

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **March 9th – March 15th, 2007**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Commercial test catches in the Columbia indicate fair numbers of salmon and steelhead in the river. With the current weather pattern, mainstem clarity should improve and so should sport catches. The river from Longview downstream should fare best although boat anglers will have the advantage with a weak tide series on-hand.

Trollers pulling herring in the Willamette took a few spring Chinook over the weekend. It's still early, but this is a good sign. The sturgeon derby produced a good number of keepers for participants with the stretch below St. Johns and Multnomah Channel receiving heavy pressure. Fishing was slower on Sunday, but a few keeper sturgeon were taken.

Clackamas anglers saw the water start to color up early this week. Steelheading has been slow. Eagle Creek has produced some fish to steelheaders drifting bait. Many of the fish present are too dark to keep. Over 100 fish entered the hatchery facility last week.

Prior to last weekends rise in river levels, the Sandy River produced good catches of wild and some broodstock steelhead in the high teens. Fish are well distributed in the system and catches will only improve in coming weeks.

Hagg Lake frustrated most trollers over the opener and derby last Saturday although bank fishers using bait did somewhat better. Freshly-stocked trout won't venture out of shallow water for a couple of weeks following a planting. A few of the larger brood trout were taken.

Northwest – The Wilson River was laden with steelhead on Thursday last week. Knowledgeable anglers took easy limits but when the river rose with heavy precipitation over the weekend, most fish moved upstream where bank anglers have better opportunities.

The Nestucca has been consistent as well but its popularity due to the recent success of the broodstock program has frustrated some long-time veterans.

The wild run of steelhead is well underway on all north coast streams but snow slow to melt has kept river levels high and fish scattered. Drifted bait is producing the best results but plugs are working well on the smaller streams where fish aren't migrating as rapidly.

Rain combined with melting snow put the Siletz out of shape over the weekend but fishing improved significantly by mid-week. A strong showing of broodstock and wild steelhead were taken. River forecasts have the Siletz going out again by Saturday.

Anglers are anxious for herring to show in Yaquina Bay, but jigging has been yielding only a few. Crabbing improved late last week but slowed again over the weekend.

Alsea anglers took steelhead earlier this week, but the hatchery run is beginning to wind down. ODF&W is developing a broodstock program to prolong the steelhead run into spring.

Hebo Lake, North Lake, South Lake and Town Lake are scheduled to be planted with legal-sized trout.

Southwest – Despite higher-than-optimal water levels and low visibility, the Umpqua fished well over the weekend, delivering multiple hookups to many anglers. About half the fish landed have been fin-clipped steelhead of hatchery origin.

The Siuslaw River has been putting out fair numbers of wild and some broodstock steelhead. The weather forecast has this river going out into the early part of next week.

Sturgeon fishing is very likely to improve in the Umpqua below Reedsport. Sand or mud shrimp are the most popular and effective baits, fished on the bottom with a short leader and a sliding weight to better detect a bite. The outgoing tide is most productive for these current-loving scent feeders.

The Rogue blew out over the weekend with more rain on the way. It is unlikely to fish by the weekend.

At six feet and flowing well over 5,000 cfs on Tuesday this week, rain will push the Chetco further out of shape.

Eastern – Fly anglers on the middle Deschutes are doing well fishing nymphs for Browns and rainbows. The lower river has been slow to fair although warm weather has triggered brief Mayfly hatches, providing mid-day dry-fly action.

Lake Billy Chinook provided decent bull trout fishing for trollers over last weekend. **Pro guide Rick Arnold (541-480-1570)** reports the Metolius Arm is fishing very well. Don't forget your tribal permit for this area.

Pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688) reports Grande Ronde anglers are still posting good numbers of summer steelhead near Troy and barring any heavy rain falling, fishing should remain good. The Wallowa River is also yielding impressive results.

SW Washington – Wild steelhead are making a stronger showing than late-run hatchery fish. The Cowlitz, Kalama and Lewis Rivers are all yielding small catches of fish with little effort.

Many smaller Columbia River tributaries close to steelhead fishing on March 15th to protect spawning fish. Check local regulations before heading out.

Smelt dippers were still catching limited numbers in the Cowlitz River. With such a small number predicted to return, catches will likely die off soon.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Salmon anglers are anxious to get the season underway and recent weather has improved conditions for anglers on the mainstem. Although effort is just now getting underway, success rates although limited, are underway. The best stretch of river has been from the I-5 Bridge (upper most deadline) to the Lewis River but more consistent results will likely begin to show from Jim Crow Sands near the Estuary upstream to the Cathlamet area. With temperatures beginning to increase, plugs will become another viable method for catching fish. Herring is a strong option for early season salmon. The bulk of the fish in the system now are destined for the Willamette River. These fish are most easily identified by their "snow belly" features including a whiter chin when upper Columbia bound salmon have dusky bellies and chins. The Columbia bound chinook will also feature a deeper red flesh than the Willamette fish. Many anglers believe that these fish travel the Oregon side of the river. Although unsubstantiated, this seems to make sense so higher effort often takes place on the Oregon side. Certainly the mouth of the Multnomah Channel is a strong option when water clarity justifies effort. Higher flows often direct good numbers of fish into the Channel.

