

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 19th – January 25th, 2007**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Sturgeon fishing has picked up in the lower Willamette with several keepers taken over the last Thursday through Saturday retention period. Winter steelhead have started crossing Willamette Falls in decent number bringing the latest counts as of January 9th to 700. Flows are dropping as is the water temperature. The visibility has improved to about 1.5 feet. Meldrum Bar has gotten a lot of attention from plunkers but no catches have been reported.

Most of the native winter steelhead are destined for the Santiam system which is still quite high and swift although the color is good.

Clackamas steelheaders are finding it difficult to draw a strike with bait or lure. The water temperature is just above freezing. Eagle Creek, low but showing good color, produced a few steelhead over the weekend.

Bait has been effective in enticing a few bright steelhead from lower Sandy River and near Dodge Park.

Brood trout are scheduled to be planted this week in Sheridan Pond, Huddleston Pond and West Salish Pond.

Northwest – Despite being between early hatchery returns and later running wild and broodstock steelhead, anglers working the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers fared well over the weekend. Native steelhead made up the bulk of the catch and with encouraging numbers this early in the season, a good run is likely to materialize.

Cold weather is likely to keep rivers in fishable shape but roads and boat ramps treacherous. The lower stretches of the Trask, Wilson and Nestucca Rivers will produce the best results in the dropping flows.

Smaller streams like the Kilchis, North Fork Nehalem and Necanicum Rivers are low, clear and producing poor results. Remote roads are getting less attention so travel with caution.

The Siletz River is producing good catches of wild and broodstock steelhead. Sidedrifting roe is the ruling technique here.

The boat ramp at Garibaldi is closed this week as dredging is taking place in that area. It would be a good idea to call ahead to see if it will be open this weekend if you plan to launch.

Sturgeon anglers were forced to launch in the upper bay where recent floods have again shifted sandbars. Effort is increasing with a good mix of keepers and shakers in the catch. Sand shrimp is a top bait but call local shops to ensure an ample supply.

Crabbing has slowed slightly on Tillamook and Netarts Bays although undersize crabs seem plentiful.

Crabbing was very good in Yaquina Bay with most folks coming away with limits of large, hard Dungeness.

Most steelheaders fishing the North Fork Alsea over the weekend had hookups with many landing fish. **Bill Kremers (541 754 6411)** advises anglers to fish progressively lower on the mainstem as the

river drops this week.

Siuslaw steelheaders are experiencing good results in the main river and up into the tributaries with all manner of bait and lure.

Southwest – The Umpqua River has been productive for winter steelhead this week in the mainstem, North and South forks.

Steelheaders fished in the snow late last week, finding green water and bright steelhead on the Coquille River.

Elk and Sixes anglers will need to wait for the next rain as these flashy systems are too low and clear to provide decent fishing.

The lower Rogue has continued to pump out good numbers of fresh, bright winter steelhead in good numbers. The river has been dropping daily for over a week with the level at 5.3 on Tuesday. Bait drifters have had an edge over lure anglers in these conditions.

Chetco steelheaders have been seeing great winter action with plunking remaining effective even as flows dropped well below 4,000 cfs. A 21-pounder was landed last Wednesday on eight-pound-test mono. Plunkers will have to wait until the next round of precipitation with the river low and clear this week. Light tackle and long leaders will be the rule.

Eastern – With water temperatures in the low 40s, slow, deep runs will be most productive for steelhead on the Deschutes below the deadline at the Reservation. Dark-colored lures are accounting for fair catches for this time of year with very light pressure on the lower river.

SW Washington – Most SW Washington streams are in fishable shape. The bulk of the hatchery winter steelhead are in the river but the cold front has them reluctant to bite. The Cowlitz River remains the best option but the Kalama and Lewis Rivers are producing light catches also.

Steelhead tend to bite less aggressively in cooler temperatures and plugs often become a more viable option. Be patient on the bite and wait until fish turn with your lure in their mouth before setting the hook.

