

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 15<sup>th</sup>, – December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2006**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** As per usual for this time of year, sturgeon action seems to be slowing in the gorge for keepers and shakers. Although water temperatures stabilized last week, freezing levels and food supply should send them downstream for until early spring.

Flows at Willamette Falls have increased slightly with the water temperature rising to 42 degrees and the visibility currently unaffected but likely to color. Anglers have been hoping for river temps to increase as this should improve the sturgeon bite.

Winter steelhead are on the move at the Falls in modest numbers, jumping to double digits on December 10th and pushing the total over 170.

A couple of winter steelies have fallen to early optimists on the Clackamas but plunkers at Meldrum Bar below the mouth have a better chance of a hookup.

One lone hatchery winter steelhead has been confirmed from the Sandy River. The water is likely to be roiled by this weekend. Look for steelheading to start up here in January.

Fishing has been challenging in the high waters of the North Santiam, but the swift flows have caused hatchery summer steelhead to seek shelter near the smaller tributaries where anglers are catching a few.

Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake are scheduled to be planted with eight to 10 inch rainbows this week.

**Northwest –** North Coast anglers seized another good week of salmon and steelhead fishing in the Tillamook district. With the log jam on the Trask opened up for navigation, fishing was very good with bright fish in the high 30 pound class taken. Most streams have already begun to rise putting these fish in jeopardy through the weekend.

Although the action slowed after excellent success the week before, some fresh salmon were still being taken in the lower stretches including tidewater. Backbounced eggs and backrolled plugs were the ticket.

**Pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** reports, "The Nestucca also continued to put out bright chinook but this run should fade and winter steelhead fishing should be in full swing when flows drop." **Pro guide Jim Nicol (503-550-3166)** adds "Three Rivers will be a good option for bank anglers while boaters working the mainstem Nestucca below the entrance of Three Rivers should start to take steelhead as early as Sunday."

The North Fork Nehalem is getting steelhead back to the hatchery and should be a top option when the rains taper. It's neighbor the Necanicum is also a strong option but high winds and saturated streambanks will make this dynamic river a navigational hazard- be prepared.

Gnat Creek and Big Creek will also be options as they fish best when most other north coast rivers are too high for success. Bank access may be a problem however as some areas are well posted.

Crabbing is excellent on Netarts Bay and may remain that way through the weekend.

Razor clam digging may be an option by the beginning of next week. Clatsop area beaches will produce the

best results.

On the Alsea, **pro guide Bill Kremers (541 754 6411)** reports, "The Alsea River went up to 10 feet today and suppose to go higher for the next couple of days. I spent the day fin clipping steelhead at the North Fork hatchery. Something like 55 steelhead showed up at the hatchery, so the run is on. Hopefully the river will drop by early next week with some good fishing."

**Southwest** – Steelheading is fair on the mainstem and North Fork of the Umpqua River.

**Pro guide Jeff Jackson (541-268-6944)** reports, "The Siuslaw fished good for chinook last week but has since blown out. When the flows recede, steelhead fishing should pick up with plunkers taking the first fish on spin-n-glos and small baits."

Siltcoos and Tahkenitch Lakes close on December 15<sup>th</sup> but the fishery has been productive.

The Coos River is delivering some decent winter steelhead fishing while the run has started up on the Coquille where fishing is fair and improving.

Anglers on the Sixes scored bright Chinook once again over the weekend as the run winds down and thoughts turn to winter steelhead.

Winter steelheading on the lower Rogue remains slow although a few half-pounders are being taken. Summer steelhead fishing is spotty on the upper river due to chilly water temperatures.

A series of days when the ocean was flat late last week allowed crossing out of Port Orford where anglers scored limits of rockfish and lingcod. The lings ranged from the low twenties to 35 pounds.

Fall Chinook fishing is holding up on the Chetco with winter steelhead coming on strong. Metalheads are ranging from 10 to 14 pounds with an 18 pound hatchery fish taken recently.

Ocean crabbers are taking large, firm Dungeness in 100 to 120 feet of water where the bottom is sandy. Following the lengthy ocean closure, December crabbing is always reliable. Tides will be soft over the weekend, favoring crabbers, but we will move into a series of late-day minus tides by mid-week.

