

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **March 23rd – March 29th, 2007**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Willamette River anglers are still faring well for spring chinook. Anglers working the Sellwood Bridge are seeing more consistent results and some 4 year-old fish are beginning to show in the catches. Trolled herring near the bottom just upstream of the bridge is producing but the cold front and associated precipitation could slow the weekend bite.

Pro guide Kevin Newell (360-430-2521) reports that sturgeon anglers continue to post good catches in the Portland Harbor using smelt and shrimp for bait. Several keepers are ranging from 48 to 50 inches and anglers may have to locate schools on the finder before setting the anchor.

After a two-week hiatus of Columbia River gillnets, commercial fishers went in for a 10-hour opener on Tuesday night. This could slow the mainstem bite, which remained fair above the mouth of the Willamette River reports **pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)**. Cathlamet area anglers are now getting into some chinook catches. One salmon for every 24 boat rods was tallied over the weekend. Bank anglers were not doing all that well. Results of this opener will give agencies an indication of numbers of spring chinook present and whether the fish are destined for the Willamette or upper Columbia River.

Sandy River anglers are catching steelhead throughout the river with a stronger showing of natives. Water temperatures were on the rise, which should stimulate the early arrival of the system's first spring chinook.

Pro guide Brandon Glass (503-666-5370) reports the Sandy river has been on the drop and starting to look beautiful but the catching is still slow.

Clackamas River anglers are taking a mix of wild and a few broodstock steelhead but action is likely to increase in the coming weeks.

Northwest – With so much high water this winter, steelheaders on the north coast are experiencing sub-par success. Action on the Wilson was great last Friday with ideal conditions but lots of traffic. Some large broodstock fish are in the catches.

Pro guides Jim Nicol (503-550-3166) and Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808) report Nestucca anglers are competing for steelhead with a pack of well distributed harbor seals working the river clear up to 6th bridge. Success has been sporadic and river levels are dropping enough to cause anglers to use extreme caution when boating. A boating hazard just above first bridge claimed a boat last week.

Pro guide Bill Kremers (541-754-6411) reports Siletz River anglers are finding more spawned out steelhead in their catches. Although the run is waning, on typical years, fresh fish, both wild and broodstock are available into the first week of April.

North coast anglers can expect fair results into the first week of April but effort should begin to wane as Willamette Valley spring chinook enter the minds of most anglers.

Tillamook Bay tides were favorable for sturgeon fishers over the weekend but numbers of fish seem to be down this year. The best action is taking place in the upper west channel although keepers are still rare.

Calm seas drew anxious anglers over the bar for successful bottomfishing trips over the weekend. Smaller lingcod were caught just outside Tillamook Bay while larger lings dominated catches offshore. Ocean crabbing has been much better than in the estuaries and the crab are in ideal condition.

Most coastal lakes will provide ample opportunity for trout as younger anglers prepare for spring break.

Southwest – Umpqua River anglers are experiencing some fine steelheading with fish in the teens taken regularly. This fishery is peaking right now.

Rogue River anglers are seeing the first catches of spring chinook in the lower river. Anchor fishermen use anchovy and spinner rigs working the slower inside bends of the river to produce fish. Early morning flurries are most productive as fish are most active at this time. Steelheaders are finally getting cooperative river conditions with good catches coming from the upper river.

Chetco River anglers are seeing an end to their banner steelhead season. Most fish have entered the spawning phase and past their prime for tablefare. These fish do get more aggressive after they have spawned.

Ocean bottomfishers did exceptional over the weekend in calm seas. Large lingcod hit the docks and catches of black rockfish have been good as well. The recreational chinook salmon fishing offshore opened on March 15th but effort has been next to non-existent.

Eastern – Trollers targeting bull trout at Lake Billy Chinook are finding tougher conditions to fish in. Colder water temperatures have fish lethargic but success should improve as the weather warms reports **pro guide Rick Arnold (541 382-4843)**.

Deschutes River trout fishing remains challenging with nymphs producing the best results this time of year.

Pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688) reports Eastern Oregon steelheaders are still experiencing good catches on the Grand Ronde and Willowa Rivers. Forecasted weather will keep river levels in check and action should hold up for another 2 or 3 weeks.

SW Washington – Although numbers of steelhead are clearly down from last year, catches have improved slightly on the Cowlitz River. Late run winter fish are making up the bulk of the catch.

There are some spring chinook present in the Lewis River although it may be difficult to justify a targeted trip for them.

Nineteen adult spring chinook have bypassed Bonneville Dam. This has inspired only a few boats to target them in Wind and Drano Lakes. Returning adults are expected to be down in both of these fisheries. Be sure to check regulation changes in this area.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Recent gillnet opportunity has curtailed the sportfishing success. Gillnets were permitted on the mainstem Columbia twice this week and the results indicated there are a good number of fish in the river. Upriver reports show action has been more sporadic as **pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)** reports. Brandon states, "Fishing on the Columbia in the Vancouver area has been spotty this week. The river is up as Bonneville has been letting some extra water out. There are fish but they have not been biting well due to the higher flows. However, guys in the know are still getting fish. These conditions are more favorable for anchor fisherman and plunkers than for trollers. Try fishing shallower and softer water if you are going to troll." Brandon fished the

lower river at Altoona on 3/22 and reported results as very poor. He started the morning off on the anchor with a great tide to work with but had nothing materialize. He then moved up into Clifton Channel to troll along with about another dozen boats and never saw a fish taken. Not what one would expect for this time of year.

