

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **March 10th, – March 16th, 2006**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Sport caught spring Chinook are being taken in the Portland to Longview stretch but catches remain minimal. Most anglers are anchoring with plugs but fish tend to respond well to herring in the early part of the season.

Sturgeon- both legal and sublegals are oddly absent in the Columbia below Bonneville Dam. This was a trend witnessed last year with no explanation.

Two spring chinook crossed Willamette Falls on Thursday, March 2nd, for a YTD total of three. Look for activity to increase as water temperatures do. Winter steelhead are being counted by the score with the run total over 3,600.

Sturgeon fishing is improving in the lower Willamette but there is waning interest with steelhead and the occasional springer being taken. Multnomah Channel should improve for springers if the weather warms as forecast, but it's still very early to expect much action.

The Clackamas River is reported the better of the two metro rivers with the water below Feldheimers producing the best results. Sidedrifters are experiencing the best results. Rain this week will improve fishing overall as rivers recover.

The Sandy has been sporadic for steelhead. Fish are well distributed from the lower river to Marmot Dam and are responding equally between bobber and jigs and drifted bait. The wild to hatchery ratio has recently improved as broodstock fish become available.

Dexter Reservoir in the South Willamette Valley was stocked with rainbow trout this week.

Middle Columbia - Steelheaders remain effective in The Dalles Pool with almost 2 steelhead per boat being landed in this fishery. The majority of fish taken this week were of wild origin.

Some of the better keeper sturgeon fishing is taking place in the Bonneville, The Dalles and John Day Pools. The best overall action for shakers and keepers remains in the Bonneville Pool with smelt fishing the best.

Walleye fishing continues to be fair with the best catches coming from the John Day Pool- 15 walleye were kept for 22 boats participating in the weekend fishery. Success should continue to climb as the spring progresses.

Northwest – Tillamook area streams have been good but the forecasted precipitation should make them great just before the weekend. The best hatchery prospects should remain on the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers with some quality sized broodstock fish reported in recent catches reports **pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)**. Most anglers are sidedrifting bait but plugs are working well in the dropping flows.

Sturgeon anglers on Tillamook Bay are struggling for success. The nice weather has motivated anglers but they have to work for their catch. Crabbing has also slowed on north coast estuaries as commercial pots have taken to working near-shore areas.

Siletz River steelheaders should find decent prospects over the weekend with the freshet this week bringing fresh fish into the system. The fishing has been steady, but not what it was just a few weeks ago.

Crabbing on Yaquina Bay is slow but steady.

Pro guide Bill Kremers (1-541-754-6411) reports, the North Fork Alsea will be a worthwhile destination for winter steelhead as it is expected to recover quickly from the effect of rainfall this week.

Steelheading will be good on the Siuslaw River with the stretch downstream of Whitaker likely to be productive.

Waters planted with trout in the Northwest Zone this week include Cape Mears Lake, Coffenbury Lake, Cullaby Lake, Hebo Lake, Lake Lytle, Lost Lake (in Clatsop County), North Lake, Smith Lake, South Lake, Spring Lake, Sunset Lake, Town Lake and Vernonia Pond.

Southwest - The Southern Oregon coast was also hit by the front this week. Rain is forecasted to moderate, then break by the weekend. Fishing should be very good as rivers drop and clear.

The Umpqua River will be productive for winter steelhead when the level and color returns to fishable levels. A spring chinook in excess of 30 pounds was taken near Elkton last week. Sturgeon fishing should improve below Reedsport with the extra water in the system.

The Coos and Coquille rivers are also expected to produce winter steelhead as they recover from the precipitation later in the week.

How soon the Rogue River will fish again depends on how hard it got hit by the front this week. Steelheading will be good as it drops and clears and spring chinook fishing is due to start up here.

Eastern - Good reports have been coming from Washington anglers fishing the Grande Ronde River. The river had dropped to about 3,000 cfs by Saturday, which put the river well into a fishable range. The water continued to drop through the weekend, benefiting steelheaders, reports **pro guide Mac Huff (1-800- 940-3688)**.

Oregon anglers in the Troy area likely have another week to 10 days of reliable fishing before the bulk of the Oregon fish move further upstream, primarily into the Wallowa River, but also into the upper Grande Ronde and Catherine Creek.

Southwest Washington- The Cowlitz River is putting out a few wild winter steelhead and hatchery spring Chinook. In the near future, spring Chinook will dominate the catch although the predicted run size is forecasted to be similar to last year.

The Kalama River is putting out fair numbers of wild and broodstock steelhead. The ratio is estimated at 85/15 wild to hatchery fish. A few spring Chinook have also been harvested.