**Eastern** - **Pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688)** reports, "Grande Ronde and Imnaha anglers are putting in about four hours for each steelhead taken. Pressure is light. Upcoming winter storms may deter travelers but with the freezing level dropping, flows should stay relatively consistent."

**Southwest Washington**- The Cowlitz is seeing a stronger return of steelhead than last year. Blue Creek is producing the best numbers of steelhead and some coho are still being caught near Barrier Dam. A recent news release from WDF&W has the steelhead bag limit jumping way up!

### **Increase in adult hatchery steelhead daily limit on Cowlitz River and Blue Creek**

**Action:** Increase adult hatchery steelhead daily limit from two adults to six adults.

**Effective date:** Immediately through Jan. 31, 2007

**Species affected:** Adult steelhead

**Location:** Cowlitz River from boundary markers at mouth of the river to Mayfield Dam and on Blue Creek from the mouth to Spencer Road.

**Reason for action:** Hatchery escapement is expected to be met and harvestable numbers of steelhead are available.

**Other Information:** Fishing is allowed from the mouth up to the posted markers located 100 feet below Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery barrier dam. Fishing remains closed within 100 feet of the Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery barrier dam. Release wild steelhead and steelhead with a clipped right ventral fin. This regulation maintains all existing closed waters restrictions.

**Contact:** Wolf Dammers, Region 5 office in Vancouver, (360) 696-6210

*Fishers must have a current Washington fishing license. Check the WDFW "Fishing in Washington" rules pamphlet for details on fishing seasons and regulations. Fishing regulations are subject to change. Call the WDFW Fishing hotline for the latest rule information at (360) 902-2500, press 2 for recreational rules or check the WDFW webpage at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm> for details on fishing seasons and regulations. For the Shellfish Rule Change hotline call (360) 796-3215 or toll free 1-866-880-5431.*

Kalama and Elochoman River anglers are starting to take winter run fish but bright, late run chinook are still falling on the North Fork Lewis River.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – Sturgeon action slowed in the gorge this week with the best fishing checked among the bank anglers working the area. As temperatures cool area waters, action should begin to slow. Although some fish will likely remain in the area, they become lethargic and it will take warmer weather to stimulate a bite. Fish will also migrate downstream in hopes of finding warmer water in the lower Willamette and maybe a bonus morsel in what is expected to be a poor smelt return downstream of the Cowlitz River. Action from Portland to Longview showed the most positive results with five legal white sturgeon kept, plus 251 sublegal sturgeon released for 71 boats. Some anglers are reporting fresh smelt in the bellies of these fish.

Steelhead anglers are still finding good success in the John Day area trolling plugs for steelhead. Boaters are doing the best with an almost 2:1 ratio of hatchery to wild fish. Anglers are utilizing both the John Day mainstem and the Columbia River itself just upstream of the John Day Dam. Trollers will work deep diving plugs at depths of 6 to 14 feet deep.

Crabbing in the lower Columbia remains fair but freshwater influence is beginning to take its toll. With the lack of commercial sized keepers in the estuary, sport crabbers may enjoy additional opportunity out of Hammond. The seals would enjoy your company as well so bring lots of bait if you're not caging up your fish carcasses, or just bring poultry.

**The Guide's Forecast** – The Columbia River gorge sturgeon bite should begin to wane. With another cold snap due to NW Oregon, the bite should further degrade and possibly move downstream to the mouth of the Willamette River. Smelt will continue to be the bait of choice and there may be a rare opportunity to get your hands on some fresh caught commercial smelt. This premium bait however will be difficult to attain and we have no contacts at this time.

Steelheaders are also headed for inclement weather which will likely slow the catch and effort in the John Day area. Fish should begin to move out of the mainstem making the John Day area itself more productive. The larger "B" run fish should be headed further upstream to their home destination in Idaho. Bobbers and bait or jigs will continue to take the bulk of the fish in the John Day while trollers in the mainstem itself will likely find more challenging conditions.

Crabbers working the lower Columbia will have to be the "early bird" in order to cash in on the softer tide

series which should yield better results. Cage baits carefully to keep seals from robbing you blind or seek areas like lower Desdemona Sands where fewer crabbers are likely to draw fewer seals.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – Look for the lower Willamette River level to rise and the water to become opaque by the weekend. While the last flood cleared out a great deal of movable debris, it would be wise for boaters to keep an eye upstream for trees and logs. A few keepers were taken Portland Harbor over the last opener, but productive areas are likely to change with conditions in the next few days. The precipitation should have a positive effect on the sturgeon bite, particularly if it raises water temperatures.