Salmon are beginning to climb over Bonneville Dam but not in any great numbers. None-the-less, it's a good sign given the fact that next to NONE had crossed by this time last year.

Sturgeon fishing remains much the same with poor results river-wide. Action is even a bit slow in the upper river impoundments. The Dalles and Bonneville Pools are usually going well for sturgeon anglers this time of year but the fish don't seem to be too responsive this year. Quota's have shrunk again and that may be responsible for a lack of angler effort.

Walleye are still on the minds of many this week but the bite has slowed somewhat as adults near the spawning phase of their lifecycle. Success rates are likely to drop in coming weeks.

The Guide's Forecast – Gillnets are likely to complete their season this week but may go back in if the run gets upgraded later in April. The commercial fleet is likely to have an impact on weekend catch rates- particularly in the Portland to Longview stretch of the river. Poor tides are on the horizon and that won't help anglers that are used to good fishing sitting on the anchor with plugs. This will be a week better suited for herring trollers on most sections of the lower Columbia. The timing is right for a fair number of fish to enter, it's just that the tides are not the best. This doesn't mean however that a good slug of fish won't come in this week. For Columbia fish, tides don't seem to have the impact on run timing that they do on many coastal systems. Anytime you can get out fishing this time of year, is a good time to get yourself into some fair opportunity for the highest quality fish that swims our waters!

Best areas to target springers this week will be in the lower portions of the river where gillnets will not have the residual impact they will in upriver areas. From Longview downstream should produce the best results. Clifton Channel should be a prime destination this weekend and the channel right in front of Aldrich Point is another good option. Keeping your herring on the bottom in the shallower water will offer the best chance at a salmon. The tips of islands in water less than 20 feet is also a great place to intercept a salmon.

Sturgeon anglers should still be focusing their efforts in the lower Willamette. Water temperatures will keep sturgeon lethargic on the mainstem but it's not too far out there to expect the gorge to pick up some momentum in coming weeks.

There are still steelhead being taken in the John Day Pool. Although I am not intimately familiar with this fishery, both bank and boat anglers are taking fish. These fish seem to be destined for upper Columbia tributaries but I am not even sure if they are migrating up or downstream.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Winter steelhead counts at Willamette Falls have topped 4,300 with 185 summers accompanying them. Only nine springers have crossed so far, but with the water temperature above 50 degrees and rising, it won't be long until spring Chinook numbers are in the hundreds daily. Water visibility at the Falls is over four feet. The St. Johns stretch and Multnomah Channel are producing lots of shakers and a decent number of keeper-sized sturgeon. Readers are reminded that they now have four days per week in which sturgeon may be retained as the catch and keep days were extended to Thursdays through Sundays as of February 1st.

Pro guide Kevin Newell (360-430-2521) reports, "Sturgeon fishing on the Willamette River near downtown Portland continues to be very good. The best area has been from the Ross Island Bridge downstream to the Toyota dock. The fish are responding well to smelt and especially sand shrimp.

Moving around a little bit and finding them on the fish finder before I start fishing has been putting limits in my boat. The fish are large this year with the average being around 48 – 50 inches."

Summer steelhead have been taken in both the North and South Santiam. There are far greater numbers of unclipped winter fish this early in the year, however.

The Guide's Forecast – Water visibility continues to improve in the lower Willamette daily with water temperatures topping 50 degrees. Spring Chinook hookups were a more common event this week, mostly on plug-cut herring. Anglers are also drawing strikes with prawn spinners. It's still too early to switch over to hardware.

Decent numbers of keeper-sized sturgeon were taken over the last four-day retention period. Pay close attention or better yet, hold on to your fishing rod to detect light bites. Sturgeon fishing has been good with some anglers limiting week after week. Smelt remains the top bait with sand shrimp, squid and herring effective at times. The stretch around St. Johns and Multnomah Channel will produce keepers.

With better-than usual March numbers of summers crossing the Falls, the chance of hooking a hatchery steelhead in the North Santiam is improving daily. Green's Bridge and Stayton have produced the best results. A total of 62 winter steelhead and six summers have entered that trap at Foster Dam on the South Santiam as of March 19th.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Clackamas steelheaders are taking a few but it's been slow with the water temperature in the low forties. Clackamas River anglers are taking a mix of wild and a few broodstock steelhead and catches are expected to increase in the coming weeks. Winter steelhead have been caught from the bank at Carver recently. Bank fishing at High Rocks has been productive as well.