Commercial smelt netters in the mainstem Columbia are yielding higher numbers but dropping water temperatures typically send smelt back to sea. Sport dippers in the Cowlitz were only taking an occasional smelt in the lower river.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Sturgeon effort on the lower Columbia River has been low as cold weather keeps many anglers at home. As we reported before, a low smelt prediction means a low concentration of fish in the Portland to Longview stretch.

With temperatures cooling, activity for sturgeon, salmon and steelhead will also fade- not that it was all that much to begin with. Smelt will also likely exit the system until warmer weather triggers a stronger migration. Most Cowlitz River smelt dipper blanked during the daytime last week but those trying after dark had varying degrees of limited success. There just aren't many in the river and while it will improve in February, a poor run is forecast. The Cowlitz is open to smelt dipping Saturdays from 6 AM to 10 PM. Steelheading has been slow.

The Guide's Forecast – Desperate anglers may find an occasional sturgeon near the mouth of the Willamette or Cowlitz Rivers. Your best chance is to get your hands on some fresh smelt and if you find a good supply, stock up on what you need. It will be in short supply this year. Don't put too much effort into this waterway- better times are certainly ahead.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Movement of winter steelhead over Willamette Falls has improved considerably this week. The counts, updated through January 12th, indicate just over 900 have crossed. The last retention period resulted in fair to good catches of shaker sturgeon along with several keepers.

Well over twice the number of steelhead have gone through the fish ladder at the Falls thus far this month as did the entire month of January last year. This could be a good sign for the catch-and release wild steelhead fishery at the North Santiam. With Detroit still higher than required for flood control the North Santiam will remain high as well for a few weeks.

The Guide's Forecast – Plunkers on the bank of the lower Willamette below the mouth of the Clackamas are seeing improvement in catches coinciding with melioration of the water conditions. Several steelhead are being taken daily although some days are better than others. Most of the steelies hooked here are finclipped fish bound for the Eagle Creek hatchery facility on the Clackamas. Sturgeon retention is allowed on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Concentrating on the stretch above the St. John Bridge will likely be most productive although catches may slow in with the lower water temperatures this week. Keep a variety of bait on board and in order to feed 'em what they want.

There should be adequate numbers of wild, native steelhead in the Santiam system in February for anglers interested in this sort of fishery to start targeting them.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – While still running a little high, the water color is good. A few steelhead have been taken but the water really needs to warm up a few degrees for the action to pick up. The ramps at Barton and Carver have been closed all week due to snow and ice but should be open for the weekend with warmer air temperatures. The lower Clack holds the best promise for steelhead. Catches are spotty this week with bait out-fishing lures. Eagle Creek will fish only if snowmelt contributes to the flow; otherwise it will probably be too low.

The Sandy River is low and clear. Cold weather this week has only contributed to a situation where the water temperatures were frigid already. Time us on the angler's side as the winter steelhead season has just started and will continue into March. Catches will improve when the water temps rise. Over 100 winter steelhead have entered the hatchery facility on Cedar Creek.

North Coast District Fishing Report – Larger river systems like the Wilson, Trask and Nestucca finally came into great shape over the weekend and despite my gloomy report, fishing was actually quite good. The best fishing is likely past but anglers fishing on the Wilson and Nestucca have done fairly well for wild fish and an occasional broodstock keeper. The early run of Alsea stock fish made a poor appearance this year but water conditions were not very conducive to productive fishing. The upper drifts cleared first and thanks to the Association of NW Steelheaders, boat ramps like the Siskeyville Ramp are once again functional. These rivers are retaining their color well and although they should fish into this weekend, the best fishing of the freshet is likely past. Larger baits and bobber and jig produced nicely and crowds were down with all the inclement weather we have been experiencing.

The Trask River is also an option and has fished fairly well at mid-week. Fish to 18 pounds have been

rumored here recently.

Pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808) recently reported from the Nestucca. Jesse states, "The Nestucca is coming into beautiful shape. Fish are spread through the entire river. However, with the cold, spend a bunch of time working over some of the holes, simply because they are there, and acting a little lethargic. All tactics will work, but again, work slowly, and you will find a fish that will be in the mood to play. We have not seen any temperatures above freezing for several days in my area, so dress the part and be extremely careful out there. On another note, the highway from the valley (22) from Grande Ronde to the river is an absolute nightmare. It has been, and will continue to be very icy until we see some higher temps. So, be patient, and very careful...Honk when you go by, just to say hello."

Sturgeon fishing on Tillamook Bay has been good. Anglers are reporting a mix of keepers and shakers from the upper and middle areas. Sand shrimp has produced well. **Pro guide Ron Kaser (503-842-3332)** reported numerous opportunities on Saturday (January 13th) taking 2 nice keepers in the 52 inch range. I had the pleasure of fishing the Berkley Conservation Director **Jim Martin** and NSIA's Executive Director **Liz Hamilton** along with several other good folks landing only 5 fish- however, 4 of them were keepers ranging from 42 to 47 inches. The middle bay got quite skinny and admittedly we were lucky to get out of there without getting stuck. I hit my jet in 3 shallow spots and had very little room to negotiate. A prop propelled boat would not have been an option and one boat got stuck from when we launched to well after dark. You had better know where you are going if you are fishing the peak (minus) tides.

Crabbing in the area has slowed somewhat. Netarts crabbers reported slower action and effort on Tillamook Bay was light indicating poor performances. Conditions for crabbers would be improving if it wasn't for a more extreme tide series that we are now moving into.

Most charter boats won't be operating bottomfishing trips until early spring. A rare ling cod is being picked up from the jetty on the inside of Tillamook Bay. Seas have been pretty big but there is an occasional day where recreational craft is allowed over the Tillamook Bay Bar. Call the Garibaldi Coast Guard at (503) 322-3234 for updated reports and an ocean forecast.

The Guide's Forecast – Minus tides will continue through the weekend making sturgeon fishing a decent option. The one exception is the best time of the tide (last 2 hours of outgoing tide) will be after dark by the weekend. Anglers should still get some good opportunity during the middle part of the outgoing tide. It can be a dangerous time to negotiate the bay however as many sandbars lurk just below the surface of the water at this time of the tide.

Only moderate incoming tides exist in the morning hours this weekend so crabbers may have some good opportunity to take quality crab near the bay entrances. Although the swell may be too big for a bar crossing, it may be suitable for safe crabbing in the lower reaches of the estuaries. Be safe however and wear your lifejackets!

Steelheaders should continue to enjoy fair steelheading into the weekend. The higher tide exchanges and favorable flows will bode well for weekend drifters and bank anglers. Steelhead will likely slow their migration in the lower flows (can you believe I'm saying that?) so the lower drifts will produce the best results. Steelhead however should be well distributed throughout most coastal river systems and last weeks results indicate there are fishable numbers around (despite my last prediction). Keep in mind however that most of the fish being landed are of wild origin and must be released carefully.

Sidedrifting bait will be a strong option but lower flows are also conducive to bobbers and baits or jigs as well. Steelhead will begin to hold in their traditional haunts- shallow, broken surfaced water, deeper runs and tailouts only in the morning.

The Wilson from Mills Bridge downstream, the Nestucca from 1st Bridge downstream and the Trask from Cedar Creek downstream will offer the best opportunities. Stealthy steelheaders on the smaller streams like the Kilchis and Necanicum may find success as well. Bank anglers should excel in these smaller streams. The North Fork Nehalem has been poor lately.

Central & South Coast Reports – Bottom fishermen will be allowed a six rockfish limit in 2007. An eight-fish limit was discussed earlier this year, but it was decided to leave it the same as 2006 in order to maximize the length of the season. The ling cod limit will remain at two with a new minimum length limit of 22 inches in order to reduce by-catch of protected rockfish species.

The 2007 Pacific halibut sport seasons will be presented and discussed at 7 PM on Wednesday, January 24th in Room 30-32 at the Hatfield Marine Science Center, 2030 NE Marine Science Drive in Newport. Sports anglers with opinions or comments are urged to attend. Those unable to attend but with something to say should call Don Bodenmiller at 541-867-4741

It's that time of year for anglers to consider ditching the diver and bait rigs for something - anything - else with wild fish in the majority in many rivers. Steelhead are commonly hooked very deeply with these rigs and it's often fatal. Let's protect wild steelhead as the valuable resource they truly are.

