

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 28th – January 3rd 2008**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

We've upped our ante! It's an all out salmon roe blow out! With only 3 weekends to choose from (January 12/13, January 19/20 and January 26/27- we have some weekdays to choose from as well), book any 2 nights at the Guide's Guest House in Bay City and we'll give you 6 jars of professionally cured Tillamook Bay fall chinook roe! Book one night, and we'll give you 2 jars! This is the perfect place to plan your winter steelheading trip/ sturgeon trip or winter crabbing trip from. It's the finest fisherman's accommodations for the price in Tillamook County! Call or email Bob or Nancy at (503) 377-9696 or email brees@pacifier.com today!

Anglers are reminded that new 2008 fishing licenses and tags must be purchased before recreating in the new year!

Willamette Valley/Metro- Mainstem Columbia sturgeon fishing remains poor with water temperatures continuing to drop. This fishery, including the Willamette River and Multnomah Channel, will go to a 4-day per week fishery (Thursday – Sunday) beginning January 1st.

Water temperatures have continued to rise at Willamette Falls along with the water level and the winter steelhead count. Sturgeon fishing has been fair for keeper-sized fish with shaker action all day long. The lower Willamette River is producing the best results with squid and sand shrimp the top baits.

Rain has pushed the Santiam system too high to fish.

Heavy rain over the weekend has the waters of the Clackamas too high to fish as of Monday this week. Plunkers picked up a few winters before the rain hit but Eagle Creek will be the only possibility for a while and is giving up a few fish.

The upper Sandy is reasonably clear but the lower river is off color. Steelheading has been fair but it's early for this river to be posting big numbers. Pontoon drifters experienced some good action from Dodge Park to Oxbow just over a week ago but warned that rock hazards make this stretch treacherous. The bulk of the fish being caught were wild. Low snow levels may keep the Sandy in fishable shape.

Northwest – Most steelheaders are still waiting for good conditions to search for coastal winters. The smaller streams offered up the best opportunities with the Necanicum and North Fork of the Nehalem producing best when in shape. Drifted bait has been working best in the higher water conditions.

Boaters must still be aware of downed trees. The smaller streams are the more technical to drift- especially as the rivers recede.

More precipitation is in the forecast which will keep the larger river systems like the Nestucca and Trask out of shape. Mudslides have kept the Wilson River from running clear since mid-November.

Three Rivers does have fish present with the hatchery hole producing a few fish.

Gnat and Big Creeks will also be strong options this week as returns peak and river levels remain high.

Lacey DeWeert of Woodland, WA and her 5 crabbers had no trouble taking their 72 keeper limit on Sunday out of Hammond. The group used frozen shad between buoys 20 and 22 in about 35 feet of water. The strong incoming tide countered the large run-off and despite the large numbers of commercial pots present, there were plenty of sport-legal crabs available.

Rough surf has kept Clatsop area beaches from being productive for clam diggers this week. Large swells will continue to hit coastal beaches through the weekend so fishing is not an option.

The Alsea produced fair numbers of steelhead over the weekend but was under very heavy pressure.

The Siletz has been off to a good start with large natives and some quality broodstock fish available as well. It will likely be in good shape again after the weekend.

Southwest – Mild tides this weekend would encourage crabbing in bays and estuaries but fresh water has pushed Dungeness out to the ocean. While ocean crabbing is open, wind and wave action will prevent crossing the bars.

South coast rivers which were dropping through December 23rd, though not necessarily to fishable levels, are again on the rise.

The North Umpqua is high but fishable above Elkton. Fair numbers of steelhead were reported by side-drifters this week. The water is muddy below that point.

The Elk River was dropping and clearing over the weekend, but will probably rise again with rain this week. It is getting close to the end of the salmon run here.

The Rogue is too high to fish well this week and is forecast to remain that way for a while.