Rain mid-week was causing the Santiams to achieve blowout status. The storm will finish the job.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Sturgeon like current and muddy water and there's likely to be plenty of both for a while on the lower Willamette. Boaters should use caution if these conditions are accompanied by woody debris. It's a good idea to keep a knife readily accessible as Columbia fishers do. You'll be thankful if a tree ends up on your anchor line. Losing an anchor is preferable to losing your boat - or worse. Baits of smelt or squid, with or without scents, will be effective. Try flats that might hold clam beds which will attract the sturgeon to feed. Sturgeon retention is allowed Thursday, Friday and Saturday each week but anglers can use only one single-point barbless hook. Fishing this week is probably out of the question. The Willamette at Oregon City is forecast to go over flood stage on Friday afternoon.

When the water starts to clear, plunkers should see an improvement in the winter steelhead bite. Spin 'N' Glos, often rigged with a little bait, will be the lure de jour. The stretch below the mouth of the Clackamas to Meldrum Bar is a popular spot, frequented by regulars most of whom are willing to show newbies proper rigging and technique. At the first sign of improving visibility, water will still be high and swift, so keep offerings close to the bank as that's the route the fish will take in strong current. It's the path of least resistance.

The North and South Santiams won't fish for at least a week.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – While a few winters have been caught on the Clackamas and one was reported earlier this week from the Sandy, the deluge this week has had the predictable result: High, muddy water. While we don't usually lump these two tributaries together in the same report, there are no appreciable distinctions between the two this week. Since runs on both these rivers are now comprised of later-running first-generation progeny of wild steelhead, the timing is later in the year than previously stocked hatchery bred and reared fish. While there may be fishable numbers as early as the last week of December, January will be a better option with winter steelheading as good as it's going to get by February. Eagle Creek on the Clackamas and Cedar Creek on the Sandy, both direct return patches to the hatcheries at those respective locations, will also be the first to drop and clear. Expect crowds - you won't be disappointed.

**North Coast District Fishing Report** – Anglers working the North Coast streams continued to find success into the weekend with the Trask River a highlight after the log debris was cleared for boaters to pass. Great numbers of fish were taken by driftboaters and a good number of them were bright! The Wilson waned as it had been hit so hard. Last week, most north coast rivers fished the best they had all fall. It was the first time most rivers fished due to the high water we experienced for the entire month of November.

**Pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** reports from the Nestucca River: "The Nestucca was fishing well for late fall Chinook, up until Yesterday (12/11). We got slammed with another heavy storm, which

was quite challenging. There are still some chrome fish available, but we expect them to shoot up with this recent rain. It is looking more like steelhead fishing in the next couple of weeks. It won't be long until we see a good push of them in the lower half of the river. As it stands today, Fall kings is about finished, and the river is in marginal shape. Look for steelhead to follow soon.

**Pro guide Jim Nicol (503-550-3166)** also reported, "I was picking 1 to 3 quality fish on the Nestucca per day until recently. I think efforts on the Nestucca are better spent on targeting the Silver Bullets (Steelhead) of the Northwest. I have heard of some good days for those targeting Steelhead below 3 rivers. I would expect this rain will pull a lot of steelhead into all of the coastal rivers. This will be our last chance at catching some quality Chinook on the Wilson and Kilchis following this weather system. There is something about fishing the coastal rivers after the high water starts to recede that makes it hard to sleep the night before. I guess it is a little like Christmas Eve, for my children."

Smaller streams like the Necanicum have been too low to drift. Recent driftboaters have had to cut their way through downed trees to make it through the drift. Now that waters have risen, rain storms and high winds will likely put more dangerous debris in the river. Drifting may be challenging and anglers should not attempt a drift without a chainsaw or a back-up plan. Steelhead are available however but late run coho are present too and some folks are mistaking them for steelhead. The North Fork of the Nehalem was high and colored at mid-week but steelhead were entering the trap although angler effort and catch was poor.

