

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 22nd – December 29th, 2006**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Sturgeon fishing continues to slow in the gorge as water temperatures begin a steady decline. This fishery will continue to slide until spring and keepers will become increasingly available from the mouth of the Willamette downstream. Smelt will remain the top bait and a few fresh smelt are being taken from commercial netters in the lower river.

Steelhead anglers are beginning to see a downturn in their fishery as summer run fish begin to feel the need to migrate to winter spawning grounds. Tributary fisheries like the John Day may linger for another few weeks with bobber and bait taking the majority of fish.

Precipitation pushed the Willamette River to over 90,000 cfs at the Falls on December 15th, increasing water temps to 48 degrees. As the water dropped, so did the temperature, back down to a chilly 42 degrees by Monday of this week. The visibility remains less than one foot. Sturgeon fishing has been fair in Portland Harbor and Multnomah Channel.

It's still early for reliable winter steelhead action on the Clackamas although fish have started entering the hatchery facility on Eagle Creek.

Water conditions are good on the Sandy which is typical when the freezing level is low. Since this river is 100% broodstock steelhead, the run is still a few weeks away.

The Molalla River is blocked by a log jam and impassable to driftboaters. The hatchery program ceased several years ago however a remnant wild run exists later in the season.

The North Santiam remains very high with trees and debris causing potentially dangerous situations at various locations. Check ahead and boat with care.

Huddleston Pond in Sheridan will receive 350 'Trophy Trout' (16 inches or better) this week. Scheduled to be planted with 'Catchable Sized' trout (eight to 10 inches) are Junction City Pond, Carmen Reservoir, Clear Lake, Leaburg Lake, upper McKenzie River, Quartzville Creek, Santiam River North Fork and Trail Bridge Reservoir.

Northwest – The Kilchis produced good catches of chinook on Sunday and Monday. Not many anglers are targeting hatchery steelhead with such a strong showing of late winter chinook. A downed tree will keep driftboaters from using the section of river from Kilchis Park to the logger bridge.

Flows are expected to remain relatively stable through the weekend making the Wilson River the best bet for late winter chinook and steelhead. Hatchery plants of steelhead were distributed further upstream giving bank anglers good opportunity above Mills Bridge. Lower river anglers should focus more on chinook until flows drop lower.

Only a handful of boats are targeting chinook in the Ghost Hole and a rare chinook was caught early in the week. Tillamook estuary anglers should focus their efforts on sturgeon at this point with a nice minus tide series currently underway. Unfortunately, the peak part of the tide is occurring after sunset.

The Trask and Nestucca Rivers have slowed for chinook and only a few steelhead are showing in Three Rivers.

Steelheading is slow on the Alsea according to **pro guide Bill Kremers (541 754 6411)** who goes on to predict that it'll be after Christmas before this one starts to produce.

Crabbing has picked up in the lower Tillamook Bay and remains good in Netarts Bay. Softer tides will allow for expanded crabbing opportunities by the middle of next week.

Southwest – The South coast has been blessed with an earlier-than-normal winter steelhead run this year and the forecast is for above average numbers of fish.

Winter steelheading has been fair to good on the mainstem Umpqua above Scottsburg. Warming conditions could get the sturgeon fishing underway below Reedsport. It's overdue.

Chinook fishing is expected to improve on the Coquille with waters dropping and clearing.

Coos River anglers are enjoying a winter steelhead run that is underway earlier than in seasons past.

The Elk has dropped and cleared since the last rain and is producing quality Chinook.

Winter steelhead are entering the lower Rogue in sufficient quantity to have created a worthwhile fishery. This run doesn't usually get underway until the last week of December but was jump-started by the recent heavy rains. Steelhead are running 8 to 15 pounds.

While over 30,000 cfs last week, the Chetco flow had moderated to 3680 cfs as of Tuesday this week. Many of the Chinook moved upstream with the freshet but winter steelhead catches are on the increase.

Eastern - Weather in Northeast Oregon has recently made the fishing opportunities spotty. Water levels became unmanageable a week ago, then cold weather arrived earlier this week and brought water levels into good fishing conditions. By midweek, water temperatures had dropped enough to create slush ice in the river. Not necessarily bad for catching, but it adds a new element and eliminates fly fishing and drift fishing bait. Catch rates have dropped from recent weeks due to volatile weather conditions.