Plunkers on the Chetco River are the first to score winter steelhead and there have been some big ones in the mix this year. Over the past week, a 20 pound hatchery fish was landed. Rain is in the forecast daily for the coming week, however, which may keep the Chetco above acceptable 6,000 to 8,000 cfs levels, even for plunkers. Drift boaters require a friendlier 4,000 cfs or less.

Eastern – The Deschutes has continued to fish well for a mix of hatchery and native steelhead. The area bordered by the Indian reservation closes on December 31st but the Deschutes will remain open from above Maupin to the mouth.

Trout fishing has been rewarding for anglers at Green Peter.

Cold temperatures have Grande Ronde anglers wary of icy conditions. If temperatures moderate, summer steelhead will be available. The John Day River remains an option as well.

SW Washington – The Cowlitz has cooled although good numbers of anglers remain motivated to pursue winter steelhead. High water will continue to challenge steelheaders through the weekend.

The Lewis River is also producing a few steelhead and Kalama hatchery workers continue to

recycle steelhead to the lower Kalama River Boat Ramp.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Recreational opportunity on the Columbia River mainstem is not much to write home about. Sturgeon fishing success continues to decline- even for shakers! It's a wait-and-see situation until the smelt arrive which often happens in the month of January. So, let's wait and see!

As for steelhead, action here has also slowed. The John Day remains the best place to be but anglers there, both bank and boat posted poor results with all the recent weather changes. Weekly checking showed two adipose fin-clipped summer steelhead kept plus seven unclipped steelhead released for seven boats and no catch for two bank rods.

About the best thing going on the Columbia River is crabbing in the Astoria area. **Pro guide Kevin Newell (360-430-2521)** treated me to a day of crabbing out of Hammond on 12/23. Along with his wife Lacey and 3 of their friends, we took an easy limit of 72 keepers between buoys 20 and 22 with many an easy sport legal size. There were a lot of commercial pots competing for space but they didn't seem to have any effect on the productive crabbing for our group. We used frozen shad to take these quality keepers and only a rare crustacean was too soft to take. The weather was not in our favor but by tide-change, it had calmed enough for a comfortable ride home. We crabbed on a strong incoming which may have worked to our advantage given the fact our rivers have seen so much precipitation already this year.

The Guide's Forecast – Not much to say for salmon, sturgeon or steelhead. It's a waiting game for sturgeon and the steelhead fishing will likely continue to draw down as weather intensifies. Steelhead will still be available to trollers working the mainstem above the John Day Dam and the John Day Arm itself should provide opportunity well into late winter.

As for crabbing, the strong tide series we are currently experiencing will give way to softer tides over the weekend giving New Year party-goers the opportunity to cash in on some quality product. Buoys 20 and 22 will remain the mainstay for crabbers and should produce well for folks putting out the effort. Be sure to pay attention to weather conditions as high surf advisories remain in effect and this is quite often the time of year when people get in trouble. **Prepare for the elements and wear those life-jackets!**

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Willamette Valley anglers caught a break with light precipitation on December 25th and 26th which allowed many of the valley rivers to achieve fishable conditions. Rain returns for the rest of the week, however. Hopefully, dry weather in the forecast next week will actually come to pass.

Water levels increased with the temperature dropping in the lower Willamette which has slowed the sturgeon bite. Plunkers have kicked up a few winter steelhead daily fishing the bank below the mouth of the Clackamas River.

The Santiam systems are settling down a bit for those who enjoy catch-and-release action for wild winter steelhead.

The Guide's Forecast – The lower Willamette and Multnomah Channel, while slower than last week, remain worthwhile with good numbers of sturgeon available. The latest temperature reading was 42 degrees on December 26th. Smelt and anchovy have been effective baits recently with the stretch above the St. Johns Bridge and upper and lower Multnomah Channel

productive areas. Plunkers may find Meldrum Bar completely submerged at current river levels but there are additional fishing spots upstream where steelheaders will find short casts most effective in high water.