Commercial effort was put on hold this week due to the high number of steelhead present and a stronger showing of upper Columbia spring chinook in the most recent targeted gillnet fishery. The commercial fleet is in a quandary because if they fish their tooth tangle nets, they are likely to eat into their steelhead impacts. If they utilize their larger mesh nets, they are likely to eat into their ESA listed impacts to Snake River fish. The commercial fleet has already exhausted 43% of their allowable impacts so in essence, they are almost half way through their season with very little effort taking place. Anyway, the hold on the commercial season will put more fish into the Willamette River this week- it's just too bad poor tides will likely not draw in large numbers of fish.

Sturgeon anglers are still spending most of their time pursuing keepers in the lower Willamette. Very few keepers (and shakers) are coming from the Columbia River at this time.

Smelt dipping was once again a bust on the Cowlitz last Saturday, but crowds of hopefuls are likely to return when it opens again on the 10th. The WDFW conducted sample nettings on Thursday, March 8th, which resulted in zero smelt and commercial efforts this week were fruitless. The results of future sampling will be available online at [*http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regions/reg5/reg5-2.htm](http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regions/reg5/reg5-2.htm) on Fridays.

Walleye fishing is beginning to heat up with the water temperatures. Creel checks in the Bonneville Pool indicated increased effort and catch but on average, only 1 fish per boat was landed. In comparison, The Dalles Pool put out over 2 walleye per boat and the John Day Pool just slightly less than 2 fish per boat. These catch statistics indicate the fish are moving into their shallower lies in preparation for the spring spawn. Action should even improve in coming weeks until the spawn actually happens.

The Guide's Forecast – Although the weather pattern is still predicted to be volatile in the coming week, water conditions should continue to improve in the mainstem Columbia. Also, with the halting of the commercial gillnet season and a significant portion of the forecasted run to be Willamette bound fish, action could pick up for mainstem anglers this week.

Weak tides should favor boat anglers as stronger tides tend to draw fish closer to the bank as these fish are calorie conscious since they won't be feeding on their upstream migration. Trollers should begin to see catches improve at Tenasillahe and Clifton Channel just downstream of Westport/Cathlamet areas and the St. Helens area could see improved catches as well. Anchor anglers should have some opportunity in the Kalama section of the river and the wing jetties should begin to produce light catches of quality chinook. Late afternoon tides will begin to improve significantly late next week so anglers will want to save any precious vacation time until the following week. This week should produce the best catches of the season so far on the mainstem Columbia.

Sturgeon anglers should continue to focus on the Willamette River but walleye anglers will want to begin pursuit of the next world record as water temperatures begin to climb. This warming will inspire the walleye to begin their spawning ritual in coming weeks- this is coming into peak walleye time!

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – The single spring Chinook which crossed Willamette Falls on February 15th must be a lonely critter. No additional springers have been counted since then. Steelhead counts totaled 3,796. With the water temperature of the lower Willamette up to 48 degrees as of March 8th, fish movement and catches of all species has improved this week. The visibility was 2.2 feet on that date.

While not the destination of a great number of boaters, the fishing spot known as the cul-de-sac at the base of Willamette Falls may be off limits to boaters due to a new ladder. Officially titled the T.W. Sullivan North Fish Bypass, heavy flows in the area below it is likely to be at cause for a new deadline

further downriver. Stay tuned.

The sturgeon derby held last Saturday yielded good catches for many participants. Every year, a weight is chosen at random and if a sturgeon happens to hit the exact poundage, the lucky angler gets \$25,000. This is the first year in the history of the derby when one fisherman hit the mark, taking home the hefty check. In addition, a new North River drift boat was awarded in a raffle. Proceeds benefited the Boys and Girls Club.

While the vast majority of fish in the North Santiam are native winters, a few hatchery summer steelhead (which haven't been counted as such at the Falls thus far in 2007) are also present. Several were taken recently below Mehama.

The Guide's Forecast – With the water temperature approaching 50 degrees, each day will move us closer to the opening of the Chinook floodgates. Last year, the prediction was for 46,500 with the final total of 59,700. The 2007 forecast is for 52,200. Springers have been falling for prawn spinners recently. Spring is surely coming.

Sturgeon fishing should be rewarding despite the dent last week's derby made in the number of available keepers. Recently, smelt, anchovy, squid and sand shrimp have been effective baits. Sturgeon's preference can change daily so it really pays to have a variety on board. Last week, the bite remained light, so pay close attention to the rod tip or just hang on to the rod to feel the bite, especially if it's windy.

Steelhead populations in the North Santiam are improving daily, as should the cat (and release) rate. While Detroit Reservoir above the river won't be full until early May, rain over the last week has filled tributaries and as a consequence the North Santiam is fairly high. Look for greater numbers of fish in the river daily as this is the destination of the majority of steelhead crossing the Falls. The lower drifts are expected to be most productive in the coming week.