Sturgeon effort was still low as salmon was still on the minds of many utilizing the conditions we had for most of the week and weekend. It's unusual that this late in the season trollers at the Ghost Hole continued to score over the weekend. **Avid angler Gary K.** observes, "Sat. saw about 8 fish for 14 boats - nice bright fish too! Right at and before high slack. Sun the water was choppy and nobody hooked up. Crabbing at Lysters was very good....Sat. 2+ limits for four pots. Sunday with three of us fishing we kept around 30 - being very selective - for five pots."

Crabbing results on Tillamook Bay will decline with the freshet this week chasing Dungeness out to the ocean. High water a debris this weekend will prevent safe crabbing in the bay. Netarts continues to produce good catches of keepers and without any major freshwater tributaries will deliver over the weekend.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Well, the big one is coming and it should send area rivers out again for the remainder of the weekend. With widespread flooding predicted for most major north coast streams, holiday parties will be the main focus of most anglers this weekend. Smaller streams like the Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem and possibly the Kilchis will be options on the last day of the weekend or early next week. Three Rivers will also be an option at that time and fish will be holed up at the hatchery taking advantage of the higher flows.

Large baits and dark colored drift gear soaked in scent will take the most fish when conditions allow. Fish the slower water closer to the bank and plunkers working the lower stretches of the river may also take fish in the shallower water.

North Coast estuaries will not be a very safe place to be this weekend. Wood debris and high winds will make for dangerous boating. Stay warm and dry with the family this weekend.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – The big news this weekend is the weather ... and that's not necessarily a good thing.

The storm front started hammering the South coast on Wednesday this week, dumping from one to three or more inches of rain. While most streams and rivers were in need of precipitation, there's some irony in

receiving it in such generous amounts. Rain is forecast to continue through Thursday, then taper off Friday. As of this writing (on Thursday, December 14th), it is predicted that the weekend will be dry or nearly so.

As usual, the small, volatile systems will fish first. To the Southwest, this means the Elk and Sixes systems which have been quite productive for late-season Chinook recently. It remains to be seen just how many fish remain as a major freshet can cause salmon to 'go the distance,' running the length of a river straight to the areas in which they'll spawn. Winter steelhead will be available for sure and the Elk should fish be the weekend if the weather forecast is accurate.

On a brighter note, while many rivers were showing a mix of fresh and aging Chinook, common this late in the run, a gullywasher will draw dark fish upstream to be replaced by chromers. If, that is, there are any bright fish yet to enter. Optimists would point out that most runs were late this year and the majority of anglers are optimistic by nature.

The steelhead run on the Siletz times out later than others. It'll get underway mid-January so the fact that it's headed for the 17-foot mark this week won't effect anglers.

Prior to the rainfall, a few winter steelhead were taken on the Alsea and are entering the hatchery facility. Predicted to rise steadily through Friday means it'll be some time be recovering. Steelheading will be good as it drops and clears.

The Umpqua, Coos and Coquille rivers are all very high and exhibiting a chocolate hue. The rain event may jump-start the sturgeon fishery below Reedsport.

Forget the Chetco 'til next week. It fishes best around 4,000 cfs or a little less but was over 30,000 cfs on Thursday, December 14th and increasing at an alarming rate. Hourly, no less. Winter steelheading will be good when it returns to fishable level and flow, but it won't be *this* weekend.

Storms on the have blown out the Rogue with the river running high and muddy. Only the uppermost stretch, where a few summer steelhead are available, holds any hope. Use bait for the best results in the low-40-degree water. When the water starts to recede, plunkers fishing the bars on the lower river will find fresh winter steelhead hugging the banks. Flood stage at Agness is 17 feet. The river is forecast to crest at 16.7 Thursday evening. The Grants pass stretch should also have some winters around as the river starts to recover.

Spring Chinook anglers on the Rogue River will see some changes in the areas where fish may be taken and expand those in which they must be released. A draft, in the works since 2004, would require catch-and-release on the upper Rogue for wild springers but may also allow a two Chinook per day bag limit downriver. This due to a dramatic decline in run numbers since the construction of Lost Creek Dam in 1976 which reduced spawning habitat by about one third while raising river temperatures. The spring Chinook run, which averaged 30,000 fish historically, has declined to an annual average of just over 8,000 fish over the last ten years. Broader catch-and-release restrictions are expected to nearly double that number. No date has been set for these changes to be implemented. More info online:

**[http://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/nfcp/rogue\\_river/](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/nfcp/rogue_river/)**

**Central and Eastern Oregon – Pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688)** reports, "The Grande Ronde River water level has held at 1,200 cfs for more than a week and the current weather system moving through the Pacific Northwest late this week is dropping snow in the mountains, which will minimize its effect on the river. Last week's creel survey for Oregon and Washington portions of the river found catch rates near 4 hours per fish and almost 40 percent of the fish caught were wild. Many of the anglers are fishing gear, but fly anglers are doing fine with winter fishing techniques."