The Siletz River is producing good catches of wild and broodstock steelhead. Side-drifting roe is the ruling technique here.

Alsea anglers have been hammering chrome steelhead this week with the mainstem coming into shape nicely. The North Fork Alsea was very productive last weekend. Hopefuls will find low, clear water this weekend. A few steelhead have been taken and recycling from the hatchery is ongoing but rain is needed to rejuvenate the fishery here.

Bill Kremers (541 754 6411) adds this, " ... fished the Alsea River a couple of times in the cold weather. The fishing has been almost as cool as the weather, but we have managed a few bright steelhead and missed a few more because of light strikes. All my action has been on the pirate series K-11 Kwikfish with some Pro-Cure kokanee scent. Have been able to get around the tree blocking most of the river below Missouri Bend with no problem. Just have to hug the left (south) bank. The forecast is for a fall river all week, so anglers will want fish the lower river, below Fall Creek by the weekend and then when the Alsea drops to four feet or lower fish below Five Rivers. Warmer weather should improve the fishing."

Catches of hatchery steelhead are good at the Siuslaw for side-drifters using quality cured salmon eggs. Expect plenty of boat traffic on weekends here.

Try the South Umpqua this weekend for winter steelhead. It's in pretty good shape and has been productive for boat and bank anglers. The North Umpqua and mainstem are low and flowing too cold to provide much in the way of steelhead action. Sturgeon fishing below Reedsport has stalled in clear water conditions.

Low, clear, cool water has stalled steelheading in the both the Coos and Coquille rivers.

Rogue steelheaders continue to find decent action this week as fresh steelhead continue to enter. Agness area anglers are taking fish on both bait and lures. The majority of steelies in the lower river are unclipped, but one wild steelhead may be retained per day on the Rogue anywhere below Graves Creek up to an annual limit of five fish. While action on the upper Rogue has come to a standstill in low, clear cold water, the Grants Pass stretch has been fair for both bank and driftboat steelheaders.

Chetco anglers have experienced some hot action last weekend into this week although the lower river has cooled as levels and flows have declined in the absence of precipitation. The better fishing this weekend will be in the upper river. Fishing will be very good with the next round of rain.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Steelhead action was fair to good for trollers above McNary Dam over the weekend with the water clarity improved. Unfortunately, conditions tanked after the snow and now (01/18) it's very muddy. Skip it this weekend.

There is no need to rise early to fish the Deschutes as the warmest part of the day will be most productive at this time of year.

Rainbows and bull trout are being taken in fair to good number on the Metolius. Midges and Blue-Winged Olive hatches are occurring here although the corresponding nymph patterns are accounting for the most strikes.

The Fall River provides a very good winter fly fishing experience on the same patterns as those recommended for the Metolius. Keep offerings small at this time of year for best results.

Bull trout are being taken at Lake Billy Chinook by anglers prepared to deal with bone-chilling conditions.

Northwest Trout – This week, ODFW planted rainbow brood trout in Sheridan Pond, Huddleston Pond and West Salish Pond. Sheridan Pond may be seen from Highway 18. To get there, take exit 33, turn south on Balston Road and look for signs to Sheridan Park. Turn left into park and follow road to the pond. To find Huddleston Pond, take Highway 18 to the Willamina City Center Exit. Turn left on Main Street to NE E Street and turn right to NE Yamhill Street, turn left and follow signs to Huddleston Pond.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report January 10th – January 23rd:

North Puget Sound

Unpredictable weather has made fishing spotty for both saltwater and freshwater anglers in the region.

On Puget Sound, angler effort increased during the Christmas holiday, but has tapered off since the arrival of another round of wet and windy conditions. Only five anglers were checked with two **chinook** at the Everett ramp during creel checks the first week of January. That's well below the 99 anglers who brought in 26 blackmouth during the final week of 2006.