Drift boaters take note! A tree is down across the North Channel at Guides Island. Use caution in this stretch. Use caution and stay to the left for safe passage.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – The Clackamas is running high and off color this week. Steelheading is slow with a few bring taken above Carver. Eagle Creek should be productive, if crowded, this weekend. Drifting cured salmon eggs will be the best approach for intercepting the winters returning to the hatchery. At last glimpse mid-week, the water color was good but there was a lot of it and it was moving at a pretty fast clip.

Sandy steelheaders managed to hook a few steelhead using cured salmon eggs earlier this week high on the river. Strong flow has the sand (present in copious quantity since the last high water event) stirred up and billowing. As a result, steelheaders aren't getting any hits downriver.

North Coast District Fishing Report – North coast steelheaders got their first taste of what's to come on Thursday as Wilson River anglers had easy pickings. **Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** had a group out this day and landed 12 steelhead for 13 opportunities. Chris had most of his chances side drifting on the lower Wilson. Pictured here are his customers with their limit of broodstock fish:



Chris also contributed 5 wild fish to the broodstock program on the Wilson River this day. The program got a significant boost last week with big numbers of fish coming into the hatchery. To participate in the Wilson or Nestucca broodstock collection, call the Tillamook ODF&W office at (503) 842-2741.

With this sort of showing, many of us thought the fishing would hold up for a while. Well, more precipitation in the form of rain and snow fell in the basin over last weekend keeping river levels high and fish on the move. Following the drop, fish were well distributed in the Wilson system with effort remaining high.

I started my work week on the Necanicum River last Sunday with ideal conditions and favorable weather. We worked the water from Klootchie Creek to the gravel pit with 7 opportunities landing 5 fish. We spent most of our day pulling plugs and the K11 X-treme, chrome with orange stripes was unstoppable. It was responsible for the bulk of our catch. Most of the fish we landed were run-back steelhead but we did hook some bright wild fish- we just didn't land those. I followed up the next day on a short float from Siskeyville to Mills Bridge on the Wilson landing a beautiful broodstock, 12 pound buck for neighbor **Pat Vining** of Bay City near the take-out. The next 2 days were also spent on the Wilson River where side drifting ruled but not necessarily for us. We only landed 1 fish in the day and a half I had customers out- it was a nice 10 pound wild hen caught side-drifting a corkie and plastic eggs.

There were some fair numbers of fish taken by some anglers with side drifting responsible for the lion's share from Mills Bridge to Sollie Smith. Higher flows kept fish from concentrating in most locations but well spread out so you could find fish just about in any type of shallow, slower water type.

Pro guide Dave Johnson (503-201-4292) adds this report, "Last week after the high water most the guides were hooking double digits but this week with the water being high so long the fish have been spread out and our numbers have dropped to a handful a day. The water is high and cold from snow melt and we are having our best success by giving them a slowed down offering like drift fishing with heavy lead or pulling plugs. This has been paying off in the high, cold water."

The Nestucca has remained a consistent producer as well with successful anglers taking advantage of the higher drifts that didn't quite have the faster flows of the lower reaches. **Pro guide Kent Anderson (503-550-6303)** reported consistent results from 6th Bridge downstream but anglers need to be cautious when floating this reach. It is more technical water and not recommended for those that

haven't drifted it before. The put in at 5½ is no longer functional reports Kent so when the Nestucca drops even further, there won't be much access for anglers in the upper reach as the major rapid just above this put in will be too dangerous to pass. The Nestucca flows also challenge plug pullers making drift fishing or side drifting the better options.

The Kilchis and Trask have not seen heavy traffic although fish should be available on both systems. Recent reports however have not be great but the Trask typically sees some of its better returns a little later in the month. The Nehalem is a poor option with the amount of rainfall in the basin.

Sturgeon reports are poor as of late but effort is low also. Crabbing reports are also disappointing but that is to be expected with the poor ocean productivity and high fresh water influx we are now experiencing in the estuaries.

The Guide's Forecast – North coast flows are forecasted to remain consistent making steelheading an option well into the weekend. The fact remains however that higher flows will keep fish on the move and without a significant tide series at hand, action will likely continue to drop off until flows drop enough to slow migration. Smaller systems like the Kilchis, North Fork Nehalem and Necanicum may also remain options but may pose a higher risk of river hazards in the lower flows.

Drifted bait will remain the best option and anglers should utilize heavy scent to maximize success. On the larger systems, most drifts will remain accessible and the higher reaches may yield the better results. Keep in mind however that broodstock fish are acclimated to the lower reaches to avoid hatchery/wild fish interaction. This will make the Mills Bridge to Sollie Smith on the Wilson and 4th Bridge to Three Rivers the most productive sections to find a hatchery fish this late into the season.

Weak tides may make crabbing look like an option but the marine forecast says otherwise. Needless to say, the ocean won't be so friendly either. Sturgeon fishing won't be a great option either with wind and rain in the forecast.