Spinners are hooking winter steelhead in the Sandy but most fish are natives now. Bobber and jigs are taking a few brooders on Cedar Creek.

Pro guide Brandon Glass (503-666-5370) reports, "Well, the Sandy river has been on the drop and starting to look beautiful. The catching is still slow throughout the whole river. I have been picking up about 3-5 fish a day in the lower river-mostly natives. The water temp has hit 46 degrees and a springer should be caught any day. I saw a 7-8 foot Sturgeon in the Sandy above the Stark Street Bridge. My guess is that he ran in here trying to get away from the seals out at the mouth of the river."

With spring chinook available in the Willamette and none in the Clack or Sandy until mid-April, these rivers are getting less attention now.

The Guide's Forecast – Broodstock fish should become more readily available and with the arrival of summer steelhead, there should be a good mix of several runs of steelhead in the Clackamas. Fish should be well distributed in the system but action at McIver Park won't peak for another few weeks.

Action on the Sandy should also improve in coming weeks with a fair concentration of steelhead in the Marmot area. Drifted bait and bobber and jig should become more consistent in the warming and dropping waters.

North Coast District Fishing Report – Steelheaders remain a bit frustrated on north coast streams. Some of the best fishing took place late last week as the Wilson, Nestucca and even the larger Nehalem system began to put out good catches for a brief period of time. Since the weekend however, catches have become more sporadic.

Pro guide Jim Nicol (503-550-3166) reports this, "The Nestucca has been fishing good the last five days. Fish have been caught through out the river from the six bridge down to Three Rivers. I have been putting in at 5 1/2 the last week and finding that the majority of the fish have been holding below the First Bridge. Side drifting eggs has been the most effective method. However as the water is starting to clear and slow, plugs should start to be a deadly technique for these big brood stock fish and Native's. **Reminder to those fishing this time of year with the Native fish around not to use DIVER AND BAIT.** We all need to be aware of the condition of these native fish we are catching and releasing. I believe you will find you will catch more fish when applying the side drifting technique, simply because you will be fish more water.

Yesterday (3/19) my clients and I were sitting below the 2nd bridge baiting the rods and ready to make a drift. All of a sudden, the water starting turning near the boat. Yes, it was a seal. We were witnessing a seal chasing a steelhead in approx. 3 ft. of water next to the boat. The seal made a large half circle toward the shore where we were setting traveling mock speed. The steelhead beached itself 5 ft from my boat and the seal stopped with in a 2 ft of the boat to lift is head up and look at us as if we cheated him out of a meal. The seals have been a big problem this season. I have seen them as far up as the 5th bridge."

Also contributing from the Nestucca River is **pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)**. Jesse reports, "The Nestucca is on a fast drop. Some days are good, some are very poor. Over the week end, there was simply no place to fish because of boating pressure was the highest I have ever seen. The places where there were not boats, there were Seals. We are seeing seals working the river clear up to the falls near sixth bridge. We had one blast a fish next to the boat today. We have been seeing a mix of brood fish, and wild fish. The wild fish population seems to be suffering. Although, we are having a seal issue, which could be part of the problem. So, as it seems, there is no real pattern to the river. Some days are better than others, and every day, we find them in different area's of the river. As we get some rain, and a little more color to the water, it will be interesting to see what happens. There has been some summer fish caught as well. Look for fish to be spread around through the entire river. If you are a bank angler, you have a good week to go before the upper river closes, but it could certainly be worth the time. There has got to be a bunch of fish up there, and without a seal problem."

From the north, mainstem Nehalem fishers reported there were fair numbers of fish around last weekend. Fly anglers did see some action below the Beaver Slide and there wasn't much effort on the river. These fish should be well distributed by now.

Offshore, in the calm seas, I took some of my customers out for lingcod and crab. It was great being back out on "big blue". The morning seemed to produce the best catches. One day, we took 5 lingcod between 23 and 27 inches on dinner reef just outside of the Tillamook Bay jaws. A few longer range boats targeted lings further offshore taking limits of lings about twice the size of the ones we caught. We were catching some Seabass slow trolling a little higher in the water column.

I also took some customers out to target sturgeon in Tillamook Bay. We had favorable tides but there was little action in the traditional haunts that these fish have been hanging around in. We got about 4 bites per day but had a hard time hooking the fish. No keepers were landed. The best action took place near the oyster pile in the upper end of the west channel.

Crabbing is by far best outside of the jaws of Tillamook Bay. The best we did for a 3 day effort was 13 keepers in about 30 foot of water to the north of the bay entrance. Crabbing inside the bay has been very poor. We retrieved 4 different crab pots headed out to sea last week as unknowing crabbers must have placed their pots in too deep of water with not enough weight in their pots. We picked them up and placed them in really shallow water in crab harbor that day. Three of the pots had the name "Brenner" on them if you know of this person, please let them know.