Sturgeon fishing will only get better into the winter months although Sturgeon retention regulations will change on January 1st to Thursdays through Sundays. The regs we've enjoyed for a while, allowing anglers to retain keepers-sized sturgeon seven days a week, was the result of low catch rates early in 2007.

The McKenzie River water level was too high to fish on Wednesday this week.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Winter steelhead have been hooked in above-average numbers for this early in the season on the Clackamas River. The stretch below McIver has been particularly productive. Water is off-color as of the morning of December 27th so fish accordingly, using larger, brightly-colored lures or bigger baits. The Clackamas was 13 feet at Estacada the afternoon of December 27th, dropping and forecast to continue falling into the New Year. Eagle Creek looked good although it's running high and swift. Winter steelhead are scattered throughout the system now with numbers improving into January.

Sandy River steelheaders hooked fair numbers of a mix of native and hatchery steelhead over the weekend. The hatchery run will improve around mid-January and reward anglers into springtime. It's shaping up to be a good run this year. Water at the Sandy River was a nice green color on Wednesday this week, but hookups had slowed.

North Coast Fishing Report – Steelheaders have not had much of an opportunity to recreate in the past week. High waters continue to plague north coast streams and foul weather conditions have kept most smart steelheaders tying leaders instead of fishing.

The Wilson remains off-color due to mudslide in the Lee's Camp area. The Trask is still reported to have a log jam at the railroad bridge upstream of the lower take-out downstream of Loren's Drift.

The Kilchis, Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem, Three Rivers, Big Creek and Gnat Creek have all been the best options given the most recent weather conditions. The most recent reports from the Necanicum are that the bridge at Klootch Creek is functioning again but the drift downstream of it may still have navigational hazards to contend with. The drift downstream of that one (Johnson's Gravel pit to the Relief Pitcher) remains open and one guide reported catching 2 nice steelhead before the river blew out again on December 23rd.

The conditions on the Necanicum closely mirrors the North Fork Nehalem River when small stream steelheading will dominate the scene into the weekend for NW Oregon steelheaders. Anglers able to fish from the handicap ramp hooked several fish in the higher flows at mid-week and warming temperatures and moderating flows should improve conditions at this favored spot. Bait will work best in the higher flows.

Little to no pressure for sturgeon despite the quality tide series we are coming off of. Temperatures are just too cold and weather too severe to motivate even the hardiest of anglers. Crabbing has also been poor in most coastal estuaries with all the fresh water making its way to the sea.

Surf forecasts for the northwest coast are literally off the charts (50+ feet) for this coming

Sunday. Wave-watchers enjoy but stay off the beaches.

The Guide's Forecast – NW Oregon streams will once again experience moderate rises in river levels and with snow accumulations in the coast range, river levels will likely remain high into the weekend along with cold water temperatures to chill the bite. Fish do seem available and smaller streams will once again be the go-to option with Three Rivers, the Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem the top options. Gnat and Big Creeks will also be good options but the first three offer some of the better bank access spots so pick according to knowledge and travel time.

As for bigger rivers, the upper Trask at the Dam Hole is a good option for bank anglers as well. The Nestucca, Wilson and Nehalem (south fork) are a ways off from producing any action. It's anyone's guess as to when the Wilson River will clear up.

Sturgeon anglers will likely want to wait until the next minus tide series before putting in any significant effort. Crabbers will have the upper hand but Netarts Bay will likely be the best option as fresh water won't influence this estuary like it will other north coast favorites.

Central & South Coast Reports – Tides will be mild but crabbing is poor in most estuaries with fresh water washing into the bays and estuaries.

Crabbing and sturgeon fishing has improved in Winchester Bay and the Umpqua River estuary. Expect sturgeon catches to pick up during the next minus tide series. The mainstem is blown and steelheading in the North and South Umpqua is low but is expected to improve when the weather breaks.

Steelheaders on the Coos and Coquille systems have enjoyed fair to good results for winter steelhead depending on water level and color.