Central & South Coast Reports – Weather models have the Umpqua rising into the weekend. Hit the South when the river starts to drop and clear. Steelheading on the South Umpqua has been excellent this season when the water conditions have cooperated. Sturgeon fishing below Reedsport may save weekend anglers. Crabbing in the bay is poor.

The Coos and Coquille rivers are on their way out as weekend steelheading prospects. Coquille anglers have enjoying fine fishing when the river has been in decent condition.

Pulling plugs has been effective for boaters on the Elk and Sixes. These volatile rivers were high mid-week but exhibited passable color, allowing for modest catches.

Plunkers on the lower Rogue have hooked - and lost - some big fish over the last week. That these were spring Chinook remains speculation as there have been no confirmed catches as yet. The springer run here is expected to be smaller this year. The river level at Agness is predicted to rise this weekend, cresting on Sunday near nine feet. The Grants Pass stretch is high, muddy and swift. Upper Rogue steelheaders have a chance at a few winters along with late, recycled summers. Bait will rule in these conditions. The YTD winter steelhead count is approaching the 3,000 mark.

The Chetco is expected to crest overnight Saturday and will probably not fish this weekend.

Remember the Klamath Chinook crisis of 2006 that curtailed commercial efforts and reduced recreational opportunities? In an unexpected reversal, Federal fish managers announced this week that three-year-olds number about 500,000 offshore, an increase of 1200% over last year and an

unprecedented, all-time record.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688) reports, "Northeast Oregon's thaw this week is gradual, with most of the runoff going into the ground, leaving rivers steady and in good color. Along with the warmer weather and great water conditions the catching showed decent improvement from last week.

"Somebody must have believed my assessment that fish were still in the Grande Ronde at Troy because the fishing interest increased dramatically, along with the catch, last week. Instead of one fish caught, like last week, 34 fish were landed this week at an average of about 7 hours per fish. Washington anglers did better, averaging less than 5 hours per fish and reporting to the creel checker that 140 steelhead landed.

"The Willowa River came in between the Oregon and Washington portion of the Grande Ronde with an average of 6 hours per fish and 58 steelhead landed with slightly less pressure than last week.

"The forecast for the week shows daily temperatures mostly in the 40s and night time temperatures just reaching the 20s. The low and mid elevation snow is thinning out as the week progresses and becomes less of a threat to the rivers. The wildcard is the system of storms coming into the Pacific Northwest late this week. If it snows, the rivers and the fishing will remain good. If rains, the fish might get a break for a week or so."

Pro guide Rick Arnold (541-480-1570) reports, "The Metolius Arm of LBC was officially open for business effective 3-1-07. With overcast skies and more wind than normal it was a little dicey on the trolling. Mixed bag on the results. Glen Chase caught and released a 12 Lb. bull. Surface temps a little colder than usual."

Don't forget to shell out \$9 for a tribal permit to fish this arm of Lake Bully Chinook.

Northwest Trout – Grant Lansing, the "Fish'n Magician," of Portland caught this 29.5-inch brood trout while bass fishing with a plastic worm at Henry Hagg Lake on Saturday, March 3rd. On eight-pound test, it took 20 minutes to land the jumbo rainbow. Lansing was not involved in the derby being held that day and doesn't intentionally fish for trout. Read the entire story in his own words in the **Reader Email** section, below.



Hebo Lake, North Lake, South Lake and Town Lake. all in the Northwest Zone are scheduled to be planted with legal-sized trout. Dexter Reservoir in the Willamette Valley has been stocked this week.

Northwest Bass & Panfish - The Irrigon stretch of the Columbia is producing fair to good catches of walleye, a few of which have weighed over 10 pounds.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report March 7th – March 20th, 2007

North Puget Sound

Anglers could have an opportunity over the next couple weeks to take advantage of warming temperatures and spring-like conditions on Puget Sound, where blackmouth salmon fishing remains hot. Freshwater fishers also could benefit from the changing seasons, as the Skagit River appears to be dropping into shape, improving anglers' chances of hooking a steelhead.

The best bet, though, continues to be the **blackmouth** fishery. "There's no shortage of blackmouth out there," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "Fishing has been good for several weeks, and some people have said that this is the best blackmouth fishing they've seen in a long time."

Most marine areas in the region - with the exception of Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) - are open

for blackmouth, and all have been good for salmon anglers, Thiesfeld said.

The most productive region seems to be the southern portion of Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet), Thiesfeld said. According to WDFW creel checks at the Everett boat ramp, 262 anglers brought home 56 salmon during the first weekend in March. At the Kingston public ramp, 34 anglers were checked with nine chinook that same weekend.

Anglers in Marine Area 9, as well as Marine Area 7 (San Juan Islands), have a daily limit of one salmon, and chinook must measure at least 22 inches in length. "Marine Area 7 also is kicking out some nice size fish," Thiesfeld said. "I've heard some salmon have been as large as 18 pounds."

Blackmouth fishing in marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay) and the northern portion of 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) also remains a good bet, Thiesfeld said. Anglers in those two marine areas 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.