**Northwest Trout** – Two weeks ago the ODFW planted a couple of valley ponds with large rainbows, commonly called 'brood trout,' but failed to get word to anglers (or outdoor writers) in advance. While they assured us that future plantings would be publicized in advance, evidently somebody dropped the ball as Walter Wirth Lake in Salem receive 110 trout running from eight to 20 pounds on Monday this week.

According to Henry Miller of the Statesman Journal, "Similar plants of the lunkers known by anglers as "brooders" from Roaring River Hatchery near Scio were made to Walling Pond, also in Salem; Sheridan Pond; Huddleston Pond in Willamina; Junction City Pond off Highway 99 just south of its namesake town and West Salish Pond near Portland."

The ODFW actually did announce this round of plantings, but not until Wednesday, December 13th. This stocking was made with a total of about 500 broodstock trout. All the common baits, including the popular Power Bait will take them as will spinners and other shiny lures.

### **Washington fishing reports:**

#### **From the WDF&W Weekender Report:**

##### **North Puget Sound**

Effort has been light on Puget Sound, but stalwart anglers venturing out onto the saltwater have found some **chinook salmon** in recent days, especially in Marine Area 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay). "Fishing for blackmouth has been pretty good recently for some anglers," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fisheries biologist. "We've seen a number of keeper-fish caught in the selective fishery and even a few further south in Marine Area 10 near Jefferson Head and Kingston."

Anglers participating in the selective fishery in marine areas 8-1 and 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) can keep up to two hatchery chinook per day, so long as the fish measure at least 22 inches in length. Wild chinook salmon, which have an intact adipose fin, cannot be brought aboard the boat.

In Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton), anglers have a daily limit of one salmon, and chinook must be at least 22 inches long. Thiesfeld reminds anglers that **crabbing** also is a possibility in Marine Area 10, where the fishery is open seven days a week through Jan. 2. "If you're in that marine area, you can drop a crab pot while fishing for blackmouth," Thiesfeld said.

Crabbing also is open each day through Jan. 2 in marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu), 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 9 (Admiralty Inlet), 12 (Hood Canal) and 13 (south Puget Sound). Other waters - including marine areas 7S (San Juan Islands), 7E (Anacortes to Bellingham), 7N (Bellingham to Pt. Roberts), 8-1, 8-2 and 11 (Tacoma-Vashon Island) - are closed to sport crabbing for the season.

Meanwhile, the **steelhead** fishery, which usually peaks around Christmas, is under way in the region. And fishing continues to be fair for **chum salmon** in a number of rivers, including the Green, Nooksack, Skagit and Skykomish, said Thiesfeld, who noted that salmon fishing closes in those and most other rivers after Dec. 31.

Anglers should check WDFW's *2006/2007 Fishing in Washington* pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>) for more information on fishing closures and regulations.

##### **South Sound/Olympic Peninsula**

Tired of turkey, ham and other traditional holiday fare? Anglers and shell fishers around the region can choose from a number of other options in the days ahead, including fresh-caught steelhead, salmon and - if all goes as planned - razor clams.

For the second straight year, favorable tides have allowed WDFW to schedule a **razor clam** dig over the New Year's holiday. So long as marine toxin levels remain within the acceptable range, an evening dig will be held Dec. 31 at all five ocean beaches - including Copalis - followed by another evening of digging Jan. 1 at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks and Kalaloch. One beach, Twin Harbors, is also scheduled to remain open for an evening dig Jan. 2. Final word on the dig will be issued about a week ahead of time, after a final round of marine toxin tests has been completed.

"Razor clam digging has become a New Years tradition for tens of thousands of people, and we don't want to let them down," said Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager. "The tides look good for digging, and we'll let people know whether it's a 'go' as soon as we can."