Elk River anglers have been experiencing good levels and color with decent results for the few remaining late Fall Chinook and improving numbers of winter steelhead. The river reached perfect conditions on Wednesday this week.

Opening January 1st to hatchery steelhead retention, the Applegate offers fair prospects for action with fishing improving as the months go by. It will fish best in February and March.

The lower Rogue is dropping, clearing and fishing well for steelhead. Winter fish are being taken in the Grants Pass stretch in modest numbers with catches expected to improve into January. Not much is happening at this time of year on the upper Rogue.

Plunkers on the Chetco River have been picking up large hatchery steelhead this week and with the river below 4,00 feet today (December 27th), drift boaters will be having some success.

While runs of native steelhead are strong on the Chetco, the sentiment in the angling community regarding the release of all wild fish is likely to have an impact on regulation regarding this river. Expect to see a change in the near future changing the Chetco to catch-and-release for natives here.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Steelheaders on the lower Deschutes continue to take decent numbers of winter fish although effort has been very light. Fish the softer sections as the water temperature has dropped.

Starting in 2008, a system for limiting numbers of boaters on the Deschutes from Macks Canyon to the river mouth will be in place. While this area was supposed to be limited starting in 2005, the maximum of 18,300 boaters was exceeded last year. A maximum of 328 boaters will be allowed on the lower river on Friday, Saturday and Sunday from July through October 15th next year.

Northwest Trout – Scheduled trout stocking is over for the year but the ODFW will periodically conduct winter plantings of larger rainbows, brood trout and steelhead. Stay tuned. Trout stocking will resume in Willamette Valley lakes and ponds on the week of January 7th, 2008.

The bridge on the Trask River Road to Tahoe Lake has suffered damage and is closed. A tree has been felled across the road to prevent anyone from trying to cross.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report December 12th, 2007– January 8th, 2008

North Puget Sound

Heavy rains and high winds during the first few days of December made fishing difficult for anglers in the region. But several rivers have come back into shape and are fishable again. At the same time, stalwart anglers that dropped a line in Puget Sound have had some success fishing for **blackmouth**.

"The big storm, and probably some holiday shopping, have kept fishing effort down in the marine areas," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "But anglers who did get out on the water in the last few days have actually done pretty well in some areas, especially those fishing in 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay) and 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner)." Anglers fishing marine areas 8-1 and 8-2 can keep two hatchery **blackmouth** – resident chinook – as part of their two-salmon daily limit. They must, however, release wild chinook, which have an intact adipose fin, and are required to use single-point barbless hooks.

Farther south, Thiesfeld said anglers have been averaging about one blackmouth for every five rods in Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton), where they also have a two-salmon daily limit, and can keep up to two hatchery chinook per day.

"The blackmouth fishery is a good opportunity for anglers to get out on the water during the holidays," Thiesfeld said. "Plus, in some marine areas, you can still do some **crabbing**." Marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu), 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 9 (Admiralty Inlet), 10 (Seattle/Bremerton), 11 (Tacoma/Vashon), 12 (Hood Canal) and 13 (south Puget Sound) are open to sport crabbing seven days a week through Jan. 2. However, crabbing is closed in marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands), 8-1 and 8-2.

The daily catch limit in Puget Sound is five Dungeness crab, males only, in hard-shell condition with a minimum carapace width of 6¼ inches. In addition, fishers may catch six red rock crab of either sex per day, provided those crab measure at least 5 inches across. Additional information is available on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/shelfish/crab/index.htm>.

In the freshwater, water levels have dropped in most streams, allowing anglers an opportunity to get out on the river and cast for **steelhead**, said Steve Foley, another WDFW fish biologist. "Some of the rivers are actually in pretty good shape," he said. "I've heard the Green and the

Skykomish are fishable and there should be some winter-run hatchery steelhead in both of those rivers.”

Foley reminds anglers that **salmon** fishing closes in those and most other rivers in the region after Dec. 31.