"There might be some really hot spots here and there, but it's hard to go wrong just about anywhere in the region this year when it comes to blackmouth," Thiesfeld said.

Hot fishing could make for some heated competition during the inaugural Anacortes Salmon Derby, which is scheduled for March 10-11 out of the Cap Sante Marina. Tickets for the event are \$50 per person, with proceeds going toward scholarships to benefit young adults interested in pursuing an education in fisheries or a related natural science. Top prize for the derby, which is hosted by the Fidalgo Chapter of Puget Sound Anglers, is \$5,000. For more information visit <http://www.anacortessalmonderby.com>.

In the freshwater, anglers in the region still have a shot at **steelhead**. A number of rivers closed to steelhead fishing Feb. 28, although most areas of the Skagit River remain open for the harvest of hatchery steelhead through March 15. Beginning March 16, a catch-and-release fishery for all steelhead opens on the Skagit from the Dalles Bridge to the Cascade River. Wild steelhead are distinguished from hatchery fish by their intact adipose and ventral fins.

Brett Barkdull, another WDFW fish biologist, said fishing has been decent on the Skagit, especially in the lower river. "The river had been running a little high recently," he said. "But it should be back in shape, and anglers should find some nice fish."

Barkdull reminds steelheaders on the Skagit fishing from boats, sleds or any other floating device equipped with a gas or electric motor that it's illegal to fish while under power during the catch-and-release season. Rules and regulations for the Skagit River fishery, as well as other freshwater and saltwater fisheries, can be found in WDFW's 2006/2007 Fishing in Washington pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>).

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

Fishing for blackmouth is still going strong in Puget Sound, but steelheading may give that fishery a run for its money now that the rivers have dropped into shape. Add the prospect of a razor clam dig in mid-March and the outdoor forecast is looking good for the days ahead.

Fishing for **blackmouth** continues to reward anglers from Port Angeles to Hood Canal, said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "This season is continuing to produce," he said. "The fishing is the best I've seen in the past six to eight years."

Good numbers of fish, combined with nice weather, helped make the 25th annual Geoduck Restaurant Salmon Derby in northern Hood Canal a success, said Sue Perley, who sponsored the event. Shane Roaf of Brinnon won the \$600 first prize after hooking an 18-pound, 2-ounce blackmouth. A total of 149 fish were weighed in during the two-day derby, which takes place "anywhere south of the Hood Canal Bridge," Perley said. Most of the fish were caught in the Brinnon-Seabeck area.

Twenty-five blackmouth were reported caught over the March 3-4 weekend at Ediz Hook (Marine Area 6), the three-and-a-half mile spit that curves north of Port Angeles. Farther south, anglers fishing in Marine Area 11 near Point Defiance boat ramp hauled in nine blackmouth March 4. South Sound anglers should also be aware that Marine Area 13 opened March 1 for blackmouth.

Meanwhile, word is out that rivers and streams throughout the area have dropped into shape for some prime **steelhead** fishing. Sixty-three anglers were contacted on the Bogachiel River during a creel survey conducted March 2-4, up from just 17 anglers during the previous three-day period. Those 63 anglers connected with 51 fish (all but four of them wild), releasing 16 of them.

"The rivers are dropping into shape and fishing should start to pick up," said David Low, a WDFW fish biologist who monitors the fishery on north coast rivers. "Conditions haven't been great this season but, when they are, anglers are generally finding fish."

More anglers were surveyed on the Hoh River during the March 2-4 creel check than anywhere else. On the lower river, 141 anglers reported catching 45 steelhead, 41 of them wild. On the upper river, 94 anglers caught 50 fish, releasing all 46 of the wild ones. The 21 anglers surveyed on the Sol Duc had caught 11 steelhead, nine of them wild.

No survey results were available for the Queets River during that period, but Low said he had heard reports of several 18-to-20 pounders caught in recent days.

Under state rules, anglers may retain one wild steelhead per year, provided that it is caught in one of 10 designated rivers in western Washington. Rules for wild-steelhead retention are outlined on page 29 of the Fishing in Washington rule pamphlet <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

Favorable weather and river conditions have also made for good fishing in the Grays Harbor area, said Scott Barbour, WDFW fish biologist. "Now that the rivers are back in shape, there are fish to be had," he said. "Although some rain is expected in coming days, the rivers should remain quite good." The Wynoochee and Satsop rivers were especially popular for steelhead fishing in early March, Barbour said.

Those fishing the Chehalis River might also want to consider trying for sturgeon, which are now present in the river. "The technique for catching the big fish is somewhat different," said Barbour. "People seem to have the best luck using smelt for bait on an incoming or outgoing tide, and keeping their lead low to reach the fish."

Ready to dig some **razor clams**? Fishery managers have tentatively scheduled a three-day razor clam dig March 16-18 at various ocean beaches on evening tides. Final word on the dig will be announced about a week ahead of time, once marine toxin tests determine whether clams on those beaches remain safe to eat.

As currently scheduled, the following beaches will be open for razor clam digging between noon and midnight on the following days:

March 16, Friday - Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks (low evening tide: 5:31 p.m., +0.1 ft.)

