

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 29th, 2006 – January 4th, 2007**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Anglers should remember pertinent fishing licenses and tags prior to pursuit in the new year.

Rumors of smelt on the Cowlitz are circulating but the season does not open until January 1st.

Columbia River and Cowlitz River regulations differ so check specifics before you dip.

Lower Columbia River sturgeon are well distributed as anglers are having a challenging time finding concentrations of fish to target. Most keepers are coming from the Kelly Point Park area indicating a move to the nearby Willamette River.

Sturgeon were taken from the lower Willamette during the last retention period by anglers willing to seek out biters. Oregon City put out a couple of keepers although Multnomah Channel continues to receive the most attention. Anglers should watch for floating debris from upriver. Flows won't begin to drop until late in the week.

Plunkers at Meldrum Bar and anchor fishers nearby are hooking a few steelhead in high, off-color water. Most steelhead in this area are destined for the federal fish hatchery on Eagle Creek.

Eagle Creek was fishable earlier this week with winter steelies and the occasional colorful summer fish present. The Clackamas, running high and muddy, will require some time to recover.

Fishable numbers of winter steelhead are bound for the Sandy and should start providing sport by mid-January.

The Santiams are high and swift. None of this system will fish this week.

While no trout stocking is scheduled this week, the ODFW periodically plants larger trout and broodstock steelhead in valley and North coast lakes and ponds over the winter months.

Northwest – Although retention of sturgeon below the Wauna Powerlines opens back up on January 1st, catch and effort will be low until the springtime. Smelt are rumored in the Cowlitz however which may stimulate success near the tributary's mouth.

Prior to the high water, the Wilson was the best prospect with a few fresh chinook and an occasional winter steelhead taken. Another deluge will put the river out at least until the weekend. Nestucca River water conditions closely mimic the Wilson. Higher flows will put hatchery fish further up the watershed- target them accordingly.

The Kilchis, North Fork Nehalem and Necanicum River are the better coastal hatchery steelhead options as they should be fishable prior to the weekend. Anglers should be prepared for more navigational hazards with recent wind events. Three Rivers should provide fair opportunity for bank anglers. Big baits and colorful drift-bobbers will produce the best results prior to the weekend.

Bank anglers will also find results on the lower Columbia tributaries like Gnat Creek and Big Creek. Be sure to respect private property rights in these watersheds.

Weak tides produced excellent crab catches out of Garibaldi just prior to the holiday. Commercial

crabbers are working deeper water enabling good escapement into coastal estuaries. Nehalem and Netarts Bay also produced good catches.

Although effort is still low for Tillamook Bay sturgeon, weekend tides are ripe for good action in the west channel and Bay City. Fresh shrimp will produce the best results.

Tides are right for Clatsop Beach razor clamming but a high surf forecast may limit success. Be sure to have your new shellfish license if you harvest after Sunday.

Steelhead are present in the Siletz and Alsea Rivers. The higher drifts will produce the best results and will be the first stretches to clear.

Yaquina Bay was producing limits of large, hard Dungeness over the weekend but fresh water may shut down crabbing for a while.

Siuslaw anglers were taking a few steelhead prior to the blowout on Christmas day. It should be worthwhile again after this weekend.

Southwest – Central and South coast rivers were slammed by heavy rainfall over the weekend, creating a situation where all ocean tributaries are in the process of recovery this week.

Umpqua steelheaders were doing well prior to the rain this week which put the river out of shape and off-color Christmas day. It was on the drop Tuesday this week and should be fishable by this weekend barring another front.

Recent rainfall caused the Rogue River to rise over 12 feet on Christmas day at Agness, effectively shutting down the winter steelhead fishery which was getting off to a great start. It will be several days recovering, but worthwhile when it drops and clears. The freshet should have drawn decent numbers of steelies upstream through the Grants Pass stretch.

The Chetco was producing for side-drifters early last week, and then began to rise, a situation which favored plunkers. Action was fair to good until it blew out over last weekend. Steelheading will pick up as the river recovers.

Eastern - Grande Ronde River flows stabilized over the weekend bringing much better success rates to area steelheaders. Cold weather and long travel times prevent high pressure in this part of the state but with an average of 4 angling hours per fish, catch rates and adequate bank access offer some of the best opportunities of the year.

Southwest Washington- Area steelheaders are patiently waiting for better water conditions. Early catches, especially on the Cowlitz are positive. SW Washington rivers should begin to produce good results late in the weekend.

A New Year's holiday clam dig was recently approved by WDF&W:

Evening low tides during the upcoming digs are:

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

Columbia River Fishing Report – Effort continues to drop for sturgeon in the gorge. Most anglers are focusing their efforts downstream near the mouth of the Willamette. Although keepers are hard to come by, the fish that are being caught are in good shape and size. Effort is increasing downstream of the Willamette as well but even if a mediocre smelt run appears, action isn't likely to pick up like it once did many years ago.