Pro guide Brad Shride (877-483-0047) reports, "I've been fishing up and down on the coastal rivers of the Olympic Peninsula. The Queets River is fishing pretty good when it is in shape but the road is washed out above Hartzels Creek. The Clearwater is a bit low and clear with fishing just okay, again, put in the energy and get fish. The Hoh has had mixed reports in both the upper and lower river. The lower river as of March 1st is now catch and release, single barbless hooks, no bait, same as the upper river. Pitch bait to all those hidden spots and in front of and behind rocks, along the edges, seams and under logs. Yes you will lose gear and fish but

that is what it will take to get fish. The Bogachiel is fishing just okay with a few new Natives in here too. All the high tides will bring fish now. The Sol-Duc has slowed a bit and seems most of the natives here are not as restless as the other river systems. Mixed reports from all river systems on the coast but if you put your time in you will hook fish. Jigs will work in 1/8 oz under floats. We were hooking fish on synthetic egg clusters. Springers are starting to show a bit on the Lower Columbia River. I fish out of the Cathlamet area mostly from about March 23rd through the closure on April 19th. I have spots open for the Springers so call and book your trip before all the best dates are gone.

Jay and Reid (from Pro Guide Brad Shride)



Soapbox Update - Here's a thought. The million dollar grate intended to keep sea lions out of the fish ladder at Bonneville was improperly designed. There's a sea lion **inside** the ladder as you read this. These critters can be seen below the Dam eating oversized (breeding stock) sturgeon. It's time for decisive and effective action.

Concern over the growing interaction between sealions and salmon and sturgeon has sport and commercial interests as well as fishery managers on edge. There has been some movement at the state level to curb this behavior and some managers believe methods will be effective. One thing is for sure, we are running out of time in dealing with this issue. Broodstock sturgeon are a valuable commodity. If this trend continues, there will be dire consequences to our sturgeon stocks, not to mention salmon populations. Stay tuned on this issue.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Sport caught spring Chinook have been landed. Although catches are far from good, effort is paying off for a lucky few sportanglers- both boat and bank anglers participating in the fishery. The most telling story of spring Chinook presence is gillnet success on the lower Columbia in a recent opener. About 111 spring Chinook were landed in the March 7 – March 8 opener while in the previous week, more than double that were landed. Average size of the fish dropped to just over 15 pounds but this fishery is performing as expected and the nets will likely fish again next week. To date, the gillnets have landed almost 400 spring Chinook.

Sturgeon catch and effort remains poor in the stretch below Bonneville Dam. No keepers were tallied in the weekend check and only a few were counted above Bonneville Dam with the Bonneville Pool itself checking in the most.

Steelhead action remains fair in The Dalles Pool with close to 2 fish per boat counted. This fishery is remaining surprisingly stable but that likely won't last too much longer.

Walleye anglers didn't do as well this week as last. Action for walleye should improve as we head into the spring but the cold front could dampen success for a while.

The Guide's Forecast – Just as things started to look up, a cold front has hit the NW corner of the state and the Columbia will be a cold place to fish. Water conditions should remain stable however with maybe a bit of color added to the Columbia and Willamette Rivers by the weekend. The temperature will be the biggest factor and may hamper success on relatively good tides this week. I am forecasting continued poor catches for spring Chinook this week on the mainstem Columbia but things will be picking up soon. The best areas will be from Longview to the estuary- and by "estuary", I mean Altoona and upstream.

If anglers are desperate for sturgeon, the water above Bonneville Dam will be the best option- and that's not a red-hot option at that. Fresh smelt will remain the key ingredient- or as fresh as you can get since dippers- both sport and commercial are not finding success on the Cowlitz.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – With every spring chinook reported, the fever intensifies. A handful of salmon were taken over the last week. As catches gradually increase, additional pressure may be seen mounting on the lower Willamette. Oregon City has realized some decent catches but the Multnomah Channel and Portland Harbor are viable options if good water conditions persist.

Keeper-sized sturgeon have been taken in the Lower Willamette from Oregon City to the Harbor. While smelt remains the best bait, it's only getting harder to find any. Lots of shakers are being taken in the process which further depletes anglers' bait supply.

The Guide's Forecast – Nets were seen flying again today at Sellwood Bridge and that can mean only one thing: springers. With the season just barely underway, anticipation is high and hopefuls are hoglining in the usual areas.

Sturgeon fishing is expected to improve as the water warms, but so will spring chinook action and it's the latter that will attract the most attention. Herring work well in the early season- especially for trollers working from Sellwood Bridge downstream. When the water temperatures do rise into the low 50's prawns will take significant amounts of fish. If water clarity maintains itself at Oregon City, spring Chinook could be available in fair numbers where the log rafts used to be, at the Garbage Hole and upstream of the I-205 Bridge on the Sandbar and Lakeline areas.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Steelheading was fair on the Clackamas until the storm this week pushed water levels up and temperatures down. Fortunately, the water came up less than a foot as a result of the deluge.

Precipitation raised the water level of the Sandy River as well this week, but only by about six inches at Bull Run as of Thursday, March 9th.