March 17, Saturday - All beaches: Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch (low evening tide: 6:16 p.m., -0.1 ft.)

March 18, Sunday - Long Beach, Twin Harbors and Kalaloch (low evening tide: 6:58 p.m. -0.1 ft.)

No digging will be allowed before noon any of those days.

Southwest Washington:

Smelt are thinning out and steelhead fishing is set to close on a number of lower Columbia tributaries, but spring chinook salmon are about to take the main stage.

With springers now showing up in creel surveys on the lower river, anglers have established a growing "fish camp" in Cathlamet.

"**Spring chinook** fishing should improve daily," said Joe Hymer, WDFW fish biologist. "The fish are beginning to arrive, water conditions are improving and we're getting some warmer weather. This season is about to begin in earnest."

The spring chinook fishery has been open since Jan. 1 between the Interstate 5 bridge downstream to Buoy 10, but it doesn't usually start heating up until mid-March, Hymer said. Creel surveys and other reports show anglers are now catching hatchery spring chinook between the I-5 Bridge and the Lewis River.

Anglers fishing below the I-5 bridge can keep a total of six hatchery salmon per day - including two adults - but must release any wild, unmarked fish they encounter. Hatchery steelhead and shad may also be retained within the limits described in WDFW's *Fishing in Washington* rules pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>).

Based on pre-season estimates, a total of 164,000 spring chinook are expected to return to the Columbia River this year, considerably fewer than the 225,000 that returned last year. However, some individual runs - particularly the one to the Willamette River - should provide some good fishing this year, Hymer said.

"A large portion of the return to the Willamette is comprised of five-year-old fish, which can run to 30 pounds or more," he said. "Those fish tend to come in early, so they should start showing up in the catch pretty soon." He added that the Cowlitz, Kalama, and Lewis rivers should also start producing spring chinook soon.

The mainstem recreational fishery for spring chinook salmon below the I-5 Bridge is scheduled to run through April 15, unless allowed targets for wild fish are reached first. Run forecasts for Columbia River tributaries are posted on the WDFW website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/salmon_columbia07.htm.

Farther upriver, fishing for hatchery chinook and hatchery **steelhead** will open March 16 from the Tower Islands (six miles below The Dalles Dam) to McNary Dam. Chinook fishing will also open March 16 on the Wind River and Drano Lake, although returns to those waters - plus the Klickitat River, which opens in April - are expected to be down this year. WDFW will announce new fishing regulations for the Wind River and post them on its website within the week.

Since only one chinook had been counted at Bonneville Dam through February, anglers should check the fish counts at <http://www.cbr.washington.edu/dart/adult.html> or <http://www.nwp.usace.army.mil/op/fishdata/home.asp> before they head to these areas.

Meanwhile, March 15 is the last day to fish several lower Columbia tributaries, which are being closed to protect spawning steelhead. Rivers and creeks closing the next day include Abernathy, Cedar, Germany, Mill (Cowlitz County), Rock (Skamania County), Salmon (Clark County), Skamokawa, Coweeman, Elochoman, Grays, East Fork Lewis, Washougal and Wind.

Anglers are still catching some steelhead on the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers, which will remain open for late stocks of hatchery fish. Wild fish must be released. Angler effort on the Lewis River has been light.

Smelt dippers on the Cowlitz and lower Columbia rivers have probably seen the peak of the season - such as it was, Hymer said. Both recreational and commercial harvest did fairly well on the last Saturday in February, but the catch has declined ever since, Hymer said. "Dippers may still be able to pick up some smelt, but abundance is declining," Hymer said. The Cowlitz River will be open to smelt dipping from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. each Saturday through March 31.

Sturgeon fishing in all areas of the Columbia open for that species should improve with warming weather, although most anglers below the I-5 bridge are now focusing on spring chinook, Hymer said. Boat anglers fishing for **walleye** have been averaging one fish per rod in The Dalles Pool, and almost that good in the Bonneville and John Day pools. **Trout** anglers should be aware that WDFW released 2,000 browns into Kline Pond and 7,000 more into Lacamas Lake on Feb. 22.

Eastern Washington:

The Spokane River arm of Lake Roosevelt is the place to catch **walleye** now. WDFW district fish biologist Chris Donley of Spokane explains that walleye are staging in that part of the waterway now in preparation to go upstream into the reservoir to spawn. Walleye fishing in the Spokane arm remains open until April 1, then closes for two months to allow the fish to spawn.

Many **trout** waters in the central district of the region have been a little tough to access. Iced-up shorelines have made bank fishing virtually impossible, and launching boats to reach open water has been challenging. "We need a good rainstorm, wind, and continued mild temperatures to open things up," Donley said. Undaunted anglers in float tubes and other small craft have been working Coffeepot Lake in Lincoln County and Amber Lake in Spokane County, both which opened March 1 and have healthy populations of rainbows.

Donley also noted that the district's two winter-only rainbow trout-stocked lakes - Fourth of July on the Lincoln-Adams county line and Hog Canyon in southwest Spokane County - are still producing catches. Both close March 31.