Rainbow trout, however, remain an option for anglers. About 3,000 hatchery rainbow trout – averaging approximately 3 to 5 pounds each – were released into Beaver Lake near Issaquah in mid-November. The daily bag limit is five fish, and bait anglers must keep the first five trout they catch.

Before heading out, anglers should check the rules and regulations for all freshwater and saltwater fisheries in WDFW's *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>).

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

The Olympic Peninsula's world-class **steelhead** fishery should begin in earnest once rivers drop back into shape after the heavy rains of early December. Meanwhile, anglers and shell fishers around the region can choose from a number of other options, including **salmon** and **razor clams**.

Depending on the outcome of marine toxin tests, **razor clam** diggers may be able to add some clams to their holiday feast, said Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager. The last digs of the year are scheduled for Dec. 21-23 on evening tides at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis and Mocrocks. One more evening dig is planned Dec. 23 at Twin Harbors only. Kalaloch Beach remains closed throughout the 2007-08 season.

“We’ve found that folks really enjoy going out on a dig around the holidays, when clams are a traditional menu item for many people,” said Ayres.

Tentative opening dates and evening low tides are:

- Friday, Dec. 21 (4:12 p.m. -0.4) all beaches (except Kalaloch)
- Saturday, Dec. 22 (5:06 p.m. -0.9) all beaches (except Kalaloch)
- Sunday, Dec. 23 (5:58 p.m. -1.2) Twin Harbors only

No digging is allowed before noon those days. For best results, Ayres recommends that people start digging at least one hour before low tide and take a lantern for evening digs. Harvesters are allowed to take no more than 15 razor clams and must keep the first 15 they dig, regardless of size or condition. Each digger's clams must be kept in a separate container. A license is required for anyone age 15 or older. Any 2007 annual shellfish/seaweed license or combination license is still valid.

A week after rain and high winds pelted the Olympic Peninsula, most rivers from the north coast to Grays Harbor were still too high to fish. But anglers looking for steelhead may have some opportunity by the Dec. 15 weekend, said Scott Barbour, WDFW fish biologist. “The rivers really got flooded out, but the Wynoochee and the Satsop should be plunkable soon and I hear conditions should be better on the north coast soon.”

In Puget Sound, angler effort has been low in Marine Area 11 (Tacoma/Vashon Island), but people “who know what they’re doing and are familiar with the area,” are still landing **blackmouth**, said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. Thiesfeld said those fishing near Point Defiance averaged about one fish for every 2½ rods over the Dec. 8 weekend. He reminds anglers the salmon season ends Dec. 31 in marine areas 11 and 13 (south Puget Sound).

Once the rain subsided, anglers on the Nisqually River began landing some late-run **chum salmon**. "The chum here are still pretty bright and high-quality," Thiesfeld said. "With the river coming back into shape, anglers should be able to land some nice fish." Anglers have been successful fishing between the WDFW handicap access and the railroad bridge due south of Old Nisqually Road. The Nisqually River remains open through Jan. 31, with a limit of six salmon, only two of which may be adults. Wild, unmarked chinook must be released.

For these and other fisheries, anglers are advised to check WDFW's *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>) for more information.

Meanwhile, area **crabbers** have through Jan. 2 to sink a pot or two. Marine areas 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 9 (Admiralty Inlet), 10 (Seattle/Bremerton), 11 (Tacoma/Vashon), 12 (Hood Canal) and 13 (South Puget Sound) are open for sport crabbing seven days a week through that date.

The daily catch limit in Puget Sound is five Dungeness crab, males only, in hard-shell condition with a minimum carapace width of 6¼ inches. In addition, fishers may catch six red rock crab of either sex per day, provided those crab measure at least 5 inches across. Additional information is available on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/shelfish/crab/index.htm>. Once the fishery is over, Puget Sound crabbers will have until Jan. 15 to submit their winter catch record cards to WDFW (the mailing address is printed on the back of the cards). A drawing will be held for free fishing licenses after the filing period.