Southwest Washington- Despite the increase in the daily bag limit to 6 steelhead, Cowlitz catches are mediocre at best. Bank anglers at Blue Creek averaged nearly 2 fish per rod but most of the catch was comprised of darker summer run fish.

Winter steelhead are being recycled on the Kalama River but the run is down slightly from last year. River conditions are good and this weeks catch should follow suit.

The North Fork of the Lewis is producing a few steelhead, coho and late run fall chinook. Only the steelhead are in quality shape.

Soapbox Update - From USCG Boating

Well its trade show time again and the Keep Hope Afloat Foundation is conducting another children's lifejacket giveaway at the Portland Boat Show. Last year they gave out 5000 quality Sterns lifejackets to any child 12 and under. This year they plan on doing the same thing but adding a return program where you can bring in any of your lifejackets, no matter the size, that you have grown out of and no longer use and receive a tax deduction credit. Can't get any better than that!

In order to make these programs a success there is a need for volunteers to help. I was discussing this with the folks at the Oregon State Marine Board and asked if they would be interested in some if the IFISH

family could participate. They gave the big thumbs up and asked me to pass the invitation. The Marine Board is coordinating the program and is scheduling the volunteers. The show runs from 6 to 14 January. If you are interested please contact MariAnn at 503-378-5158. Go ahead and drop my name!

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Columbia River Fishing Report – Interest in sturgeon fishing is dwindling in the Columbia River gorge where cooler water temperatures and inclement weather is turning people away. Although the bite has not been as good as it was in previous years, catchable numbers of fish are still available. For the few fishing fresh, commercially caught smelt (sorry, we still don't have a contact), success have been good. Most anglers are using old smelt and tipping their baits with shrimp or squid. Although the best fishing remains in the gorge, success is picking up slightly as it appears sturgeon are staging near the mouth of the Willamette where warmer water temperatures make over-wintering more tolerable.

Catches from Portland to Longview are poor for keepers. It may be several weeks before this fishery picks up and it may not at all if significant numbers of smelt do not show.

Effort for John Day Pool steelhead is also waning but conditions and the bite remain fairly consistent. Trollers and bobber and jig or bait anglers should be able to target these summer run fish for another week or so.

Here are the adopted sturgeon seasons for the Columbia River for 2007:

KELSO, WASH. Dec. 15, 2006 - The states of Oregon and Washington adopted 2007 Columbia River sturgeon sport fishing regulations yesterday during a Columbia River Compact meeting.

"The Columbia River sturgeon population is stable based on recent stock surveys, so fishery managers adopted a season similar to last year," said John North, ODFW Columbia River fisheries program manager. Beginning Jan. 1, 2007 the following rules will be in effect in addition to the permanent rules printed in the 2007 Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations.

Additional modifications to the Columbia River sturgeon recreational fishery above Wauna Powerlines will be considered for adoption at the Compact's Jan. 25 meeting.

Effective Jan. 1, 2007, retention of green sturgeon is prohibited in Columbia River recreational fisheries. Green sturgeon were listed for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act during summer 2006.

Above Wauna Powerlines

(Mainstem Columbia River from the Wauna Powerlines at river mile 40, upstream to Bonneville Dam and the lower Willamette River upstream to Willamette Falls including Multnomah Channel)

- Jan. 1 – July 31: Open to retention of white sturgeon Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.
- Aug. 1 – Sept. 30: Closed to retention of sturgeon, but open for catch and release.
- Oct. 1 – Dec. 31: Open to retention of white sturgeon Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

Below Wauna Powerlines:

(Mainstem Columbia River from the Wauna Powerlines at river mile 40 downstream to the mouth at Buoy

10.)

- Jan. 1 – April 30: Open to retention of white sturgeon seven days per week. Minimum 42-inch size limit.
- May 1 – 11: Closed to sturgeon retention but open for catch and release.
- May 12 – July 4: Open to retention of white sturgeon seven days per week. Minimum 45-inch size limit.
- July 5 – Dec. 31: Closed to sturgeon retention but open for catch and release.

Above Bonneville Dam

As described in 2007 Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations, open for sturgeon retention Jan. 1 until quota is reached. Catch and release may continue after quota reached.

The Guide's Forecast – The gorge will remain the best place to target keeper sturgeon but fish should begin migrating downstream in hopes of a smelt run actualizing or the warmer water temperatures of the Willamette River. Smelt will remain the key bait but unless its fresh, you had better plan on tipping your baits with squid or shrimp.