For best results, Ayres recommends that people start digging at least one hour before low tide. No digging will be allowed before noon any day. Evening low tides for the upcoming dig are as follows:

- Sunday, Dec. 31, (4:00 p.m., -0.0 ft.) all beaches, including Copalis
- Monday, Jan. 1, (4:53 p.m., -0.3 ft.) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks and Kalaloch
- Tuesday, Jan. 2, (5:43 p.m., -0.5 ft.) Twin Harbors only

Under state rules, harvesters are allowed to take no more than 15 razor clams and must keep the first 15 they dig, regardless of size or condition. Each digger's clams must be kept in a separate container.

Meanwhile, **steelhead** fishing is heating up on rivers throughout the region. The Bogachiel/Quillayute system was the biggest draw during the first 10 days of December, when 433 anglers reported catching 243 hatchery steelhead and five wild, unmarked steelhead. Forty-two of the hatchery fish and four of the wild fish were released.

Although the Hoh, Queets and Calawah rivers drew far fewer anglers, all north coast rivers are likely to see more action in the weeks ahead, said Mike Gross, a WDFW fish biologist. "If past years are any guide, we should see angler effort - and catch rates - pick up through New Year's Day," he said.

Farther south, steelhead fishing is also picking up on the Humptulips, Satsop and Wynoochee rivers, particularly around Black Creek, said Scott Barbour, another WDFW fish biologist. Anglers are also still picking up some bright coho salmon in the Satsop and Wishkah rivers, he said. "Those are some nice, big fish," said Barbour, who also recommended plunking for steelhead on the Chehalis River this time of year. "Steelhead fishing should continue to improve, so long as the rivers don't blow out," Barbour said. "Snow or a little rain would be OK, but another deluge could put the fishery on hold for a while."

Anglers are still catching **chum salmon** "hand over fist" at Minter Creek, but fishing remains slow on the Nisqually River, where erosion has turned the water the color of a latte, said Hal Michael, WDFW district fish biologist. "Visibility can be measured in millimeters, and I don't see that situation improving anytime soon," he said. Anglers can catch four chum salmon per day at Minter Creek, which is open to salmon fishing through Dec. 31. The Nisqually River remains open through Jan. 31, with a limit of six salmon, only two of which may be adults. Wild, unmarked chinook must be released.

For these and other fisheries, anglers are advised to review WDFW's *Fishing in Washington* rules pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>) for regulations currently in effect.

Saltwater fishing has been slow in most areas of Puget Sound, but some adventuresome fishers are still catching **crab** in Marine Area 13. "People have to work pretty hard at it - often sinking their pots 100 feet or more - but they are getting one or two Dungeness crab per pot," Michael said.

The crab season will remain open seven days per week in marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu), 6 (eastern

Strait of Juan de Fuca), 9 (Admiralty Inlet), 10 (Seattle/Bremerton), 12 (Hood Canal) and 13 (south Puget Sound) through Jan. 2, unless the catch quotas for those areas are reached before then. All other areas of Puget Sound, including Marine Area 11 (Tacoma/Vashon), are closed to crabbing for the season.

### **Southwest Washington:**

Hatchery winter steelhead have taken center stage on most tributaries to the lower Columbia River, although some boat anglers fishing the North Fork Lewis River have been catching bright fall chinook salmon weighing up to 50 pounds. Those hoping to claim one of those Lewis River hogs for themselves will have to hurry, because anglers must release any wild, unmarked chinook salmon they catch on the river starting Jan. 1, said Joe Hymer, WDFW fish biologist. "Most, if not all, of the chinook salmon being caught on the Lewis River are wild, so the retention fishery effectively ends on the last day of the year," he said.

Returns of **winter steelhead** got off to a fast start at the Cowlitz River hatcheries in early December, prompting fishery managers to increase the daily limit to six hatchery fish per day through Jan. 31. The six-fish daily limit is now in effect from the mouth of the Cowlitz River to Mayfield Dam and from the mouth of Blue Creek to Spencer Road. WDFW also extended the rule allowing anglers to fish up to 100 feet below the Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery barrier dam through January, rather than allow it to expire Dec. 31 as originally planned.