The Guide's Forecast – Steelheading is expected to be fair to good on the Clackamas as it recovers from the rain. It should fish well through next week. The upper river is currently dropping rapidly. Start high on the system and work downstream as the water levels recede for best results.

In the midst of improving steelhead reports, the Sandy River produced its first springer on Tuesday, March 7th. An eight-year-old angler fishing with **pro guide Brandon Glass (503-666-5370)** landed the chrome 24 pounder. The fish took one of the new K11 Xtreme Kwikfish

and Brandon got his 2 customers into 2 native steelhead shortly after that. The Chinook took the "spotty body", that is, the chrome with red dots. And so it begins on the Sandy. The water color is perfect.

North Coast District Fishing Report – Steelheading on the North Oregon Coast has been quite consistent on most days. Water conditions opened up many options for steelheaders last week and with the recent rain freshet, they are all back on the table again. The Wilson was one of the few north coast "biggies" to keep its color for most of the week although it experienced a slight hike on the afternoon of the 8th. The Nestucca fished fair at best for the first week of March as **pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** reports. Jesse states, "The Nestucca is getting low, and has been quite clear. Fishing has tapered off dramatically, with just a few fish caught in a day. The boat and bank pressure has been the heaviest we have ever seen, both winter and fall. Yesterday and the few days prior, there was very little space to fish, with nearly 60 boats per day. With clear water and the amount of traffic, results were hard to come by, and little was caught. Fish have been caught with floats and jigs, in the normal pink, red and peach combinations, and from what I have seen, about 80 percent of the people on the river are fishing floats. We, as most of you know, are drifting small baits of eggs with a tiny bit of color. We have dropped down into summer tactics, using really light gear, and fishing every little spot we can. We are hoping for a nice, good soaking rain, and that will certainly help. We will see what happens from there. Look forward to some company if you come over, you will have some friends. Float safe, and be kind, and everything will be just fine..."

The Wilson recently put out great numbers of fish- both hatchery and wild fish on 3/7 and 3/8. The river gained some color with a small bout of rain we had and was in ideal condition on the 7th. Although it fished very good on the 8th as well, the river began rising with a storm front that brought big winds with it that day. Sidedrifters have ruled the roost on most days and eggs have been the big ticket. Plugs have also worked well but they seem to be responding to bait best.

The lower Trask has also put out some fish although no big numbers. With the lower flows, most anglers have been concentrating their efforts in the lower reaches of coastal streams. Some quality fish have been reported.

The Necanicum River has also fished fair recently. The very north coast received more rain than the Tillamook area and that puts the smaller streams like the Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem "on the table" while putting the big Nehalem out of commission for a while. We only managed 3 opportunities on 3/8 but the storm front was fully upon us and the river was rising. One of the fish was an estimated 13 pounds however!

Anglers in pursuit of sturgeon have not done so well on Tillamook Bay recently. Effort has been fair with some of the recent nice days we have had but keepers have been hard to come by. Sand shrimp remains the best bet.

Crabbers have also suffered on the success side as of late. Commercial effort has slowed overall but pot setters are beginning to work alternate areas- like the beaches just off of the mouths of north coast estuaries. Both Netarts and Tillamook Bays have slowed dramatically for crab catches.

The Guide's Forecast – With the recent rain freshet to stimulate further migration of wild winter steelhead, most north coast streams should begin to fish well again. The prolonged period of low water adds to the excitement of the rain freshet. All methods should work well with sidedrifting bait- particularly eggs, a big winner. The sidedrifting method lends itself to short drifts so some anglers may look to drift sections of river more than once or opt to hit 2 rivers in one day. Best bets in order of productivity include: Necanicum, Kilchis, North Fork Nehalem,

Trask, Wilson and Nestucca (hatchery fish an option too with close to a 1:1 ratio) and mainstem Nehalem. With some bruiser bucks available, don't hesitate to work the deep chinook water with deep diving plugs as these large steelhead respond well to this method.

As the water drops, fishing will only get better. Bait will produce good results in the higher flows but when the water begins to drop and clear, more methods will produce results. Bobbers and jigs as well as pulling plugs- especially those new K-11 Xtreme Kwikfish that are fresh on the market are producing excellent results. The Tadpollies however are also working well- our 2 biggest fish (15 and 13 pounds on the 7th and 8th) came on chrome/chartreuse head and green pirate Tadpolly plugs. These plugs were fished in the deeper water where Tadpolly's excel. As the water drops and clears, anglers will want to go to more subtle colors and smaller baits. Choose the north coast stream that best fits that "steelhead green" criteria. One of my favorites, the Nehalem, won't fish well again until early next week at the very least.

Sturgeon anglers don't have great tides to work with but there are low tides in the late afternoon over the weekend for folks still hot to hunt sturgeon. The weather however looks to be cold and being in the middle of Tillamook Bay would not be one of my first choices.