Softer tides begin to show on Christmas Day if folks are looking to crab the lower Columbia River. The action should remain fair to good into the New Year.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – The flow of the lower Willamette over the Falls has declined by over one-third since Friday last week to 60,000 cfs as of Wednesday, December 20th. The water temperature has continued to fall as well to a bone-chilling, metabolism-slowng 40 degrees. As of Sunday, December 17th, water covered most of Meldrum Bar although a couple of die-hard anglers were seen plunking the dirty river.

Rain pushed the level of Detroit Reservoir up about 50 feet, which excess will be released into the North Santiam, keeping the river high for weeks to come. Detroit provides flood control for the valley below it. While high, swift flows will hamper fishing efforts, it will also encourage fresh fish to enter providing a fine catch-and-release fishery for wild winter steelhead in about a month. Boaters are cautioned as logs may block passage on the North Santiam. The boat slide on the North side of Stayton Island is one such place and it will be next week before water district workers will be able to remove it. Drift boats should keep an eye out in any section of the river for a while.

The Guide's Forecast – It looks as if 2006 will wrap up with 4,000 sturgeon remaining in the quota allocated to sports anglers. This will likely result in an increase in the number of retention days in 2007 for both the Columbia and Willamette rivers.

The low water temperature is likely to slow the sturgeon bite in the lower Willamette. The visibility remains low below the Falls, which sturgeon prefer but they also like warmer water. Sturgeon fishing has been most productive in Multnomah Channel with most of the biters undersized. Portland Harbor has produced some fish as well. A variety of baits from squid and smelt to sand shrimp and even nightcrawlers have tempted fish. If rain this week raises river temperatures as expected, the bite will definitely improve. The water at Meldrum Bar is slowly receding and a Spin 'N' Glo tipped with a little bait could entice a steelhead or two if showers this week don't increase flows. Plunking in this area will become more productive in coming weeks.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Water color was perfect on the Clackamas Wednesday this week, although the river was a bit high. Waters are expected to rise and will probably color up with precipitation this week. As of mid-day December 21st, the temperature of the water was increasing which bodes well for steelheaders. The first winter steelhead which had entered the hatchery facility on Eagle

Creek last week have moved back into the creek according to the ODFW. A few steelhead are entering the Clackamas and while intercepting one is a long shot, some optimists are trying their luck. With the larger percentage of the run component of native parentage, the greater portion of the run will start in mid-January.

Due to slides upstream, the Sandy River turns muddy with even a little rain, so it's likely to be roiled.. One steelhead was landed here last week and one more was reported this week. The Sandy is weeks away from having sufficient number of broodstock steelhead to make it a worthwhile fishery, so it doesn't matter if it's off-color this week.

North Coast District Fishing Report – Chinook is still the main quarry for anglers on the north coast. The Kilchis was still putting out good numbers of bright chinook late last weekend. By mid-week, action had slowed as expected and darker fish were being found. A log across the river was reported by **pro guide Kent Anderson (503-550-6303)** as he plied the waters from the logger bridge to the Hwy. 101 takeout. They missed one fish on eggs in that float and talked to very few people with fish.

Pro guide Jim Nicol (503-550-3166) submitted this report. Jim writes, "Started fishing the Kilchis this past Sunday. The river had a perfect glacier green color conducive for enticing chinook to take plugs or eggs/shrimp. We had lots of opportunities but had a hard time putting them in the boat. We still managed to put a couple nice chinook in the boat, but had 7 chances that didn't go according to plan.

On Monday, we landed only one fish and had two other opportunities. I haven't heard of any steelhead showing up in the Kilchis and I have seen a little bit of effort in some fisherman starting to target them. I'm sure they are in the system, just not in large numbers.

Steelheader's targeting Steelhead this winter on the Kilchis should be aware of a tree that is across the river just downstream of the park. **The upper river is not drift able at this time.**

Tuesday we fished the Kilchis with no success. I took out at 11 am and bounced over to the Wilson. The river had about 1 1/2 feet of visibility. It was definitely a Kwifish show with an oiled up sardine wrap. In these conditions I really believe in changing my wrap on a regular basis and load them up with lots of sent. This method produced one #26 Hen and missed one other fish. Both fish took it in the bottom end of the hole. Be patient when working these fish in higher water that is off colored.