"It's clear that we'll have plenty of fish available for hatchery broodstock, so the rest are available for harvest," said Hymer, noting that 792 hatchery winter steelhead had returned to Cowlitz River hatcheries through the first week in December. That compares to 53 fish by the same time last year.

During the week ending Dec. 10, the 72 anglers checked in creel surveys had caught 16 hatchery steelhead, six adult coho and one adult chinook. Anglers fishing the Cowlitz near Blue Creek were catching steelhead, while those fishing near the barrier dam were mostly catching coho. Steelhead were a mixture of bright winter-run fish and darker, recycled summer-run fish. Ten other anglers checked on Blue Creek, a tributary to the Cowlitz, had landed six steelhead and released one.

Some of the region's best catch rates have been at Lake Scanewa (Cowlitz Falls Reservoir), where 50 boat anglers landed 38 adult coho and released 34 others during the week ending Dec. 10. Of the eight bank anglers checked, one had released a coho salmon.

Although hatchery steelhead returns have been outpacing last year's count on the Cowlitz River, they have been lagging somewhat on the Kalama and Lewis rivers. On the Kalama, 28 winter steelhead had returned to the Kalama Falls hatchery as of Dec. 6, compared to 87 by the same date last year. On the Lewis River, 153 winter steelhead had returned to the hatchery as of Dec. 5, compared to 460 last year.

"That doesn't mean a lot this early in the run," Hymer said. "Let's see what happens after the next big rainstorm." He noted that Colvin Creek, upstream to the power lines below Merwin Dam, opens to hatchery steelhead fishing Dec. 16, although salmon fishing in that area remains closed until Jan. 1.

**Sturgeon** fishing was slow through the first week of December on the lower Columbia River from the Wauna power lines to Bonneville Dam. Anglers looking for **sea-run cutthroat** trout might want to try Riffe Lake, where WDFW planted 200 one-pounders Dec. 5.

### **Eastern Washington:**

The best fishing for **steelhead trout** in the Snake River drainage is on two tributaries - the Grand Ronde and Tucannon rivers. The latest creel checks conducted by WDFW and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) show steelheaders spending an average of less than three hours of fishing per steelhead caught on the Tucannon and three to four hours on the Washington and Oregon sections of the Grand Ronde. Mainstem stretches of the Snake River saw averages of around 10 hours of effort per

steelhead. For complete details of the latest creel surveys, see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/snake/index.htm>.

Now is the time to fish Lake Roosevelt - the Columbia River reservoir behind Grand Coulee Dam - which is open to fishing year-round. The star attraction in winter is the half-million **rainbow trout** reared in and released from in-reservoir net pens. Heather Woller, WDFW fish biologist, said the big rainbows are usually biting well from mid-December through January, especially in the lower reservoir from Grand Coulee to Seven Bays. Roosevelt rainbows usually range from 18 to 24 inches.

Trout anglers should probably try fishing Roosevelt instead of the region's four winter-only rainbow lakes. Chris Donley, WDFW central district fish biologist, said recent warm weather and rain have left ice conditions risky for on-ice walking and frustrating for attempted boat launches at Fourth of July Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line and Hog Canyon Lake in southwest Spokane County. "Of course if we get another deep freeze that can all change," he said. When the two lakes are safely fishable, anglers will find a good number of fish in Fourth of July are 14 inches or better, which means a fishing trip could be short because only two of the daily catch limit of five trout can be over 14 inches. Hog Canyon has more 9- to 11-inchers, although enough 14- to 18-inchers to make fishing interesting. Safety isn't the only concern for trout anglers at the other two winter-only lakes - Williams and Hatch in Stevens County. Curt Vail, WDFW northeast district fish biologist, said that both lakes have very poor fishing because of illegal introductions of **yellow perch** that feed on and out-compete native trout. "And the perch themselves are pretty puny at this point," Vail said.

#### **North Central Washington:**

Recent warm weather and rain may have rivers and streams in the region running high and fast, but anglers itching to go after **whitefish** in those waterways have through March 31 to find better fishing conditions. Portions of the Chewuch, Entiat, Methow, Similkameen, and Wenatchee rivers and Sinlahekin Creek opened Dec. 1 for whitefish. Averaging 10 to 13 inches, these bony fish may be best smoked. They are relatively easily caught on maggots, small grubs, stonefly nymphs or sparsely tied artificial flies and small lures fished along the bottom of deep pools.