The Tucannon River impoundments in Columbia County that opened March 1 have been providing good catches. WDFW Tucannon Fish Hatchery manager Doug Maxey reported all seven man-made fishing lakes -- Beaver, Big Four, Blue, Deer, Rainbow, Spring and Watson lakes - are full of catchable-size (8-10-inch) rainbows and "in good shape," completely ice-free and accessible. Maxey said the lakes will be re-stocked starting the week of March 19.

Anglers who want to get the latest information on fish stocking and rules can visit the WDFW booth at the Inland Northwest Wildlife Council's annual Big Horn Outdoor Adventure Show, March 15-18, at the Spokane County Fair and Expo Center. For more information see <http://www.wildlifecouncil.com/bighornsubsite/default.htm>.

North Central Washington:

WDFW district fish biologist Jeff Korth of Moses Lakes says there's plenty of good **rainbow trout** fishing ahead in the Columbia Basin because cold weather and ice cover on the March 1 opener kept anglers and catches to a minimum. "Participation and catch rates will pick up at all these lakes when our weather stabilizes and spring advances," he said.

The largest lakes - Burke and Quincy - were iced up and slow on the opener. Creel checks that day measured just 2.5 fish per angler average at Quincy, where most of the catch was made up of 13.5-inch yearling rainbows and about 27 percent in 17.5-inch carryovers. Anglers at Burke averaged 1.7 fish apiece, mostly in 11.2-inch rainbows with about eight percent in 14.5-inch carryovers. "These two lakes have some of the best fish in the Basin," Korth said, "so as they open up and warm weather entices more anglers, they'll provide some very good fishing."

Martha Lake fished the best on the opener with an average of almost four trout per angler. Many limits were caught in an hour or less. Most of the catch there was in 10.5-inch rainbows with a few 15.5-inch carryovers. Korth says it will stay that good throughout much of the season.

Upper, Lower, and West Caliche lakes were slow, as expected. Upper Caliche was completely ice-free, but anglers averaged just a little over one fish apiece, mostly 11-inch rainbows with some 12.6-inch carryovers. "The rainbow fishery there is simply overrun by perch and smallmouth bass," Korth said. "We stocked 4,000 rainbows there the day before the opener, but I think those fish just didn't acclimate fast enough. By now they will be very catchable."

Dusty Lake, managed under the selective fishery rules (no bait, single barbless hook, one-fish limit), was ice-free and provided very good fishing on the opener. Anglers were averaging four to five 14-20-inch rainbows each per hour.

Lenice and Nunnally lakes, also selective fishery waters, were fair on the opener, with anglers averaging about three 14-19-inch rainbows apiece. The catch rate at these lakes was much slower than Dusty, however, with less than one fish per hour of effort. Korth says Lenice and Nunnally should receive some larger hatchery fish by the first of April.

No opening day checks were made at Lake Lenore because it was mostly ice covered then. As it opens up, Korth expects Lenore to be good for many three to five-pounds **Lahontan cutthroat trout**. Lenore is under selective fishery rules, with catch-and-release requirements in effect from March through May.

As water and air temperatures warm, the string of small, walk-in lakes on the west side of the Quincy Wildlife Area should provide good fishing for anglers who want to get away from the crowds. None were checked on the opener, but usually yearling rainbows range from 9-12 inches, with carryovers 14-18 inches.

WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff of Omak reports hatchery-marked **steelhead** fishing on the Upper Columbia River above Wells Dam continues to be slow. "The most popular fishing spots are at the docks in Pateros and just upstream and downstream of the dam," he said. The season is scheduled to continue through March, but it could close on short notice, depending on impacts to wild fish. Anglers should watch for WDFW emergency announcements or news releases.

Jateff says there are still opportunities for ice fishing in the Okanogan, with Rat and Davis Lakes still providing catches of **rainbow trout** in the 10-12 inch range. Rufus Woods reservoir continues to provide **triploid rainbow** fishing for both bank and boat anglers. Fish average in the one to three-pound range, with an occasional five-pounder caught. Jateff reminds anglers that whenever bait is used in fishing, fish hooked and landed are part of the daily limit whether retained or released.

Jateff also reminds anglers that the regulations on Spectacle Lake are different this year. The lake opens April 1 and closes September 30 to provide a longer season for anglers on the very popular fishing lake.

[South Central Washington:](#)

Fishing: The southcentral region's many year-round fishing lakes continue to be stocked with catchable-size (10-12 inch) rainbow trout through this month. Some jumbo trout, weighing about a pound each, will also be planted in those waters, including Granger Pond, I-82 Ponds 4 & 6, Myron Lake, Rotary Lake and Sarge Hubbard Park Pond. Anglers can check the weekly plants list at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly> on the WDFW website to see which lakes were recently planted.

WDFW district fish biologist Eric Anderson of Yakima says more lakes at higher elevations will be stocked as the weather continues to warm up and the snow and ice melts. Wenas Lake, a popular recreational fishery in the Yakima Valley, is no longer stocked because the landowner has decided to not renew the public access agreement.