Also on Tuesday the State Police were drifting the Kilchis River- checking for licenses and making sure fisherman were marking their tags prior to putting their lines back in the river. Fisherman should be aware of all the coastal and fishing regulations and adhere to them fully. A fishing trip is expensive enough without a fine.

Good luck to all you steelheaders this winter. I'm looking forward to seeing you on the river!"

Pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808) has his pulse on the Nestucca River. Jesse writes, "Got slammed by the storm. I'm still trying to pick up the pieces around here. The Nestucca was out of shape but is coming in now. There has been very little fishing going on around here. We have heard of a few steelhead being caught, and occasional late Chinook, but it has been quite slow. The fish checker gals, have also counted very few fish caught over the last several days. So, the trend all year has been a late return. The winter fish seem to be the same so standby, and when they come, there should be a bunch. It could even be today!"

The Guide's Forecast – Predicted rises in river levels will likely keep larger north coast streams from fishing into the holiday weekend. Rivers like the Wilson were on the rise on Wednesday with predictions of

further rainfall later in the week. This will put more pressure on smaller streams like the Kilchis, Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem. The North Fork Nehalem has been in fishable shape but catches have not been all that good. These smaller streams will be the go-to spots but with recent wind storms, anglers need to be aware that fallen trees will likely make for treacherous boating conditions. Pack a chainsaw but do not remove vegetation that isn't hazardous to navigation. If the larger streams do become fishable, the Wilson will be the number one (and frankly, the only) option for late run chinook and a few steelhead. Steelhead numbers are not impressive on most north coast streams. Three Rivers may also be a good bet when larger systems are on the mend.

Softer tides will give crabbers some opportunity for holiday appetizers. Hopefully, storm fronts won't dump too much fresh water into the systems but crabbers should focus their efforts in the lower extremes of the estuary providing it is safe for excursion and you have a back-up motor in case you get in trouble. WEAR YOUR LIFEJACKETS!

Central & South Coast Reports – The outlook is bright for bottomfishing off the entire Oregon coast in the New Year. Thought in 1999 to be overfished to the point of disaster, ling cod populations have recovered to such a degree that, in the 2007 season, there will be no annual quota, therefore, no threat of closure. Further, the minimum length for retention will be relaxed from 24 to 22 inches, effectively increasing the number of keepers. The two lings per day bag limit will remain in place.

A driftboat went down over the weekend just below Moonshine Park on the Siletz River. Be careful out there, play safe and wear those life jackets. That said, side-drifted, good-quality cured eggs are taking bright winter steelhead this week.

Rain will have all South coast rivers on the rise into Friday but anglers targeting steelhead over the weekend should be blessed with excellent conditions as waters will be dropping and clearing.

Steelhead are entering the traps on the North Fork Alsea. The river has provided some fair to good steelheading recently, but as with many streams, will benefit from coming rain. There aren't too many steelhead around yet, but this one should be good in a few weeks.

Pro guide Bill Kremers (541 754 6411) seemed to agree with our assessment when he wrote on Wednesday this week, "[It] was a slow day on the Alsea today for us. Fishing pressure was surprisingly light. We fish above and below Fall Creek and never saw another boat all day. River was still on the high side, but certainly fishable. The river forecast is for a rising river tomorrow (never a good time to go steelhead fishing) so its looking like the place to fish the Alsea this weekend will be the North Fork. The one fish we landed was a large native coho which of course we immediately released. It was big and still in very good condition. If the river forecast is correct it looks like the people on their Christmas vacations will have to wait until after Christmas before they can float the main river. The Big Elk will be another alternative for this weekend if you want to get away from some of the fishing pressure."

Coos and Coquille steelheaders enjoyed fair to good results early this week, but with waters coming up, fishing will shut down until the front passes.

Steelheading has been good on the mainstem and South Umpqua despite the fact that levels and flows hadn't returned to optimum. Sturgeon fishing has yet to get underway in the estuary. Crabbing has been excellent in Winchester Bay according to the ODFW.

The Elk and Sixes, productive earlier this week, are on the rise but these smaller rivers will drop into shape rapidly for the weekend. Bright Chinook have been caught recently from the Elk.