"Windy conditions have made it difficult for some anglers to get out on the water," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fisheries biologist. "However, some experienced anglers, who have found breaks in the weather, are putting nice fish in their boats."

Thiesfeld said marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay) and 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) have been productive. However, Marine Area 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) has been slow.

Anglers participating in the selective fishery in marine areas 8-1 and 8-2 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. Theisfeld reminds anglers that the salmon season in Marine Area 10 closes at the end of the month.

In the rivers, recent storms have made **steelhead** fishing a bit erratic. However, anglers who made it out to some of the region's rivers during favorable weather conditions have done fairly well, said Chad Jackson, WDFW fish biologist. "I've heard reports of anglers doing well at Reiter Ponds and at Tokul Creek," Jackson said. "Anglers on the North Fork of the Stillaguamish have also been picking up a few steelhead."

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

Fishing: Prospects look good for **steelhead** fishing and another **razor clam** dig this month, but neither was certain as of the second week of 2007.

For **steelhead** anglers, weather remains the biggest unknown. After a month of heavy rain and high water, rivers throughout the region were dropping into shape in advance of the Martin Luther King Jr. Day holiday. With snow on the ground, the weather forecast called for a string of cold, dry days in mid-January.

"Anglers are getting pretty antsy," said David Low, WDFW fish biologist. "Steelhead fishing could be spectacular if the forecast holds and the water keeps dropping. Anglers should be able to find fish anywhere they go."

While anglers have been finding fish in some of the smaller rivers and creeks on the northern Olympic Peninsula, large rivers such as the Bogachiel and Hoh were still running too high to fish through the first week in January, Low said. "The smaller rivers usually drop back into shape the quickest," he said.

Low cautioned anglers that wild steelhead are making up a growing percentage of the fish moving into area rivers. "So it's important to take a close look at them if you plan to keep them," he said.

As most anglers know, wild steelhead can be distinguished from hatchery fish by their intact adipose and ventral fins. Retention rules for wild steelhead are outlined on page 29 of the Fishing in Washington rule pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>).

While anglers keep an eye on the weather, **razor clam** enthusiasts are waiting for final word on new digs tentatively scheduled this month and next.

As recently announced, Twin Harbors Beach will be open for razor clam digging Jan. 19-21 if marine toxin tests show the clams are safe to eat. Results from those tests are expected about one week before the planned dig. As with previous openings this season, digging would be restricted to the hours between noon and midnight.

"This month's opening is specifically designed to give diggers an opportunity to take advantage of the large number of clams still available at Twin Harbors," said Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager. "At most other beaches, we're trying to conserve clams so there will still be some available for digs this spring."

Clam diggers may, however, have a greater selection of beaches during the first two days of a three-

day dig tentatively scheduled in February.

Four beaches - Twin Harbors, Long Beach, Mocrecks and Kalaloch - will be open for digging Feb. 16 and 17 between noon and midnight if marine toxin tests are favorable. Twin Harbors will also remain open Feb. 18 during the same hours if the test results allow the dig to proceed as planned.

As with this month's proposed dig, Copalis Beach will remain closed in February because of the relatively low number of clams available for harvest there, Ayres said.

Anglers planning ahead may also want to note that the 31st Discovery Bay Salmon Derby will be held Feb. 17-19, with drop-off stations at the Port Townsend Boat Haven gas dock, Gardiner Boat Ramp and John Wayne Marine. Anglers participating in the state's oldest-running derby will compete for cash and other prizes worth more than \$10,000. Details and rules are available at <http://www.DiscoBaySalmonDerby.com> or by calling 360-797-7711.

Southwest Washington:

Most area rivers have been running too high for serious **steelhead** fishing so far this year, but that could change in the days ahead. A cold front moving into the area during the second week of January could slow flows enough to improve fishing conditions just in time for the Martin Luther King Jr. Day holiday, said Wolf Dammers, WDFW fish biologist.