Although most of the lakes in the Yakima and Kittitas valleys are open to fishing year round, special regulations are in effect on some waters. For that reason, Anderson strongly advises anglers to check WDFW's Fishing in Washington rule book (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>) before casting a line.

Reader Email

Subscriber Roger K. wrote this week, "Good morning..say, I have a question. Suffering withdrawal from waiting for Willamette to clear up near St. John area so can fish some Springers. Do you know if boats are putting in yet at Fred's Marina and running down to the Columbia fishing Springers by the barges? Seems from what I remember last year that the Columbia was much more clear at this time. Thanx for your comments."

Pro guide Bob Rees replied "It should be clear upstream of the Willamette. I don't imagine there is a lot of effort for these fish here but it may be the best spot going until the Willamette does clear.

"Good luck!"

Reader Dennis F. wrote with this question, "I have wondered about for sometime. Why is there no effort in the estuary for springers? In the fall anglers start there and follow the salmon as they progress upriver. Why isn't this done with spring Chinook? Just curious... thanks,"

Pro guide Bob Rees responded, "It's a good question. There are several things you must keep in mind that may not motivate you to give this fishery a try.

"1) The spring run is a fraction of the fall run. Although spring run fish bite better, they come in over a much longer period of time versus the fall fish which all come in at once. Fall fish all come in about 2 weeks; spring fish over the course of about 6 to 8 weeks.

"2) The fishing is pretty good close to Portland. Why travel so far when you can have good fishing close to home?

"3)The water can be rough and cold in the estuary at this time of year. There is no place to duck from the wind.

"But, if you feel so inclined, give it a try and tell us what you come up with. I tried it once, yes, ONCE.

"Good question though....."

Here's that story from **Grant Lansing** about catching the brood trout pictured above:

Henry Hagg Lake, Opening Day 2007

"After four months of hard won patience, we pulled into the gravel lot just as dawn began to lift away the night sky. We were the only visitors and the crunching sound beneath our tires seemed overly amplified. Though hundreds of feet from the shoreline, I found myself hoping the fish could not sense our arrival. No doubt about it, four months of anticipation will put a fella in the zone! The night rain which attempted to dampen our expedition had ceased. We strung up our lines against dawn's first light and began our trek down the hill, barely holding back the urge to run.

"The morning was almost a mirror of the previous year's opening day, except this year it seemed 10 degrees warmer. The water was like glass but terribly stained. Jim and I exchanged good wishes and set off in our own directions. Last year it was Jim that nailed the biggest (and only) fish of the day, and as we separated I sincerely hoped he would bag another one.

"At about 9:30 I called Jim's attention to the tightening slack in my line. I fed the fish a little more before rearing back on the rod, but this fish would not take well to any demands from me. Without giving slack, I drove my rod tip forward and loosened the bail on my reel. Then came the sound that turns grown fishermen into boys again. As my reel began to scream, so did I. This was not a decent fish, it was not a big fish, this was a huge fish, and as he swam for cover my line began to pick up vegetation. I knew that the brand new eight pound test I had put on the night before was at it's limit, and when the fish broke water about 50' out, I decided to flip my bail and play him by hand. For the next twenty minutes we took turns pulling against each other - when he would run, I would open the bail and feed him line. When he slowed down, I would close the bail and pump him in.

""Grab the camera Jim!" I hollered once I saw the fish. It was not at all what I had expected...

"Unlike the other hundreds of other fishermen on the drink yesterday, Jim and I were bass fishing. This was a rainbow trout, a brooder planted the day before I hooked him. Whether out of shock or sheer hunger, he decided to swallow my 5" plastic worm and the barbed hook (we never crimp barbs when bass fishing as they are so much tougher than trout). I had no pliers deep enough to get the hook and had to attempt removal from the gills. In the end I was so compelled to set this beauty free that I cut the line. The decision to keep the fish was made only after failing to revive him.

"There were two boys in a wooden rowboat that had watched the whole show. I gave them the fish and mentioned the KUIK Fishing Derby. They seemed amazed that I would not want to claim the fish myself, but I couldn't imagine any prize better than the experience I just had. I certainly was not going to trade my opportunity to continue fishing for money! Though we hooked no more fish, the day turned out gorgeous and will certainly go down on the books for us! Before departing, we checked in with KUIK and learned that the boys did indeed turn in the fish - 29-1/2!"

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 Link

Weather forecasts specifically for anglers:

<http://www.fishweather.com/windandwhere.iws?regionID=122®ionProductID=29&timeOffset=0>

Weekly Quote – "What does fishing do to connect you to your world? Sometime while you are out

flailing the water take ten minutes to sit on a big riverside boulder. Consider that the rock has been there for maybe ten thousand years being warmed by the sun and knocked about by flood waters. Listen to the voices of the river, feel the strength of the rock. These are the real heroes, but if you still think you want to be one why don't you go buy a race car?" - Marty Sherman

GOOD LUCK!