A WDF&W website recently posted that fresh smelt are now available in the Cathlamet area. The catch is, they're going for \$1.00 per smelt! Fortunately, I don't have the contact information for this apparent treasure but I certainly can't promote such price gouging! Even with fresh smelt, action isn't quite good enough to warrant \$1.00 per fish! Good luck on that.....

Steelheaders working the McNary area are picking up steelhead but action is sporadic. Trollers are taking a few as well as bobber and jig or bait anglers. Persistence will pay off and these fish are averaging over 10 pounds!

The Guide's Forecast – Sturgeon anglers shouldn't get too excited about the prospects for the New Year. Anglers above Bonneville Dam however may stand the best chance at getting after keepers as new quotas begin in the upstream impoundments. In recent years, the water upstream of Bonneville Dam has offered some of the best prospects in the Columbia River. Anglers in the know for this area, should strongly consider a venture.

Anglers wishing to work the Portland area should focus on the Columbia just upstream or downstream of the mouth of the Willamette. The Willamette or Multnomah Channel are also good prospects this time of year.

Steelheaders working the John Day or McNary pools should continue to find success. Mild but cold weather is forecasted for the weekend which should keep fish interested- especially the further upstream you go in the Columbia River system.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Water temperatures have started to climb in the lower Willamette, recently to the mid-40s. Visibility is gradually improving as well with the break in the weather. Sturgeon fishing produced some keepers on sand shrimp in the Oregon City area during the last retention period. Plunkers using Spin 'N' Glos and shrimp have taken a few steelhead and were doing so daily before the river rose again.

The Guide's Forecast – Try for sturgeon below the Sellwood Bridge and off Kelly Point Park. Shallow water has been producing better than deep holes recently and sand shrimp or squid has been the preferred bait. Plunkers at Meldrum Bar will see continued improvement this week and into the next. Steelhead catches will improve as the water drops and clears.

The water level on the South Santiam is fluctuating and the North Santiam has dropped to levels below that prior to the Christmas rain. It seems odd that water isn't being released from Detroit Reservoir so it can efficiently serve as of flood control through future rainy periods. This means the level of the North Santiam is subject to change, which, combined with the fact that summer steelheading is wrapped up and too few winters are present to create a worthwhile catch and release fishery, it might be best to try the Santiams later in 2007.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – While the Sandy River is dropping, the recovery is a slow process. Lower freezing levels will help to clear the water but the appearance of winter steelhead is still some weeks away.

As of Thursday, December 28th, the Clackamas was flowing swiftly and fairly high - 15 feet at Estacada, 30 feet at Oregon City - but is forecast to drop rapidly and steadily into the weekend. A few fresh winter steelhead will be around with catch rates improving as we move into the new year. Eagle Creek showed fair color as of Wednesday this week, but the water was very high and fast.

North Coast District Fishing Report – Anglers looking for winter steelhead on the north coast are not all that impressed. Although too early to be calling the season- especially given the conditions we have been experiencing, this is prime time for prime steelhead and the results are not all that impressive. The smaller systems like the Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem have been in the best shape and producing only fair results. These small streams have been littered with wood debris (good for fish, bad for navigation). It has resulted in turning these rivers into a much more technical experience than most other coastal systems. Ropes and chainsaws are strongly recommended and prepare for the worst.

The big rivers like the Wilson, Nestucca and even to some degree the Kilchis have been out for a while and the forecast doesn't give paint a good picture for much more opportunity. Reports have been slim as few people have been fishing in the adverse conditions.

A few fish have been reported from the Trask River. Mostly a wild fish show, the Trask does get some hatchery strays. Action is likely to be better further upstream and the dam hole has an uncanny reputation in higher flows. Fish close to the bank and towards the tailout of the hole for your best chance.

Tides are ripe for weekend sturgeon fishing on Tillamook Bay. Effort has been next to non-existent with recent weather systems but can you believe that a friend of mine hooked (and lost) a whopper chinook on Christmas Day in the Ghost Hole? This is a true story but salmon fishing closes on all north coast streams and estuaries on January 1st.

Crabbing has been excellent in Tillamook Bay and several coastal estuaries. Recent rainfall may damper success and big tide exchanges won't be great for safety or success this weekend.

The Guide's Forecast – The recent rain freshet will spark a winter steelhead bite on many coastal streams. Although I don't expect action to be great by any stretch, hatchery fish should be available on the following streams, in the following order on respective drifts:

Necanicum River from Klootchie Creek to the Relief Pitcher take-out. Be cautious of downed trees however and you may opt for the Johnson Gravel Pit take-out if you have the \$30 annual permit needed to access this ramp.

North Fork Nehalem River from Erickson's put in to Aldervale. Fair numbers of fish were being taken downstream of the hatchery by mostly bank anglers. The higher the flows, the higher the fish will be. The lower, the slower they will migrate. Fish bigger baits and more colorful drift-bobbers in higher flows.