Southwest Washington:

Heavy rains brought fishing to a near standstill during the first week of December, swamping tributaries throughout the lower Columbia River Basin. But as those rivers drop back into shape, fishing – particularly for **hatchery steelhead** – should be better than ever, said Joe Hymer, WDFW fish biologist.

"We'll have to see what's around when the water levels drop, but we're moving into prime time for hatchery-reared winter steelhead," Hymer said. "The fishery usually starts to take off in mid-December."

As of Dec. 10, water levels were still running high on the Lewis and Cowlitz rivers, the two largest tributaries to the lower Columbia River on the Washington side. But anglers were pulling a fair number of hatchery steelhead out of the Lewis and Cowlitz rivers before the rains hit, and should do so again once stream flows drop, Hymer said.

Hymer noted that the North Fork Lewis River opens to hatchery steelhead and hatchery coho fishing Sunday, Dec. 16 from Colvin Creek upstream to the overhead power lines below Merwin Dam. In addition, the mainstem Grays River opens for hatchery steelhead Dec. 15 from the Highway 4 Bridge to the south fork; the West Fork also opens that day from the mouth to the footbridge at the hatchery intake.

"Smaller rivers like the Grays and the Elochoman were still running dirty a week after the heavy rains, but they should be the first to drop into shape," Hymer said. "They, along with the Kalama and Washougal rivers, could be a good bet if the Lewis and Cowlitz rivers are still running high." Chris Wagemann of the WDFW Kalama Research Team noted that the "first real big push of hatchery winter steelhead" – 105 fresh fish – were handled and recycled to the lower Kalama River boat ramp by hatchery crews Dec. 10.

Anglers are reminded that any wild steelhead they intercept with an intact adipose fin must be

released. See the 2007-08 *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>) for more information about hatchery steelhead and other fisheries.

As with many area rivers, there were no reports of angling success on the Cowlitz River during the first week of December, although fish were still moving up the river. During that week, Tacoma Power recovered 3,013 **coho salmon** adults, five **fall chinook** adults, 101 **summer-run steelhead** and 108 winter-run steelhead at the Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery separator during seven days of operations.

Tacoma Power employees then released 60 coho adults and four jacks into Lake Scanewa at the Day Use Site; 271 coho adults, 10 coho jacks and four winter-run steelhead into the Cispus River above the mouth of Yellow Jacket Creek; and 130 coho adults into the upper Cowlitz River at the Skate Creek Bridge in Packwood. They also released 188 coho adults, five fall chinook adults, one winter-run steelhead and two cutthroat trout into the Tilton River at Gust Backstrom Park in Morton.

Meanwhile, 13 anglers caught 10 **rainbow trout** at Kline Pond, which was planted with 2,000 catchables Dec. 4. Icehouse Lake near the Bridge of the Gods was also planted with 1,500 catchables that day.

Only one of the 52 bank anglers checked while fishing for **sturgeon** immediately below Bonneville Dam took home a legal-size fish during the first week of December. Nine boat anglers checked from Vancouver to the Gorge had released 35 sub-legal sturgeon, but had caught no legal-size fish.

Under standing rules, retention fisheries for sturgeon will reopen Jan. 1 above Bonneville Dam upriver to McNary Dam. Sturgeon may be retained until the guidelines for each of the three pools are met. In addition, fishery managers from Washington and Oregon will meet at 10 a.m. Thursday, Dec. 13 to consider 2008 fishing seasons for both white sturgeon and **smelt**. The meeting, scheduled at the Kelso City Hall at 203 South Pacific Avenue in Kelso, is open to the public. Watch the WDFW website for news on these seasons.

