region Office in Yakima (1701 S. 24th Ave., phone 509-575-2740), or on the WDFW website. Anglers can also check a list, updated [weekly](#), to see which lakes were recently planted. "Additional lakes at higher elevations in the region will be stocked as the weather continues to warm up and the snow and ice packs recede," Anderson said. "Our next big wave of stocking effort will occur in April." Anderson reminded anglers to check the fishing rules pamphlet for special regulations on gear and catch on some waters.

WDFW fish biologist Jim Cummins reported a few fly fishers recently working the catch-and-release area in the Yakima River canyon. "I'm not sure how successful they were with the cold water temperatures," he said. "Ice has been flowing in the river early in the day, but seems to be gone by afternoon as air temperatures increase above freezing." Cummins noted that some lakes may be ice covered, but are likely not safe for fishing.

**Puget Sound** – A stretch of calm weather has given anglers a new opportunity to chase **blackmouth**. Decent numbers of chinook have been reported in several areas, particularly Saratoga Passage between Whidbey and Camano islands. The Baby Island area and the

"Racetrack," located between Hat Island and Camano Head, are also producing some blackmouth. In the San Juan Islands, anglers are hooking chinook, including reports of a 27-pounder in Lopez Pass. "I'm hearing there are some fish out there, along with some bait," said Steve Foley, a WDFW fish biologist.

Recent creel surveys show anglers are having some success. At the Everett Ramp, 44 anglers hauled in 17 chinook on Feb. 18, and 83 fishers landed 23 blackmouth the following day. At Camano Island's public ramp, 75 anglers checked in 10 chinook on Feb. 18, while 82 fishers accounted for 10 blackmouth on Feb. 19. Elsewhere that day, 26 anglers hauled in nine chinook at the Bellingham Ramp, while 39 fishers landed nine blackmouth at the Washington Park Ramp the same day.

Anglers fishing in marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands) and 9 (Admiralty Inlet) have a daily bag limit of one salmon in both areas. Those fishing in marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay) and 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) have a daily limit of two salmon, but wild chinook must be released. Unlike hatchery fish, wild chinook have an intact adipose fin.

Time is running out for **steelhead** anglers in the northern Puget Sound area. Most area rivers, including the Snohomish, Nooksack and Wallace, close to steelhead fishing Feb. 28. Steelhead fisheries on the north fork Stillaguamish and the Skykomish rivers close by emergency rule March 1. The wild winter steelhead return to those two rivers is expected to reach only 36 percent of the goal, prompting the closure. "Because of the low returns, we need to minimize hooking mortality and disturbances of spawning fish," said Bob Leland, WDFW steelhead manager.

Most areas of the Skagit River, however, remain open for the harvest of hatchery steelhead through March 15, then switch to catch-and-release from March 16 through April 30. Wild steelhead are distinguished from hatchery fish by their intact adipose and ventral fins. On the Sauk River, the catch-and-release fishery begins March 1. Anglers planning to fish for steelhead in northern Puget Sound should check the [2005/2006 Fishing in Washington](#) pamphlet and WDFW's Emergency Rule Changes, which are located on the same website.

**Olympic Peninsula** – The line-up for the next few weeks includes razor clams, blackmouth and steelhead. But it could also include some changeable weather, as anyone who has gone fishing during the past month well knows.

Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager, said he is advising everyone planning to participate in the **razor-clam** dig Feb. 24-26 to bring warm, waterproof clothes. "We've had some big waves and rough weather during the past two openings," Ayres said. "We're hoping for better conditions this time, but it's always best to prepare for cold, wet weather." Beaches open for digging during the three-day opening include those at Long Beach, Mocrocks, Copalis, Twin Harbors and Kalaloch. As in previous openings this season, no digging will be allowed at any beach before noon.

As always, Ayres recommends that diggers hit the beach at least an hour before low tide for best results. Evening low tides during the three-day dig are:

- Friday, Feb. 24: 3:43 p.m. +0.4 ft.
- Saturday, Feb. 25: 4:37 p.m. -0.2 ft.
- Sunday, Feb. 26: 5:25 p.m., -0.5 ft.

Diggers may take no more than 15 razor clams and must keep the first 15 taken, regardless of size or condition. They also must carry a valid 2005-06 fishing license and keep their clams in a separate container.

Once this week's dig is over, WDFW will determine whether enough clams remain to be harvested under this year's quota for another afternoon dig in late March and still provide a series of morning digs in April. News about late-season digs will be announced in mid-March. Meanwhile, participants in the Discovery Bay Salmon Derby caught a break during Presidents Day weekend, when rough weather gave way to clear skies and relatively calm seas. Todd Quisenberry of Poulsbo took the top prize of \$3,250 for a 19-pound, 15-ounce **blackmouth** caught on a squid hootchie. Sixty-five of the 592 other participants also caught salmon, ranging from 19 pounds to just over 3 pounds.

"That's about average for these waters at this time of year," said Larry Bennett, a WDFW technician who checked fish at the event. Those fish were caught in marine areas 6, 7 and 9, reflecting the expanded boundaries of this year's tournament. Blackmouth fishing continues in those areas, as well as in marine areas 11, 12 and 13.

In the **steelhead** fishery, the Hoh River has been getting the most attention, because cold weather has substantially reduced flows in the Quillayute River system. On the lower Hoh, 161 anglers caught 44 steelhead, including 32 wild fish (of which 23 were released). On the upper Hoh, 87 anglers caught 34 steelhead, releasing all 27 of the wild ones.