Since crabbing on the bay has slowed and the ocean is not an option, overall, this may be a poor weekend to recreate on our coastal estuaries. If you do find yourself needing to go crabbing, bring quality bait, lots of pots (while staying within the legal limit of 3 per person) and plan on aggressively working the bay. High slack in the Tillamook area will be in the late morning over the weekend.

Central & South Coast Reports – The Siletz River is on the drop as this is being written the afternoon of Thursday, March 9th, but rain in the next couple of days will keep the level above 6.5 into the weekend according to projections. Steelhead are entering and anglers will catch them when the Siletz is dropping.

Offshore bottom fishing has been rewarding for the six fish bag limit. Anglers may keep rockfish, greenling, flounder, sole, cabezon and some others but not canary or yelloweye rockfish. Ling cod limits have come in at Depoe Bay over the last week.

Crab limits are tough on Yaquina Bay, even for hopefuls working the entire incoming tide. Large red rock crabs are often in the catches here. They're edible but they're not Dungeness. Ocean crabbing is good when wind and wave action allow for safe crossing.

While steelheading has slowed on The North Fork Alsea, it will be a worthwhile destination for winter steelhead as it is expected to recover quickly from the effect of rainfall this week.

Bill Kremers (541-754-6411) adds this: "... fished the Alsea River last Friday. River was a little off color for the water level. It was a good day for catching sea-runs, but not steelhead. I have heard reports of few fresh steelhead, you just have to be in the right section of the river."

The Coos and South Fork Coquille are productive for steelheaders fishing high on the rivers where the water clarity and flows are better.

As expected, lots of fresh water flushing into the bay below Reedsport has turned on the sturgeon bite. Oversize fish are common here, so get out the heavy gear to try this fishery. With good numbers of fresh winter steelhead in the system, the Umpqua is expected to fish well when the river drops and clears.

With well over 2,000 winter steelhead having crossed Gold Rey Dam and the upper Rogue River in great condition, anglers are experiencing decent results. The middle and lower river is worth attention, however, as spring chinook are being taken now along with fresh metalheads which are entering in the strong flows. The break in the weather next week is expected to offer some outstanding opportunities.

Plunkers on the Chetco River are experiencing good results from their efforts for steelhead in high water here.

While commercial crabbing is open through summer, officials out of Brookings claim that the 2.4 million pounds harvested represents 85 to 90% of the available Dungeness. The late start combined with weather delays resulted in a take half that of the record 2005 season.

Effective March 8, razor clamming reopens from Newport's north jetty to south of Tillamook Head. Razors are found in this stretch primarily at Agate Beach. The stretch North of Tillamook Head to the mouth of the Columbia will remain open. Razor clamming is regulated by the Oregon Department of Agriculture. Contact them at 1-800-448-2474.

On the Fringe: Trade that dull, boring office job for an exciting career as a commercial sea urchin harvester! With only 20 permits available for the State of Oregon, when these come available, they're awarded by lottery. Two permits are available this year. For information, call 800-720-6339 ext. 76112.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Fly fishers are finding cooperative Bull trout active during the warmest part of the day. Look for these fish to be around wood cover.

The recent precipitation brought a fine flush of fresh steelhead to the Grande Ronde and catches are good. Get 'em while they're hot because this one will wind down soon.

Another great report from **pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688)** who wrote this week, "Steelhead anglers are riding a roller coaster this winter as low and mid-elevation snows come and go in the region and water levels in local rivers rise and fall with advancing and receding snow lines.

"Generally this winter there have been few days that rivers have been too high to successfully fish, but there have been several days when the water levels were high enough to make fishing a challenge, and anytime the water was rising the catching was done.

"Early last week there was some doubt whether the rivers would be fishable by the weekend, but some freezing night and little rain brought the rivers into tolerable limits and fishing proved to be good.

"The relatively high water took its toll on more than the fishing recently when three anglers sank their drift boat on Monday in the river upstream from Washington Highway 129 and Boggan's Oasis. All of the passengers survived and the boat was recovered, apparently without damage.

"There were no creel surveys for the Grande Ronde River last week, so there are no statistics available, but Mary at Boggan's Oasis reports that anglers did quite well over the weekend in Washington. She had no reports from Oregon anglers. The Grande Ronde had dropped to about 3,000 cfs by Saturday, which put the river well into a fishable range, and the water continued to drop through the weekend, benefiting steelheaders.

"Oregon anglers in the Troy area likely have another week to 10 days of reliable fishing before

the bulk of the Oregon fish move further upstream, primarily into the Wallowa River, but also into the upper Grande Ronde and Catherine Creek."

Northwest Trout - The opener at Henry Hagg Lake was rewarding for those who understood the nature of stocked trout. That is, that acclimation to deeper water from the shallow concrete tanks in which they were raised takes some time.