The Guide's Forecast – Weather forecasts are calling for more rain over the weekend. The big Nehalem may be the best bet prior to the freshet but it is very challenging to catch steelhead on the rising river. When rivers do come off of the rise, action should return on most north coast streams but keep in mind with all the high water we've had this season, action will be only fair. These are the waning weeks of the wild winter steelhead season although quality fish can be had into April. Crowds do seem to moderate which should up success rates on most systems. Hatchery fish will remain an option on both the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers and summer steelhead may come into the mix as well. The higher the water, the higher in the system anglers should target their quarry.

Sturgeon tides are turning south for the week which often favor crabbers- it's just too bad crabbing is so poor right now.

The ocean is forecasted to be big in the coming week putting offshore bottomfishing at the low end of an anglers priority list.

Central & South Coast Reports – Fishing was fair to good for sport and charter boats launching in passable ocean conditions out of Newport over the weekend. Offshore bottom fishing for rockfish and lingcod will close April 1st outside the 40 fathom line, re-opening in September. Crabbing in Yaquina Bay remains slow and the herring are still a no-show but could come in any day.

All-depth halibut opens Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays May 19th through June 9th.

Central coast rivers didn't take the predicted hit from mid-week precipitation, experiencing only a slight rise. Too bad, really, a little more rain would have had them on the drop the rest of the week and would probably have improved prospects.

Umpqua steelheaders are enjoying fine steelheading system-wide with the South Umpqua putting out the best numbers. Side-drifters and plug pullers are doing equally well. With the first spring chinook taken in the mainstem over the last week, the season is officially underway, although it's too early to expect stellar results. Winchester Bay has started to provide catches of keeper sturgeon with the fishing improving in the next couple of months.

Coos and Coquille anglers are taking steelhead although the majority of the fish present are dark. About half of the hatchery steelhead being hooked on the Coquille are those which have spawned and are returning to the ocean. Rain fell on Tuesday this week but it's dropping and clearing now.

While the Elk River was fishing pretty well mid-week, this small system is volatile and subject to rapid rises and falls with weather conditions. Pulling plugs has been most effective for late-season steelhead.

While not yet a sure thing (as if fishing ever is), spring chinook action has continued to improve on the lower Rogue. Springers are being caught daily, though not many, by anglers targeting them with anchovies. The spring Chinook fishery will shine here in April and May. Steelhead fishing is slow in the lower river, but not so the Grants pass stretch and upper Rogue. Nearly 7,000 winters have crossed Gold Ray Dam with daily numbers strong. Steelheading in the middle and upper river is excellent.

Chetco steelheaders are enjoying decent action, although most of the fish taken in low water conditions are dark or run-backs, making this a primarily catch-and-release fishery.

Odds are good that the offshore summer Chinook season will actually be open this summer. For the last couple of years, it was cut off in July and August which is the peak of the season. Two of the three

options being considered favor a full season fishery while the third calls for only a 10-day closure starting the 5th of July. Outstanding numbers of salmon offshore is the reason for the extended fishery this year. It is estimated that over 500,000 three-salt chinook are in the ocean off the South coast this year, a record number. In addition to a more liberal Chinook season, the coho quota is likely to be twice - or more - than the 20,000 fish limit imposed in 2006. Offshore salmon fishing opened March 15th but there has been little angler effort this early in the season.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688) reports, "Northeast Oregon rivers are finally at and sometimes above seasonal average flows, but this week the higher water only seemed to slightly slow the catch. The Willamette River didn't register much difference from the past week, tallying a catch rate of about 6 hours per fish. There was not a creel survey for the lower Grande Ronde River this week, but fishing reports from Boggan's Oasis suggested that the catch rate was only a bit slower than a week ago, probably still well under benchmark 10 hours per fish. Forecast rain showers early this week threw a bit of a kink in the river water forecast, but at this point the rain is arriving in insignificant amounts and should not contribute to runoff, so look for the Ronde to continue to drop during the week. There is another three weeks of good catching and if you want to keep fish they smoke just fine."

Bull trout were on the bite over the weekend as trollers worked depths of 60 to 70 feet.

Pro guide Rick Arnold (541-480-1570) confirms this with this report: "It was my official start to spring guiding for bulls this past week. Things had been a little slower overall than years past. We did score some big bulls this past Wed. Client Rick Coffin caught a 35 in., 18 LB. monster along with bulls of 7.5, 7.5, 8, 9.5 and 10 Lb. What a day!!"



Lower Deschutes trout anglers have seen an improvement in action with warmer weather. Dry fly opportunities are improving but nymphs will take fish all day long.

Northwest Trout – Most regularly-stocked lakes and ponds were planted last week with hatchery trout in anticipation of spring break. In the Willamette Valley, St Louis Pond and Dexter Reservoir are

scheduled to be planted with hatchery trout this week. Trout planting at Walling and Wirth last week consisted of two to four pound brood trout. Scheduled for trout stocking in the Northwest Zone is Cape Mears Lake, Coffenbury Lake, Cullaby Lake, Hebo Lake, Lake Lytle, Lost Lake (Clatsop County), North Lake, Smith Lake, South Lake, Spring Lake, Sunset Lake, Tahoe Lake, Town Lake and Vernonia Pond.