"If the snow doesn't turn to rain, the rivers could drop back into shape in time for the weekend," Dammers said. "Anglers have been catching a few hatchery steelhead at Blue Creek and the Barrier Dam on the upper Cowlitz River, but steelhead fishing has been pretty tough in most other areas."

One exception is Kress Lake near Kalama, where WDFW has planted more than 1,000 excess hatchery steelhead from the Cowlitz River since late December. The department hasn't been conducting creel surveys there, but Dammers said he's heard from several anglers who have done very well. "A guy from Lake Stevens called last week to say that he and his buddy hooked 10 to 17 steelhead each day over a four-day period," Dammers said. "The angler said all the fish were in good condition and that he and he and his fishing partner had a great time."

Anglers may catch and keep up to two steelhead per day as part of their five-trout limit in Kress Lake, and are not required to record steelhead caught in the lake on their catch record cards. The same rules apply at South Lewis County Park Pond near Toledo, where WDFW is also planting excess hatchery steelhead from the Cowlitz River. Dammers said he didn't have any current reports on fish at the county pond.

Meanwhile, the Columbia River **sturgeon** fishery has reopened up to McNary Dam, although most of the action has been in The Dalles Pool, said Brad James, WDFW fish biologist. Eighteen boat anglers reported catching six legal-size fish and releasing one more in a week-long creel survey ending Jan. 7, he said. Four boat anglers fishing the Bonneville Pool caught one legal-size fish and five sub-legals that week.

"Most sturgeon are out of the estuary and have moved upriver at this time of year," James said. "Fishing will improve throughout the river in the next few months as the water warms up and sturgeon redistribute themselves."

Current fishing rules for white sturgeon on the Columbia River are as follows:

- From the mouth to the Wauna powerlines: sturgeon may be kept seven days a week through April 30. The minimum size is 42 inches.

- From the Wauna powerlines to Bonneville Dam: Sturgeon may be kept Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays only through July 31 - except for the spawning sanctuary from Marker 85 upstream which is closed to all fishing from May through July. The minimum size is 42 inches.

- Bonneville, The Dalles and John Day pools: Sturgeon may be retained seven days a week until the guidelines are met. However, fishing will be closed from May through July in the two spawning sanctuaries, located below John Day Dam downstream 2.4 miles and McNary Dam downstream 1.5 miles. From Bonneville Dam to The Dalles Dam, the minimum size is 42 inches. From The Dalles Dam to McNary Dam, the minimum size is 48 inches.

James noted that fishery managers will sponsor a public hearing Jan. 25 in Vancouver to consider adopting season modifications for the sturgeon fishery from the Wauna powerlines to Bonneville Dam. At that hearing, fishery managers will consider options for providing additional retention opportunity to access up to 4,000 sturgeon left over from last year's harvest guideline. The hearing will be held at the Water Resource Education Center, 4600 SE Columbia Way, Vancouver, Wash. For more information, see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/crc/crc14dec06notice.htm>.

Smelt dippers caught a few fish Jan. 6 on the Cowlitz River, "but so far we haven't seen anything like a big push upriver," James said. Returns are expected to be poor this year, but chances of getting a limit should increase through mid-February, when the run usually peaks, he said. The Cowlitz River is open to smelt dipping from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. each Saturday through March 1.

Eastern Washington:

WDFW enforcement officers patrolling winter fishing lakes in the Spokane area report recent weather patterns of deep freezes followed by warm-ups, wind and rain have not produced adequate ice for safe fishing. The last time ice on Hog Canyon Lake was eight inches thick was New Year's Eve. At the same time, ice on Fourth of July Lake was only about three inches thick. U.S. Coast Guard guidelines recommend at least four inches of solid, clear ice for safe use by fishers. See more information about ice fishing safety at http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regions/reg1/ice_fishing.htm. Sporadic fishing at both of those **rainbow trout**-stocked lakes has been producing good catches, including a few 20-inch-plus fish. Another extended deep freeze, as currently forecasted, could make ice fishing at those lakes a possibility once again.