Due to the fish's swim bladder, an organ which allows them to maintain an upright orientation in the water also causes them discomfort if they enter water deeper than six or seven feet, the ability to do so occurs over a period of two weeks or so. As a consequence, trollers reported mostly poor results, bank fishers somewhat better. A few anglers found some of the 16-inchers which were planted and one lucky fisher scored a nine-pounder.

This week, waters planted with trout in the Northwest Zone include Cape Mears Lake, Coffenbury Lake, Cullaby Lake, Hebo Lake, Lake Lytle, Lost Lake (in Clatsop County), North Lake, Smith Lake, South Lake, Spring Lake, Sunset Lake, Town Lake and Vernonia Pond. Dexter Reservoir in the South Willamette Valley was also stocked.

The Youth Events made possible by an appropriation by the Oregon Legislature are learn to fish opportunities for youngsters. The next event will take place Saturday, March 11th at Cottage Grove Pond off Row River Road east of Cottage Grove. Trout will also be stocked in preparation for the following event at Loren's Pond off Chance Road in Tillamook on Saturday, March 25th. These kids events start at 9 AM.

SW Washington - "Springer fever" is starting to set in on the lower Columbia River. During an aerial survey the first Saturday in March, biologists counted 219 boats and 184 bank anglers fishing for **spring chinook salmon** from Cathlamet to Vancouver. Nearly 100 more rods were counted that week on the Cowlitz and Lewis rivers. The result: A total of five springers - all hatchery fish - turned up in creel checks that week.

That's about par for the course this time of year, said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist. "The leading edge of the run is showing up at almost exactly the same time as last year," Hymer said. "As a rule, the catch starts out slow, then picks up quickly once the bulk of the run arrives."

The run usually peaks in the mainstem Columbia in early to mid- April, and a few weeks later in the tributaries, Hymer said. But that doesn't mean time spent on the water now is time wasted. "Hey, this season is just getting started," Hymer said. "The weather's been pretty nice lately and people are shaking down their gear. Occasionally they're catching a nice fish as a bonus."

As previously reported, the projected return of 88,400 upriver spring chinook to the Columbia River system is down significantly from last year's actual return of 106,900 fish. But returns to some specific areas are up. Drano Lake, for example, is expected to see a return of 12,500 spring chinook this year compared to 4,000 last year. The forecast also calls for the return of another 7,400 fish to the Wind River; a total of 3,800 returned there in 2005.

But to Hymer, the Cowlitz River looks like the place to be when the action begins. "A lot of anglers have left the Cowlitz in recent years to fish the mainstem," he said. "But, with an expected return of 8,700 springers this year, the Cowlitz looks underutilized to me." By comparison, the Lewis River is expected to see a return of 4,400 fish and the Kalama River 2,100.

Anglers planning to fish for spring chinook in tributaries that feed the Bonneville Pool should be aware of several new rules approved for the coming season. On the Wind River and Drano Lake, the season opens March 16. For the Klickitat and White Salmon rivers, the fishery begins April 1.

On all those waters, anglers will be required to release wild spring chinook salmon, although the upper portion of the Wind River opens to retention of any chinook salmon May 1. In addition, fishing on the Klickitat River will be limited to three days per week - Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays - through May 31 with a bag limit of one hatchery chinook or steelhead per day.

All of those changes are designed to conserve wild chinook salmon in the Columbia River basin, said Craig Burley, WDFW regional fish manager. "This year, for the first time, all age classes of hatchery chinook salmon returning to tributaries of the Bonneville Pool have been marked for identification," Burley said. "That will allow us to have a selective fishery that maximizes fishing opportunities for hatchery chinook, while conserving wild stocks."

Meanwhile, steelhead fishing has been good on the Kalama River, said Chris Wagemann, WDFW fish biologist. "Most are bright fish," he said, noting that about 85 percent of those fish are wild fish, which must be released. Bank anglers casting for steelies have also had some luck on the Cowlitz in recent days, while those fishing for sturgeon in the Columbia have mostly been catching - and releasing - undersized fish.

Still hungering for **smelt**? There's still a chance the run could show up on the Cowlitz River before the season ends March 31, Hymer said. "They've reappeared in the commercial catch on the Columbia River, but we still don't have reports of any significant catches on the Cowlitz," he said. "The next few weeks will tell the tale."

North Central Washington – Columbia Basin lakes opened to fishing March 1, mostly ice-free but with cold air and water temperatures, said WDFW district fish biologist Jeff Korth of Moses Lake. **Rainbow trout** catch rates were very slow, Korth said. "But that's improving as everything warms up," he added. Martha, Quincy, and Burke lakes in Grant County are particularly worth a trip, he said, and Dusty and Lenore will also be good as the season continues.