A special kid's event will take place Saturday, March 24th from 9 AM to 2 PM at Loren's Pond on the Wilson River. Rods, reels and terminal tackle will be available for those who have none in order to catch some of the 1,500 trout planted here for the event. Local businesses are donating fish bags, ice and bait and volunteers from Northwest Steelheaders will be on hand to help young anglers.

Spring break takes place next week in the Southwest. In anticipation of youthful anglers, area lakes and ponds are being loaded with hungry hatchery trout. Ben Irving Reservoir Cooper Cr. Reservoir, Galesville Reservoir, Herbert's Pond, Loon Lake, Platt Reservoir, Emigrant Lake, Expo Ponds, Lake Selmac, Lost Creek Reservoir, Willow Lake, Reinhart Park Pond, Bradley Lake Upper and Lower Empire Lake, Johnson Mill Pond, Millicoma Pond, Powers Pond and Saunders Lake will be planted.

Northwest Bass & Panfish - With warmer weather in the valley, both large- and smallmouth bass are getting active. Largemouth bass are in pre-spawn in smaller valley ponds with the water temperature approaching 60 degrees. Willamette smallies have started to turn on in the upper river despite water temperatures that have not yet reached 50 degrees. Bass have also started to cooperate at Hagg Lake, but will improve as water warms.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report March 21st – April 3rd, 2007

North Puget Sound

Spring has arrived, but the winter **blackmouth salmon** fishery is still going strong. Anglers from Point No Point to the San Juan Islands continue to do well fishing for chinook, but time is running out in some areas to get in on the action.

"Over the past several weeks, anglers have done great in just about every marine area in the region," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "That should continue, but there are only a few days of fishing remaining in the San Juan Islands and only few weeks left in Admiralty Inlet. So now is the time to get out on the water."

Anglers in Marine Area 7 (San Juan Islands) have through the end of March to hook a blackmouth, while those in Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet) have through April 15. Anglers in both marine areas have a daily limit of one salmon, and chinook must measure at least 22 inches in length.

Thiesfeld said the most productive region continues to be the southern portion of Marine Area 9. According to WDFW creel checks at the Everett boat ramp, 324 anglers were checked with 94 salmon during the third weekend in March. At the Kingston public ramp, 43 anglers brought home 10 chinook that same weekend.

Blackmouth fishing also remains good in marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay) and 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner), 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. The selective chinook fishery in marine areas 8-1 and 8-2 remains open through April 30.

Anglers did well during the recent inaugural Anacortes Salmon Derby. Ronald Henning of Puyallup took home the event's \$5,000 top prize after landing a 22.08-pound chinook. Bob Burress from Burlington captured second place and was awarded \$1,500 for his 21.30-pound chinook, while Matt Minnis of Eastsound finished third and earned \$500 for his 19.24-pound salmon. Proceeds from the event go toward scholarships to benefit young adults interested in pursuing an education in fisheries or a related natural science. For more information visit <http://www.anacortessalmonderby.com>.

Saltwater anglers looking for a change of pace will soon have an opportunity to hook a **halibut**. The halibut season gets under way April 9 in marine waters throughout the region. The fishery will be open five days a week, Thursday through Monday, with a daily limit of one halibut. There is no minimum size limit for halibut caught in any area.

Meanwhile, the catch-and-release fishery for **steelhead** on the Skagit and Sauk rivers continues through April. Anglers on the Skagit can cast for **steelhead** from the Dalles Bridge to the Cascade River, while those on the Sauk can fish from the mouth of the river to the Darrington Bridge.

Brett Barkdull, WDFW fish biologist, reminds Skagit River anglers 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>).

Looking forward to the **summer salmon fishing** season? There's still time to provide input on proposals for this year's fisheries. Two public meetings have been scheduled for the last week of March as fishery managers continue to develop the 2007 salmon seasons.

Anglers and others can provide input on Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor salmon seasons during a March 26 meeting, which is scheduled to begin at 10 a.m. in the Natural Resources Building in Olympia, 1111 Washington Street S.E. The following day, the public will have an opportunity to discuss salmon fisheries that take place in other coastal areas, Puget Sound and the Columbia River. That meeting is scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. at the Lynnwood Embassy Suites Hotel, 20610 44th Ave. W.

The final fishing package for Washington's waters will be finalized in early April. More information about the salmon season-setting process can be found on WDFW's North of Falcon website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/northfalcon/>).

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

Nothing says "spring" like the arrival of spring chinook salmon, except possibly the start of fishing seasons for lingcod and halibut. Anglers will have the opportunity to fish for all those species - along with blackmouth and steelhead - in the weeks ahead.

Lingcod fishing got under way March 17 in marine areas 1-3, south of Cape Alava. Anglers should note the minimum size for lingcod in these three areas is 22 inches, rather than 24 inches as in years past. "The most recent stock assessment supported a decision to reduce the minimum size for recreational lingcod," said Heather Reed, WDFW fish biologist.