Anglers are catching some **Yellow perch** and **crappie** at Eloika Lake in north Spokane County and at Sprague Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line. Patrolling officers recently reported "sketchy" ice at Sprague Lake access areas, but changing conditions could make for decent ice fishing.

Lake Roosevelt's winter rainbow trout fishery continues to produce for anglers willing to brave the elements on the big water. Large net-pen-reared rainbows, often ranging from 18 to 24 inches, are usually biting well through January, especially in the lower reservoir from Grand Coulee to Seven Bays.

Trout fishing has been poor this season on winter-only Williams and Hatch lakes in Stevens County because of growing populations of illegally introduced yellow perch that feed on and out-compete the trout. Curt Vail, WDFW fish biologist, said the perch themselves are small, so the fishery overall is poor.

Snake River **steelheading** has slowed. According to the most recent creel survey, the best catch rate was about 12 hours of fishing per steelhead caught in the stretch on the mainstem Snake from Ice harbor Dam to Lower Monumental Dam. See the full survey at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/snake/index.htm>.

North Central Washington:

Art Viola, WDFW district fish biologist, said **steelhead** fishing remains slow in the Columbia River from Rocky Reach to Wells Dam. **Whitefish** angling in the Wenatchee River is also poor, he said.

Viola also reports a mix of conditions for winter trout fishing in the district. "Fish Lake is frozen with about five inches of hard ice but also a foot of slush on top," he said. "For those brave enough to venture out on Fish Lake, fishing has been very good for both **yellow perch** and **rainbow trout**. The ice on Roses and Antelope lakes is thin and dangerous."

Bob Jateff, WDFW Okanogan district fish biologist, said winter ice fishing in the Okanogan has been pretty good so far, with recent colder temperatures providing adequate ice cover for anglers. "Little and Big Green lakes in the Omak area, Rat Lake near Brewster, and Davis Lake near Winthrop are all producing catches of **rainbow trout**," he said. "Anglers can expect to catch fish in the 10-12 inch range at these lakes."

Patterson Lake in the Winthrop area opened Jan. 1 to ice fishing for **yellow perch**. The season will run through March 15 and there is a plowed-out WDFW access site at the lake with a toilet. Jateff said anglers can expect to catch perch in the eight to nine-inch range, along with some rainbow trout.

Jateff also reports **steelhead** fishing on the Columbia River in the Brewster/Bridgeport area has slowed over the past few weeks with anglers averaging a fish every 12 hours. The most popular spots are the Pateros area, as well as just above and below Wells Dam. WDFW enforcement officers recently patrolling Okanogan waterways found no fish caught by steelheaders and no angles out after **whitefish** on the Methow River.

South Central Washington:

This is the time to focus fishing efforts on the flowing, open waters of streams and rivers, as most of the region's year-round, trout-stocked ponds and lakes are iced over, but not necessarily thick enough for safe ice fishing.

Some of the best river and stream fishing now is for whitefish, open on the Bumping, Naches, Tieton and Yakima rivers, and the Columbia River between Vantage and Priest Rapids Dam. 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 rule - 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. Check the fishing rules pamphlet for all details.

Anglers can bone up and gear up for future opportunities at the 14th annual Tri-Cities Sportsmen Show, Jan. 19-21, at the TRAC in Pasco. Among the many fishing guide and gear vendor displays and demonstrations, there's a kids' fishing pond and free seminars by experts on virtually every kind of fishing imaginable. Show hours are 1-8 p.m. Jan. 19, 10 a.m.-7 p.m. Jan. 20 and 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Jan. 21. Admission prices are \$7 for adults, \$3.50 for kids six to 12, and free for kids under six. For more details, see <http://www.shuylarproductions.com/index.php>.

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Nahs feesh, Bubba:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dh_VFvIQR5w&mode=related&search=

Weekly Quote – "Fish-story tellers have jeopardized their credibility time and again by inserting into their tales a wanton degree of hyperbole, often introducing the most improbably characters and events without batting an eyelash. This has earned us all a bad reputation and has made things hard for those of us who would tell a story and not stray one iota from the truth." - Craig Woods

GOOD LUCK!