On opening day, the best catch rate was measured at Burke Lake, where anglers averaged just over three trout apiece at a rate of about one hour per fish. Burke Lake's rainbows were all 12-inch yearlings, with no carryovers from last year's hatchery stocking counted in the catch. Quincy Lake saw anglers averaging 2.4 fish per angler at about an hour per fish during the opener. Quincy's catch was mostly 10-inch yearlings with about five percent measuring 20- to 24-inches. Martha Lake's opener creel check showed an average of 1.5 fish per angler at just over half-a-fish per hour. Martha's fish were 12- to 13-inch yearlings with about ten percent in 14- to 15-inch carryovers. Upper Caliche Lake had very poor fingerling rainbow survival, Korth said, probably due to the trout fishery being overrun by **perch** and maybe **bass**.

Most of the catch at Upper Caliche on the opener was in 16- to 19-inch carryovers, but anglers averaged less than half a fish apiece. Several selective gear rule lakes with daily catch limits of just one fish also opened March 1, and a few anglers who ventured out to those lakes were checked by Korth and other WDFW staff. Dusty Lake averaged about 4 to 5 fish caught and released per angler, with 2 to 3 fish caught per hour, mostly 14 to 16 inches, with some up to 22 inches. Lenice saw about three fish per angler at the same catch rate, with most fish in the 16- to 18-inch range and a few up to 21 inches. Lake Lenore, which is open for catch-and-release only at this time, had an average of about two 18- to 20-inch **Lahontan cutthroat trout** per angler, at a rate of about one fish per hour. "The fishing is only going to get better at these and many other Columbia Basin lakes," Korth said.

Steelhead fishing is starting to pick up on both the Methow and Okanogan river systems in Okanogan County. WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff said fishing should only improve as the water temperature warms up and fish start to become more active. "We encourage anglers to

retain hatchery adipose-clipped steelhead, since one of the reasons for this fishery is to remove hatchery fish," Jateff said. The season is scheduled to close March 31, but anglers should be aware that due to wild fish impacts, closures could come at any time. If early closures are needed, they will be posted on the WDFW website and at WDFW access points along the rivers.

Due to colder than usual temperatures in February, Jateff also reports there are still ice fishing opportunities in Okanogan County. Davis Lake, near Winthrop, is producing 11- to 12-inch **rainbow trout**; Sidley Lake, near Oroville, is providing good fishing for rainbows up to 14 inches; and Bonaparte Lake, east of Tonasket, provides fishing through the ice for **Eastern brook trout**.

Spectacle Lake, which opened March 1, was treated last fall to remove undesirable fish species and will not be re-stocked with trout until mid-April. So even though the lake is technically open, Jateff said there's nothing to catch until the trout go in. Spectacle is due to receive 30,000 catchable-size rainbows and 1,000 larger triploid trout. In May, it will also be planted with 150,000 fingerling rainbows, which should provide an excellent fishery in Spring 2007.

South Central Washington - The Yakima River from Roza Dam to the base of Keechelus Dam reverted to selective gear rules March 1. That stretch of the river closed Feb. 28 to fishing for whitefish with bait, said WDFW fish biologist Jim Cummins. "March is generally a favorite time for many **trout** fly anglers on the Yakima," Cummins said. "Fishing should pick up as water temperatures rise. Flows in March are generally low unless rain on snow events in the higher elevations cause freshets."

The Naches, Bumping and Tieton rivers remain open for whitefish through March 31, but are closed for trout and steelhead. Most rivers and streams remain closed until June 1. "All of these selective-gear waters will see a change on May 1 that anglers should be thinking about now as they gear up for spring and summer fishing," Cummins said. "All will require that anglers use knotless nets to reduce abrasion and scale loss and therefore increase survival of released fish." Cummins said most fly fishers already use knotless nets, but others will need to gear up.

WDFW fish biologist Eric Anderson reports the first round of hatchery **rainbow trout** stocking in Yakima and Kittitas County lakes is complete and more anglers are starting to get out on those waters as the weather improves. Anglers can check the weekly stocking report for the latest information at the WDFW web site.

"One lake that was reported to be stocked, Denmark Pond in Kittitas County near the community of Kittitas, will no longer be available for fishing as the access owners have closed it to public fishing due to development going on around the pond," Anderson noted. "So we have revised our list and taken Denmark Pond off the list. It is small, less than two acres, and the fish will be distributed into the other listed lakes and ponds in the area."

Puget Sound – Anglers continue to have some success hooking **blackmouth** in the area's fisheries. The catch in marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay) and 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) has slowed recently, but anglers in marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands) and 9 (Admiralty Inlet) are finding some nice fish. "I'm hearing reports of some larger fish - 10- to 15-pounders - in area 7, and some decent size fish in area 9, particularly around Useless Bay and Mutiny Bay," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW Puget Sound recreational salmon manager. Overall, the blackmouth season has been fairly good, said Thiesfeld. "This time of year, folks need to decide whether to go spring chinook fishing on the Columbia River or blackmouth

fishing in Puget Sound," Thiesfeld said. "With the success some fishers are having with blackmouth, I would stick with Puget Sound and wait a few weeks before heading out to the Columbia River."