That's not the case in Marine Area 4 (Neah Bay), where the minimum size for lingcod remains 24 inches. That area opens for lingcod fishing April 15.

All four marine areas will be open seven days per week through Oct. 13 with the following restrictions:

In Marine Area 2 (Westport/Ocean Shores), recreational fishing for rockfish or lingcod is not allowed in waters deeper than 30 fathoms from March 17 through June 15.

In Marine Area 3 and 4 (La Push/Neah Bay), recreational fishing for rockfish or lingcod is not allowed in waters deeper than 20 fathoms from May 21 through Sept. 30, except on days the halibut fishery is open.

In Marine Area 1 (Ilwaco), rockfish and lingcod are not allowed on any vessel with halibut on board from May 1 through Sept. 30.

Retention of canary and yelloweye rockfish is prohibited in all waters. Additional information about the lingcod fishery is available on the WDFW Fishing Hotline (360-902-2500) and the department's website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>).

Looking for bigger fish to fry? This year's **halibut** fishery opens April 9 in marine areas 6-11 and 13 (Port Angeles and Puget Sound), running five days a week - Thursday through Monday - through June 16. Best bets in April for catching a big flatfish are marine areas 6, 9 and 13, said Michele Culver, regional director for the coastal area. "The fishing should be good, and we've heard that April is the best time to go," Culver said.

Later halibut openings on the coast and other areas are described on the WDFW website under Halibut Reports at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/halibut/>, or the Fishing Hotline at (360) 902-2500.

Meanwhile, **blackmouth** fishing just keeps getting better, especially from the eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca down to Point Defiance in Marine Area 11, said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. Creel checkers counted 30 blackmouth March 18 at Ediz Hook boat ramp, near Port Angeles in Marine Area 6, where anglers have been averaging about one fish for every two rods. "Fishing for blackmouth is extremely good right now," said Thiesfeld. "People should really get out there."

Catch rates for wild **steelhead** have been mixed on the Olympic Peninsula as the fishery nears the finish line on several rivers. "Fishing has been decent for steelhead on the Sol Duc and Calawah rivers, but poor on the Hoh where warmer temperatures and rain have put the river out of shape," said David Low, WDFW fish biologist.

The retention fishery for steelhead closes at the end of the day April 15 on the Hoh, but will remain open on the Quillayute River system through April 30.

Anglers on the Calawah averaged a fish per rod in creel checks conducted March 16-18. During the same period, 83 anglers checked on the Sol Duc had caught 62 wild steelhead, while 65 checked on the Bogachiel had hooked 18. Low said a few **spring chinook** salmon also have been taken in the Sol Duc.

The rain and warm weather also affected rivers in the Grays Harbor area, where the water was high and the catches marginal, said Low. "Anglers were out trying different methods, but fishing just wasn't ideal." The key factor for all areas is the weather, said Low. "Fishing should be better by the weekend if the rain holds off and the temperature goes down."

Before heading out, anglers are advised to call the WDFW Fishing Hotline (360-902-2500), or check the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm> for retention rules and dates.

An April morning **razor clam** dig may be a possibility, said Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager, who noted that the recent clam dig held March 16-18 was highly successful. "Most diggers got about an average of 14 clams, nearly meeting their 15-clam limit," he said. "We'd like to provide some morning clam-digging opportunities in April, but first we'll have to assess how many clams are available for harvest."

Anglers looking forward to the upcoming **summer salmon fishery** may want to attend a public meeting March 26 in Olympia where salmon seasons for Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor will be

discussed. The meeting, which will provide opportunities for public comment on current proposals, is scheduled to begin at 10 a.m. in the Natural Resources Building, 1111 Washington Street S.E. The final fishing package for Washington's waters will be finalized in early April. More information about the salmon season-setting process can be found on WDFW's North of Falcon website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/northfalcon/>).

Southwest Washington:

Landings of **spring chinook salmon** are beginning to pick up on the lower Columbia River, but not nearly as fast as the number of anglers fishing for them. Creel checkers interviewed nearly a thousand anglers from the I-5 bridge downstream during the week ending March 18. Together, they accounted for 34 spring chinook (including eight that were released) and eight **steelhead** (of which three were released).

Then again, anglers averaged one springer for every two boats fishing near Vancouver two days later.

"The action is starting to pick up throughout the lower river, especially around Vancouver and Cathlamet," said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist. "Catch rates should continue to improve in the days ahead."

Recent catch rates might have been higher, but for the high, turbid water on the lower Columbia and many of its tributaries, Hymer said. "Murky water, caused by snow melt, is posing something of a challenge for anglers," he said. "I'd strongly advise using a flasher - or *something* to get the fishes' attention - until visibility improves."

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>). The spring chinook season is expected to remain open through April 15.