The daily catch limit is 15 fish using the standard whitefish gear - one single point hook size 14 or smaller (no more than 3/16-inch from point to shank). The gear rule is designed to provide a winter fishing opportunity but minimize the chances of catching other gamefish, which are not legal to harvest at this time.

Bob Jateff, WDFW district fish biologist, reminds anglers of the recently-announced change to the lowermost boundary of the winter whitefish fishery on the Methow River from the mouth at the Hwy. 97 bridge to Gold Creek. That stretch is open to whitefish only and closed to all other fishing. Jateff said that Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed **steelhead** stage in the area near the mouth of the Methow River. "Steelhead fishing is not open in the Methow River this year due to low numbers of returning wild fish," he said. "Closure of the lower area to fishing during the winter whitefish fishery eliminates the potential impacts to these listed fish." Jateff also noted that at this time the Okanogan and Similkameen rivers are closed to fishing for steelhead.

Four Okanogan County lakes - Little Twin near Winthrop, Big and Little Green near Omak, and Rat near Brewster - are providing decent **rainbow trout** fishing. The daily catch limit is five fish and bait is allowed. All four lakes shifted to a catch-and-keep season with standard fishing gear on Dec. 1.

#### **South Central Washington:**

WDFW district fish biologist Eric Anderson of Yakima reports that recent rain and snowmelt from warmer weather has the region's rivers and streams flowing high and fast. "That's not conducive to fishing for **whitefish**, so I doubt many anglers have been out for them in recent days," he said. "When conditions settle, though, it's always a productive fishery."

The whitefish season opened on the Bumping, Naches and Tieton rivers Dec. 1. The Columbia River between Vantage and Priest Rapids Dam and the Yakima River are also open for whitefish. Averaging 10 to 13 inches, these bony fish may be best smoked. They can be caught fairly easily using maggots, small grubs, stonefly nymphs or sparsely tied artificial flies and small lures fished along the bottom of deep pools. The daily catch limit is 15 fish. The standard whitefish gear rule requires that anglers use one single-point hook size 14 or smaller (no more than 3/16-inch from point to shank.) The gear rule is designed to provide a winter fishing opportunity while minimizing the chance of catching other gamefish, which are not legal to harvest at this time. Check the fishing rules pamphlet for all details.

Year-round waters that recently received surplus hatchery **rainbow trout** broodstock are still a good bet, Anderson said. "Many of those five- to ten-pound fish are still out there for the taking and - with the recent warm weather - it's all open-water fishing," he said. North FioRito and Mattoon lakes near Ellensburg in Kittitas County each received 125 broodstock. I-82 Pond #4 and Rotary Lake in Yakima County each received 125 fish and Myron Lake in Yakima County received 84.

North Elton Pond, the region's only designated winter-season **rainbow trout** lake, opened Dec. 1 and is also open and easily accessible, Anderson said. The 15-acre lake near Selah in Yakima County was stocked with 2,000 rainbows that average about ¾-pound and 10 to 13 inches. The daily catch limit is two trout.

### **Reader Email**

Alex T. wrote this week with a question: "I am a weekly reader of your report online and in the Oregonian. I know you have some expertise in Tillamook Bay and I was wondering if you know of any spots to bank fishing for sturgeon. I have tried doing some research bank area spots but can't seem to find any. Is there any maps or articles you can think of."

TGF co-editor and **pro guide Bob Rees** replied, "The only place in the bay itself is a location along Bayocean Spit where bank anglers walk out and fish the south channel. You can see anglers there on the outgoing tide fishing the deep slot where the south channel elbows back towards Garibaldi. You may also get lucky and find a sturgeon off of the Ghost Hole pull-out. This winter ought to be the time to try as all the fresh water has the crab out to sea and not competing for your bait!

"Good luck!"

Got a question, story to tell or information to share? Shoot us an Email!

Write to the TGF staff:

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### **Random Links**

Follow the weather at Tillamook live thank to the local PUD: <http://www.tpod.org/wdlive/>

Great small stream salmon videos. Large, free downloads:

<http://www.smallstreamsalmonfishing.com/>

**Weekly Quote** – "Piscator non solum piscatur – "There is more to fishing than catching fish."

**GOOD LUCK!**