The Everett Ramp has been the busiest in the region, with 41 anglers checking in seven chinook on March 3, and 117 fishers hauling in 16 blackmouth on March 4. Elsewhere, 23 anglers accounted for six chinook at the Bellingham Ramp on March 4, while 62 fishers checked in six blackmouth at the Washington Park Launch the following day.

Anglers fishing in marine areas 7 and 9 have a daily bag limit of one salmon in both areas. Those fishing in marine areas 8-1 and 8-2 have a daily limit of two salmon, but wild chinook must be released. Unlike hatchery fish, wild chinook have an intact adipose fin.

For **steelhead** anglers in northern Puget Sound, the Skagit and Sauk rivers are about the only rivers open for fishing. Most areas of the Skagit River remain open for the harvest of hatchery steelhead through March 15, then switch to catch-and-release from March 16 through April 30. The catch-and-release fishery on the Sauk River started March 1. Wild steelhead are distinguished from hatchery fish by their intact adipose and ventral fins. 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 posted on the same website.

Anglers interested in Puget Sound salmon fisheries might want to attend a public meeting March 9 at WDFW's Mill Creek office, 16018 Mill Creek Blvd. The meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m.-9 p.m., and is part of the state's salmon season-setting process. Two additional public North of Falcon meetings, which involve planning for the numerous fishing seasons on Washington's waters - including Puget Sound - are also scheduled for March 15 and March 30. Both meetings will be at the Lynnwood Embassy Suites Hotel and are scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. on both days.

Olympic Peninsula – After a winter marked by periods of record rainfall, **steelhead** anglers are once again routing for a bit more liquid sunshine. Rain is in the forecast for the second week of March, the antidote to the low-water conditions that have hindered fishing since the last week in February. That could mean good news for the weekend of March 12-13, said Mike Gross, WDFW fish biologist.

"Steelhead fishing could get pretty hot this weekend," Gross said. "Often, a good time to hit it is when the flows peak and start to drop. That's when the fish move."

Despite low flows, creel checks conducted March 3-5 found that anglers have been finding steelhead - especially wild steelhead - on several north coast rivers. On the lower Hoh River, 95 anglers interviewed caught 50 wild steelhead and one hatchery fish, the only one kept during that period. A similar story played out on the upper Hoh above the Oxbow Campground, where 81 anglers caught 42 wild steelhead and one hatchery fish.

On the Bogachiel River, 141 anglers caught 49 steelhead, divided fairly evenly between wild and hatchery fish. Five anglers were checked on the Calawah River with seven fish, the best catch rate of any surveyed. "There are definitely steelhead in the Calawah, but that river is hard to access - especially during low flows," Gross said.

Gross 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.

Farther south, steelhead fishing has also been good to fair on rivers such as the Chehalis, Hump Tulips and Skookumchuck, said Hal Michael, another WDFW fish biologist. "But they, too, could benefit from a little rain," he said.

On the saltwater, creel checks for blackmouth salmon during the first week of March were heavily weighted toward Hood Canal, where 113 chinook salmon were entered in the 24th annual Geoduck Restaurant Salmon Derby. An 18 pound, 9-ounce fish took first prize, worth \$600. "Hood Canal may be the best place in the region right now to catch a blackmouth salmon," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW Puget Sound recreational salmon manager. He noted that Coyote Banks in Marine Area 6 has also been producing some nice fish lately, as has the middle part of Marine Area 9. Anglers fishing off Ediz Hook near Port Angeles have also been logging consistent catch rates.

Razor-clam enthusiasts should note that WDFW has tentatively scheduled a **razor-clam** dig on ocean beaches March 25-28, followed by another dig April 28-May 1. If marine toxin tests are favorable, razor-clam beaches at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks, Copalis and Kalaloch will all open for digging on evening tides March 25-27. Two of those beaches - Twin Harbors and Mocrocks - are also tentatively scheduled to open for a fourth day of digging March 28. As during previous digs this season, no digging will be allowed before noon at any of those beaches.

The dig tentatively scheduled in late April, on the other hand, is the first of the season scheduled on morning tides. Any digging done during that opening must be completed by noon. Provided toxin tests are favorable, four - and possibly all five - razor clam beaches will open for digging in late April. Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks and Copalis are all tentatively scheduled to open April 28-30 on morning tides, followed by a one-day dig May 1 at Twin Harbors and Mocrocks.

An April opening at Kalaloch is in question, however, because the clam harvest on that beach has been unusually low during recent digs. Final word on digs tentatively scheduled this month and next will be announced once marine toxin tests determine whether clams on those beaches are safe to eat. Diggers are required to carry a valid 2005-06 fishing license and keep their clams in a separate container.