Fresh winter steelhead are entering the lower Rogue River in impressive numbers. This has created a

fishery which is good to excellent from Huntley Park up to the mouth of the Applegate River. Bank anglers plunking Spin 'N' Glos from the bars are scoring fine numbers of fresh chrome, and while most of the fish are wild, anglers don't mind catching and releasing a few of these hard-fighting fish in order to sort a pair of finclipped steelies. Boat anglers are nailing fish on cured eggs. While sinter steelhead are into the Grants Pass stretch, effort in this area is low. Summer steelhead continue to be recycled on the upper Rogue where catches are strong although interest is waning as many of these fish are past their prime.

Steelheading has been very good at the Chetco River. When the flows were down to 3,000 cfs earlier this week, both bank and boat anglers are doing well. As of Thursday, December 21st, the flows had increased to 4,550 cfs and is expected to increase to 6,800 and 7.36 feet by tonight. If the forecast is accurate, Saturday looks like a great day to be on the Chetco.

Commercial crabbers started work out of Brookings on Sunday, December 17th, with marginal results for their efforts. The Brookings Fishermen's Marketing Association President Joe Speir described the take after three days of fishing as "lousy." As additional incentive, processors have increased the price they're paying for fresh crab from \$1.60 to \$1.70 per pound.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Late season steelheading has been good recently on the Deschutes. The key word is 'recently.' This late in the season, water levels and flows can vary wildly. Fishing can be decent one day and a bust the next. A drop in water temperatures can lockjaw the steelies. Luck figures into the equation to a much greater degree under these conditions. Currently, the flows and levels have moderated and the water has cleared. As a consequence, steelheading picked up over the last couple of days but with more rain on the way, this situation could reverse in short order. Try slow, deep water for best results as the run winds down. Expect to see changes in the river contour from the flood. And ask yourself: Do you feel lucky?

Pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688), whose major stomping grounds is the Grande Ronde River, reports this week, "Weather in Northeast Oregon recently has made the fishing opportunities spotty. Water levels, as elsewhere in the state, became unmanageable a week ago, then cold weather arrived earlier this week and brought water levels into good fishing conditions, but by midweek water temperatures had dropped enough to create slush ice in the river. Not necessarily bad for catching, but it adds a new element and eliminates fly fishing and drift fishing bait. The catch rate from the state creel survey reflects the changing conditions from two weeks ago when catch rates were in the single digits. Last week's creel jumped to 27 hours per fish in Oregon and 14 hours per fish in Washington. Water levels currently are excellent and the forecast is for slightly warmer weather later this week which promises to warm the water enough to take out the ice, but not warm things enough to create another freshet. The fish are there. Good fishing."

Northwest Trout – Huddleston Pond in Sheridan will receive 350 'Trophy Trout' (16 inches or better) this week. On Thursday, The ODFW announced that Sheridan Pond will also receive some big 'uns though a number wasn't specified. Scheduled to be planted with 'Catchable Sized' trout (eight to 10 inches) are Junction City Pond, Carmen Reservoir, Clear Lake, Leaburg Lake, upper McKenzie River, Quartzville Creek, Santiam River North Fork and Trail Bridge Reservoir. Merry Christmas, Power-Baiters!

After Bill Monroe read this, he shot us an Email, saying, "Carmen, Clear Lake, Quartzville and Trailbridge are snowbound...maybe even closed..." Anglers take note.

Incidentally, the trout stocking schedule doesn't indicate what day the truck will actually be making a visit to a particular body of water. That information is available by calling 971-673-6000 after 2:00 PM daily. Drivers check in after stocking is complete.

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, Mocrecks 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 $\frac{3}{4}$ -pound and 10 to 13 inches. The daily catch limit is two trout.

Reader Email

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

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com

Michael Teague: Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com

Random Links

Safety precautions regarding lead fishing weights:

<http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/lead/docs/fishingb.pdf>

Oregon Fish Finder courtesy ODFW: **<http://nrimp.dfw.state.or.us/fishfinder/>**

Just for fun: **http://www.rspin.com/img/2005/santa_fishing/santa_fishing03.jpg**

Weekly Quote – "I assert that a man does not go fishing or hunting in order to obtain, or kill, as much game as he can. I assert that he does it in order to achieve a certain relationship between himself and wildness, to match himself against the land and against certain of its creatures, possession of which he has taught himself to desire. It is not merely his skill with rod and gun which he wants to exercise ... there is a more spacious feeling, the feeling of free agency within a large solitude ... the feeling of being alone and unhampered in one's pursuit, to follow it as one sees fit, by no man's sufferance." - Vance Bourjaily

GOOD LUCK!