Fishing is also picking up on the Cowlitz River, although late-run hatchery steelhead have been providing most of the action. Seventy bank anglers reported catching 13 steelhead and no chinook during creel checks during the week ending March 18. Seventeen boat anglers landed 10 steelhead and released three others during the same week. Those fishing Blue Creek and the waters around the Olequa boat ramp generally had the best results.

Four spring chinook returned to the Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery that week. The first springer of the season also returned to the Merwin Dam fish trap on the Lewis River. Anglers took a few spring chinook from the Lewis, while those fishing the Kalama River caught - and released - a few wild steelhead.

Back on the mainstem Columbia River, fishing opened March 16 for hatchery chinook and hatchery steelhead from the Tower Islands (six miles below The Dalles Dam) to McNary Dam. But the chance of catching a chinook salmon in those waters will remain slim until more springers pass Bonneville Dam, said Hymer, noting that the count stood at 19 fish as of March 16. For up-to-date accounts of fish passage, he recommends checking the Army Corps of Engineers website at <https://www.nwp.usace.army.mil/op/fishdata/home.asp> or the DART website at <http://www.cbr.washington.edu/dart/adult.html>.

Chinook fishing also opened March 16 on the Wind River and Drano Lake, although returns to those waters - plus the Klickitat River, which opens April 1 - are expected to be down this year. For that reason, anglers fishing the Wind River may retain only one - rather than two - hatchery spring chinook per day under new regulations adopted this year. In addition, the Wind River will remain closed to all

fishing upstream from a point 400 feet below Shipherd Falls until the catch-and-release steelhead season begins in September. For more information, see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

Boat anglers fishing the John Day Pool caught nine legal-size **sturgeon** during the week ending March 18, but fishing was generally slow farther downriver. Boat anglers targeting warmwater fish above John Day Dam averaged a **bass** and a **walleye** per every 4.5 rods, while those fishing The Dalles and Bonneville pools averaged more than half a walleye per rod.

This year's Columbia River **smelt** run appears to be small as predicted. Little sign of smelt has been detected in the Columbia and none in the Cowlitz River in recent days. The sport season comes to a close at the end of March.

While most lakes in the region are open year round, many are nonetheless stocked with **trout** in advance of "opening day" - which falls on the last Saturday in April. At Klineline Pond, bank anglers averaged 3.2 trout per rod after the pond was planted with brown trout March 12. Those fish averaged more than half a pound apiece. Lake Sacajawea in Longview was planted with 4,300 catchable-size rainbows a day later. For more information about trout plants in the region, see the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/regions/reg5/index.htm>.

Eastern Washington:

The Dayton Juvenile Fishing Pond re-opened March 16 for **rainbow trout** fishing, thanks to a community effort to improve the waterway. "Volunteers helped dredge and re-contour the pond, deepening it to nearly 10 feet, and removed shoreline brush and cattails that limited access to only a few narrow locations," said Mark Schuck, a WDFW fish biologist. "The project was partially funded by a grant from Washington Department of Ecology to improve water quality flowing from the pond. A new outlet control and pond level structure was installed last December that allows water to be pulled from the bottom of the pond, thus returning cool water to the Touchet River. This is just one project of many to improve water quality in the Touchet River ESA-listed steelhead and bull trout."

Schuck said rainbows from WDFW's Lyons Ferry Hatchery were stocked in the newly refurbished pond and lots of juvenile fishers are taking advantage of the new opportunity. "The kids in Dayton once again have a great place to learn the joy of fishing," he said. "The new water depth from the dredging should help keep the pond a great place to fish well into the summer - and for years to come."

Schuck also noted fishing is good at the Tucannon River impoundments in Columbia County - Beaver, Big Four, Blue, Deer, Rainbow, Spring and Watson lakes. All are being re-stocked this week with 8-10-inch rainbows from WDFW's Tucannon Hatchery.

Amber Lake in southwest Spokane County is fishing very well now, according to WDFW district fish biologist Chris Donley of Spokane. The **rainbow trout** are running 11 to 22 inches, with most in the 15- to 20-inch range. And there's an occasional cutthroat trout in the catch. Amber opened March 1 for catch-and-release fishing with selective gear only. It shifts to a catch-and-keep season for two trout daily on April 28.

Lincoln County's Coffeepot Lake is also fishing well now, Donley said, with many anglers reporting eight to 15-fish days. The majority of the rainbows are over 15 inches, running up to 22 inches. Coffeepot has selective gear rules with a daily limit of one trout with a minimum size of 18 inches. Donley says there's also a good **yellow perch** population at Coffeepot that few anglers are tapping. "Since you can't use bait there," he said, "catching them can be a challenge but they're there for the taking."

North Silver Lake in Spokane County is providing some fair fishing, with one or two rainbows caught per hour or so of effort. Donley said the lake will be re-stocked with hatchery catchable-size fish next week. North Silver is under selective gear rules with a two-trout daily limit and 14-inch minimum size.

Year-round Rock Lake in Whitman County continues to produce good catches of rainbows. WDFW enforcement officer Lenny Hahn recently reported several limits from both shore and boat anglers, including two fish over 24 inches and five pounds each. A 14.5-pound **German brown trout** also was recently caught at Rock Lake.