Mike Gross, WDFW fish biologist, reminds anglers that selective gear rules will take effect on the Hoh starting March 1, when anglers will be required to release any wild steelhead they catch. Gross also reminds anglers that the Hoh will close to all steelhead fishing April 1 - rather than the usual April 16 end date - because of low run returns.

"But fishing on the Quillayute system and other area rivers should pick up once we get some more rain," Gross said. The same could also be said of the Wishkah, the Humptulips and other rivers in the Grays Harbor area, which have also been running low in recent days. Even so, anglers have been catching - and releasing - some nice wild steelhead on the Chehalis and Skookumchuck rivers, said Hal Michael, another WDFW fish biologist. "We also have a good number of hatchery steelhead returning to the Skookumchuck."

**Eastern Washington** - March 1 marks the opening of the Tucannon River impoundments in Columbia County, but in mid-February only two of the seven lakes were free of enough ice to allow fish stocking. Doug Maxey, of WDFW's Tucannon Fish Hatchery, said he hoped to have all of the lakes stocked with **rainbow trout** before the opener, but it depends on weather. "Big Four in particular is always most difficult when we have ice," Maxey said. "So it's possible that it won't get fish before the first. The first two lakes we stocked this week - Rainbow and Blue - have only about one-eighth open water, just enough to get the fish in. Even if we get the others stocked they might not be very easy to fish." Forecasts indicate a slight warming trend, he noted, so anglers planning on an opening day trip to the Tucannon probably need to keep their fingers crossed.

Rainbow Lake received 3,000 catchable-size (about one-third pound) rainbows and 100 "jumbos" (about two-third pounders) and Blue Lake received 3,500 catchables and 100 jumbos. Beaver Lake is slated to get 500 catchables, Big Four should get 3,000 catchables and 300 jumbos, Deer is slated for 1,000 catchables, Spring will get 2,000 catchables and 100 jumbos, and Watson is slated to receive 2,500 catchables and 100 jumbos. All of the lakes will be stocked several times again through June; check out [total allotments](#) on WDFW's Eastern Washington regional webpage. Anglers heading for the Tucannon lakes should be prepared for possible travel delays on the river road through the Wooten Wildlife Area, where post-wildfire helicopter salvage logging is under way. To further protect public safety during those operations, some of the area's campgrounds near the fishing lakes are also not available for use. Check the status of [Wooten Wildlife Area access](#) on the website or by calling 509-843-1530.

Other March 1 openings in the region are Coffeepot Lake in Lincoln County and Amber and North Silver lakes in Spokane County - all still iced up as of mid-February. Chris Donley, WDFW district fish biologist, said warmer weather and wind are needed to open access to those waters. When that happens, Coffeepot should be very good for **rainbow trout** on selective gear, which is the rule, along with a two trout daily catch limit. Amber is open only for catch-and-release fishing, and should also be very good for both rainbow and **cutthroat trout**, which grow well in that lake. North Silver Lake has not been stocked because of chronic low water problems, Donley said, so there won't be much to catch.

The recent cold snap temporarily restored some ice-fishing for trout at Fourth of July Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line and Hog Canyon Lake in Spokane County, but anglers are urged to be cautious when warming trends occur and ice deteriorates. Those lakes, along with Williams Lake in northern Stevens County, remain open through March. Waitts Lake in southern Stevens County, which has produced some nice trout through the winter, including recent hauls of 15-inch-plus rainbows and 18-inch browns, closes Feb. 28. It will re-open April 29 after hatchery trout stocking and net-pen releases.

Lake Roosevelt continues to produce **kokanee** and net-pen-reared **rainbow trout**. WDFW Ford Fish Hatchery specialist Ace Trump said during two recent fishing trips with his son to the Spring Canyon area just east of Coulee Dam they caught a kokanee and three or four rainbows each time within about four hours. The rainbows were 17 to 18 inches and the kokanee were 16 inches.

**Steelhead** fishing has been excellent on the Grande Ronde in the Snake River drainage, said WDFW Lyons Ferry Hatchery Complex Manager Steve Rodgers. "At least it was excellent until the cold weather sent ice floating down the river," he said. For the latest on Snake River steelhead [creel surveys](#), see the department's website.

### Reader Email

Ken Johnson reports from the lower Willamette, "I went fishing today, and although the word is that the Steelheading is "Hot" and the Springer action is a bit slow, I didn't witness much action at all...Or, should I say NONE! Not many guys fishing at Meldrum, either. Only "Randy" fishing on "The Blacktop" and I didn't talk to him. "

Reader Jesse H. wrote to Michael after catching his 'first steelhead', "I caught this 20lbs buck on the Nestucca River on the 20th of February. I used 2 pink corkies (1) Pearl pink(1) bright pink. I do have 1 question for you. Why does this fish look like a salmon? I thought Steelhead are "chrome" and bullet like?"



'Looks pretty chinookish to me, Jesse. Springer alert!

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: [brees@pacifier.com](mailto:brees@pacifier.com)

Doug Rees: [drees@TheGuidesForecast.com](mailto:drees@TheGuidesForecast.com)

Michael Teague: [SailCat@SailCat.com](mailto:SailCat@SailCat.com)

### **Random Links**

Preserve the memory of that trophy without killing the fish:

\*<http://www.mailtribune.com/archive/2006/0223/sport/stories/03sport.htm>

\*<http://www.mailtribune.com/archive/2006/0223/sport/stories/06sport.htm>

### **Weekly Quote –**

"There are trout in my river whose attitudes,  
Are quite of the blackest ingratitude;  
Though I offer them duns,  
Most superior ones,  
They maintain a persistent Black Gnatitude."  
- Anonymous

**GOOD LUCK!**