Three Rivers is not really drift-boat-able but bank anglers fishing near the hatchery deadline should produce good results when flows drop. This may be as soon as Friday. Fish will be on the move (at least until they get to the weir).

Kilchis River from the logger bridge downstream to the Highway 101 takeout. The Kilchis Park put in would be the best option but a downed tree has blocked safe passage. You may want to check it however as it would be a better drift in higher flows.

The Trask River from Cedar Creek to Highway 101. Fish the slower water if flows are up but bank angling may be the best option at the Dam Hole. Again, bright bobbers and big baits in higher flows. There are very few hatchery fish here.

The Wilson and Nestucca should come in about the same time. Again, the higher the flows, the higher in the system you should fish. Bank anglers on the upper Wilson should score chrome by the weekend.

Don't even think of the mainstem Nehalem. No hatchery plants and too big of a watershed to be clear before the next rain hits!

The early morning high tide may be a good crab option but don't leave your pots out for that strong outgoing tide!

Target sturgeon in Tillamook Bay in the west channel, middle channel or at Bay City. Call ahead before to check shrimp availability. Mud shrimp will produce good catches but doubled up sand shrimp is very good as well. The best tides will be late in the day as fish will be forced to congregate in the deeper slots.

Central & South Coast Reports – In a bulletin dated December 26th, the ODFW confirmed a new minimum length limit of 22 inches for ling cod effective with the 2007 season. This, due to a strong recovery combined with sport anglers comments about a high number of 23-inchers. The same bulletin went on to announce "additional measures to protect yelloweye and canary rockfish by limiting fishing for "certain species in the Stonewall Bank Rockfish Conservation Area (all year) and seaward of the 40-fathom curve (from April 1 to Sept. 30)."

Limits of Dungeness are coming out of Yaquina bay, but surprisingly, even this late in the year, some soft shells remain in the mix. A crab that has molted and has not fully returned to a rock-hard state will have translucent, watery meat of inferior flavor. The back shell will be hard so test for firmness by pinching the shell on the upper segment of the first (largest) leg next to the claw.

Taking into account weather forecasts earlier this week, it seemed as if many of the central and South coast river wouldn't recover for weekend fishing. As is often the case in Oregon, the weather prediction changed for the better. Dry weather this week means most locations will fish.

While steelheading was spotty prior to the rains, the Siletz will be producing some fish by this weekend. Fish high on the river for the best odds of taking fresh winter steel. Fish have been entering the Siletz for a while but rain has drawn them upstream.

The Alsea is dropping rapidly and with the winter steelhead run underway, should reward anglers starting on Friday this week.

Forecasts indicate the Siuslaw will fish this weekend. The winter run was getting underway prior to the rise in water levels so anglers can expect to fish fresh, bright fish available as it drops.

Prospects are bright for steelheaders on the Umpqua. The North Fork was fair and the mainstem was producing fish before the deluge. The South Fork Umpqua which opened on December 1st will offer fair and improving fishing for a mix of wild and hatchery fish.

Still over flood stage on Thursday, December 28th it remains to be seen if the mainstem Coquille will be a possibility. The North Fork is somewhat better but the South Fork looks good for the weekend

although the majority of steelhead present here are wild and must be released, hatchery fish will be in the mix..

The lower Rogue was well over the 17-foot flood stage at Agness when it topped at 20.82 on Tuesday, December 26th. Down to about 12 feet on Thursday this week, it'll drop to eight feet and should offer fresh steelhead to plunkers by Saturday. Anglers in the Grants Pass stretch will be catching steelhead enticed upstream by the high water. It's too early for winters to reach the upper Rogue and the remaining summer fish are getting a little long in the tooth.

While catch rates haven't been stellar, the quality of steelhead coming from the Chetco has been impressive. This, of course, prior to the Christmas deluge that brought fishing to a halt. While still un-fishable at mid-week, the river had dropped from 18 to 14 feet. The level and flow has a ways to go but it's early in the season here so the Chetco should provide excellent steelheading when it drops and clears. The Chetco will be a possibility for plunkers by Saturday if river forecasts hold true. Sunday would be a great day to fish this one.

Central and Eastern Oregon – No update this week.

Northwest Trout – Huddleston Pond and Sheridan Pond were stocked with 'trophy' trout last week. While no trout stocking is scheduled this week, the ODFW periodically plants larger trout and broodstock steelhead in valley and North coast lakes and ponds over the winter months. There have been glitches in providing this information in advance recently. When we know, you'll know.

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/reggs/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:

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

o 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.

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Offshore Boaters can Help Unravel the Mystery of the Ocean Sunfish:

<http://www.earthwindow.com/report.html>

Weekly Quote – "Enjoy thy stream oh, harmless fish, And when an angler for his dish, Through gluttony's vile sin, Attempts--a wretch--to pull thee out God give thee strength, oh, gentle trout, To pull the rascal in." - Peter Pindar

GOOD LUCK!