Hahn also noted fly fishermen at Hog Canyon Lake were recently doing well on rainbows, while the action at Fourth of July Lake was reportedly slow. Both winter-season trout lakes close March 31.

Lake Roosevelt has been "hit and miss" for rainbow trout and **walleye**. The Spokane arm of the reservoir - where the Spokane River flows in above Seven Bays - has been hot for walleye staging there to go up into the reservoir to spawn. "The Spokane arm closes April 1," Donley said, "so now's the time to hit it."

Ice is finally gone from northeastern Spokane County's Newman Lake and at least one legal size (36-inch minimum) **tiger muskie** has already been caught, reports WDFW fish biologist Randall Osborne. Osborne says action on Newman's other warmwater fish species - including **black crappie**, **yellow perch**, and **largemouth bass** - will be a little slower until water temperatures warm with the progression of spring. He noted the cold water at this time of year is a reminder for anglers of all ages to dress in warm layers and always wear life jackets while fishing.

North Central Washington:

Steelhead fishing on the mainstem Columbia River from Rocky Reach Dam to Chief Joseph Dam closed March 17. WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff of Omak reports anglers were able to remove an estimated 685 adipose-fin-clipped hatchery steelhead during the nearly five-month season.

Fishing for **whitefish** will continue until March 31 on both the Similkameen and Methow rivers. Jateff advises anglers to consult the WDFW website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>) or hotline (360-902-2500) for emergency closures during the whitefish seasons.

Two Okanogan County lakes worth noting will be open for fishing starting April 1, Jateff said. -- Spectacle Lake near Loomis should have excellent fishing for 10 to 12-inch **rainbow trout**, and Washburn Island Pond near Brewster will provide opportunities for **largemouth bass** and **bluegill**, he said.

April 1 is also when a number of lakes in the Okanogan switch over from a catch-and-keep season to a catch-and-release season with selective gear rules in effect, Jateff said. Davis Lake near Winthrop, Big and Little Green lakes near Omak, and Rat Lake near Brewster will all have that rule change and should continue to provide good trout fishing.

Rufus Woods Lake, the Columbia River reservoir off Chief Joseph Dam near Bridgeport, continues to provide catches - from boats and from shore - of **triploid rainbow trout** ranging from one to three pounds. There are boat launches at both the state park and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers site just above the dam.

WDFW district fish biologist Art Viola of Cashmere says fishing is getting a slow start in his area because water temperatures remain low. "Anglers are catching some of the 11- to 12-inch **cutthroat trout** we stocked in the Rock Island Ponds last fall," he said, "and trout fishing should pick up at Roses Lake soon."

Columbia Basin **rainbow trout** fishing waters that opened March 1 are reportedly being fished more as warmer spring weather entices more people outside. Quincy and Burke lakes, on WDFW's Quincy Wildlife Area near the town of Quincy, are picking up speed after a slow opener.

South Central Washington:

As spring weather draws more anglers to local year-round fishing waters, WDFW fish hatchery crews are busy re-stocking **rainbow trout** in some of the most popular spots to keep up with the demand. Starting April, catchable size 8-12-inch rainbow will be planted in Kittitas County waters, including Easton Ponds (3,500), McCabe Pond (600, plus 200 jumbos up to one-third of a pound) and Naneum Juvenile Pond (650, plus 250 jumbos).

Several lakes and ponds in Yakima County will also be planted with catchable-size rainbow starting the same day. They include I-82 Pond #4 (4,000), I-82 Pond #6 (4,000), Mud Lake (250, plus 300 jumbos), Rotary Lake (3,250, plus 400 jumbos), Sarge Hubbard Park Juvenile Pond (450), Tim's Pond (400, plus 200 jumbos) and Yakima Sportsmen's Pond (400).

In April, WDFW will plant several waters with **triploid rainbow trout**, sterile half-pound to one-pound fish that often eat their way to trophy size. These include Benton County's Columbia Park Juvenile Pond (130), Franklin County's Railroad Pond (313), Kittitas County's Fio Rito North Lake (1,021), Mattoon Lake (706), and Yakima County's Clear Lake (2,685), Mud Lake (109), and Myron Lake (345).

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. For the region's complete catchable trout stocking plan, see the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/regions/reg3/index.htm>.

Reader Email

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

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com

Michael Teague: Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com

Random Links

Coho data from the ODFW:

<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/MRP/salmon/2007%20SIG%20Index.html>

Recommended Procedures for Handling Troll-Caught Salmon -

<http://www.calkingsalmon.org/pdf/procedures.pdf>

Weekly Quote – "I have two hopes for the future. The first and lesser one is that game commissions will one day have sense enough to set limits that measurably reflect the sport safely available. The second and deeply urgent one is that we shall grow a race of sportsmen no one of whom will ever consider it a matter of pride to have killed a limit." - Roderick L. Haig-Brown

GOOD LUCK!