Anglers looking ahead to **halibut** season might want to check out [opening dates](#) and other information on the WDFW website. Seasons for most waters are similar to last year, although most areas of Puget Sound will open April 9 - five days earlier than last year. In addition, halibut fishing in marine areas 3 (La Push) and 4 (Neah Bay) will be limited to three days per week to help extend the length of the popular fishery. Starting May 9, those areas will be open Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays until the first area quota is taken.

Eastern Washington - The March 1 fishing opener got off to a cold, slow start at the Tucannon River impoundments in Columbia County and at other fishing waters in the region. But the action is starting to heat up as temperatures rise. WDFW Tucannon Fish Hatchery manager Doug Maxey said all seven man-made lakes - Beaver, Big Four, Blue, Deer, Rainbow, Spring, and Watson - are finally stocked with **rainbow trout** and are accessible.

WDFW district fish biologist Glen Mendel of Dayton reminds anglers that when fishing with bait, the first five trout caught must be kept, no matter what size. When fishing with artificial flies or lures, anglers can catch-and-release until they retain the five-trout limit. The reason for the difference, explains Mendel, is that about half the fish caught on bait die because they tend to swallow bait, and less than five percent of fish caught on artificial flies or lures die. "When bait fishermen sort their catch for size, it's a waste of hatchery time and money to raise those fish and stock them in the lakes," Mendel said.

Mendel noted that when the new fishing regulations go into effect May 1, the Tucannon lakes and other year-round waters in southeast Washington will shift to a new rule that only two of the daily catch limit of five trout can be over 13 inches. Mendel says that should reduce the number of dead released fish and distribute the larger trout among more anglers. Travel to the Tucannon lakes has been better than expected, with only minimal traffic delays on the Tucannon River Road during the Wooten Wildlife Area helicopter logging operation.

In Lincoln County, Coffeepot Lake opened March 1 with some ice, but a good number of anglers were out and doing fairly well. The ice is dwindling now and WDFW district fish biologist Chris Donley said that Coffeepot's rainbow trout are averaging 14 to 20 inches with the occasional 22-inch and better fish. Spokane County's Amber Lake opened for catch-and-release fishing on March 1, and despite some lingering ice, Donley reports anglers have been doing well on similarly sized trout. "Catch rates at both these lakes should only improve as the season advances," Donley said.

Winter season lakes in the region - Fourth of July on the Lincoln-Adams county line, Hog Canyon in Spokane County, and Williams in Stevens County - should provide good rainbow fishing till the end of the season, March 31. Several year-round waters in the region have been stocked with hatchery trout, most notably Sprague Lake, which also has a good number of carryover rainbows from last year's stocking. "Now is the time to go after Sprague's rainbows," Donley said.

It's not too early to start seeking panfish in other year-round waters, Donley noted, especially **yellow perch** in Bonnie, Eloika, and Long lakes. **Largemouth bass** can also be active on east and southeast facing shorelines of lakes like Rock, Silver, Eloika, Sprague, and Bonnie on the warmer days of March, he said.

Water levels are plummeting on Lake Roosevelt, but shore anglers are doing well on rainbows. **Kokanee** catches, on the other hand, seem to be few and far between now. Anglers heading to Roosevelt should check the National Park Service [Lake Roosevelt](http://www.nps.gov/laro/home.htm) website for the latest information on water levels and boat ramp access. (<http://www.nps.gov/laro/home.htm>)

For fishers who want to explore the outdoors while indoors, the Inland Northwest Wildlife Council's annual Bighorn Outdoor Adventure Show runs March 16-19 at the Spokane Interstate Fairgrounds. The show features hundreds of fishing, hunting, and outdoor recreation goods and services vendors, along with information from organizations and natural resource government agencies, including WDFW. See [Bighorn Outdoor Adventure Show](http://www.wildlifecouncil.com/bighornsubsite/default.htm) for details. (<http://www.wildlifecouncil.com/bighornsubsite/default.htm>)

WDF&W website - <http://wdfw.wa.gov/>

Reader Email

Going fishing? Got an opinion on something? Outraged by the ocean salmon situation, seal populations or smelt no-show? Shoot us and Email!

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: drees@TheGuidesForecast.com

Michael Teague: SailCat@SailCat.com

Random Links

Winter Steelhead Report from the ODFW:
http://www.dfw.state.or.us/RR/fishing_forecast/

How To Catch Sturgeon:
<http://www.howtocatchsturgeon.com/>

All over the 'net and Emailed to TGF twice, it's still funny:
<http://www.compused.com/directlink/1240/>

Weekly Quote – "How like fish we are: ready, nay eager, to seize upon whatever new thing some wind of circumstance shakes down upon the river of time! And how we rue our haste, finding the gilded morsel to contain a hook. Even so, I think there is some virtue in eagerness, whether its object proves true or false. How utterly dull would be a wholly prudent man, or trout, or world! Did I say a while ago that I waited "for prudence" sake? That was not so. The only prudence in fishermen is that designed to set the stage for taking another and perhaps a longer chance." -
Aldo Leopold

GOOD LUCK!