Eastern Washington:

Catch rates for **steelhead** fishing on the Snake River and its tributaries in southeast Washington are among the best so far this season. WDFW creel checkers found steelheaders on the stretch from the Oregon state line to the mouth of the Walla Walla River averaging just over five hours of effort per fish caught. Steelheaders on the mainstem Snake River between Lower Monumental and Little Goose dams averaged just under six hours per fish caught. Those on the mid-Snake stretch above the interstate bridge near Clarkston were averaging just under seven hours per fish caught. On the Washington section of the lower Grande Ronde River, from Bogans Oasis to the Oregon state line, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife creel checkers reported an average of nine hours of effort per steelhead caught. For the full report, see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/snake/index.htm>.

Fishing has been good at the region's central district winter-only **rainbow trout** fishing lakes that opened Dec. 1. Anglers averaged two to three trout on the opener in open water conditions at Hog Canyon Lake in southwest Spokane County, and Fourth of July Lake, on the Lincoln-Adams county line. Scott Young, WDFW regional access manager, reported Dec. 12 that both lakes had only about two inches of ice – enough to keep boats from being launched but not enough to walk on safely.

WDFW does not make regular checks of ice conditions or make any guarantees about safety.

While ice safety can never be assured, no one should venture onto the ice unless it is at least four inches thick, clear and solid, according to U.S. Coast Guard guidelines. As much as nine inches may be needed to safely support snowmobiles or other vehicles. Such ice depths can form after at least a week of below freezing temperatures, day and night.

Angler effort has been light at the region's north district winter-only lakes – Williams and Hatch in Stevens County. Neither lake has recently been stocked with trout since both are infested with stunted, illegally introduced yellow perch. Both are candidates for fishery rehabilitation next year. Boat anglers willing to brave winter conditions have found decent fishing for Lake Roosevelt **rainbow trout**. The hot spot seems to be from Seven Bays up to near Grand Coulee Dam. Roosevelt rainbows usually range from 18 to 24 inches.

Waitts Lake, just west of Valley in southern Stevens County, remains open to fishing through February to allow continued opportunity on **rainbow** and **brown trout** that range up to 15 inches. At last check, however, Waitts had only about an inch or so of ice about 100 yards out from shore, so fishing may be delayed until conditions are safer. Silver Lake, a mixed species water open year-round in southwest Spokane County, also had only about an inch of ice.

North Central Washington:

Steelhead fishing above Wells Dam on the upper Columbia River has slowed considerably in recent days due to colder weather, said Bob Jateff, WDFW district fish biologist in Omak. "The Methow, Okanogan and Similkameen rivers all have flowing ice, and very little angler effort has been observed," he said. "A few fish are still being caught by shore anglers fishing upstream of Wells Dam using jigs tipped with a shrimp."

Rufus Woods Lake, the Columbia River reservoir created by Chief Joseph Dam near Bridgeport, continues to produce good catches of **triploid rainbow trout** that weigh up to four pounds, Jateff reported. "Both shore and boat anglers are having success using both bait and lures and flies," he said. "Just remember that Rufus Woods has a two-fish daily catch limit for trout." Jateff noted Rat Lake near Brewster in Okanogan County should provide good fishing for 10-12-inch **rainbow trout** during the winter catch-and-keep season, which started Dec. 1. "Davis and Little Twin lakes near Winthrop should also be good this winter for rainbows once the ice is thick enough to walk on," he said.

Columbia Basin waters are freezing up, said Jeff Korth, WDFW district fish biologist in Moses Lake. But none of the year-round big waters, like Potholes Reservoir, Moses Lake, or Billy Clapp Lake are ready to provide safe ice-fishing.

WDFW does not regularly check ice conditions or make any guarantees about safety. While ice safety can never be assured, people should not venture onto the ice unless it is at least four inches thick, clear and solid, according to U.S. Coast Guard guidelines. As much as nine inches may be needed to safely support snowmobiles or other vehicles. Such ice depths can form after at least a week of below freezing temperatures, day and night.

South Central Washington:

Year-round fishing waters in the Yakima and Ellensburg areas recently received more broodstock from WDFW's Goldendale Fish Hatchery. WDFW district fish biologist Eric Anderson of Yakima reports that several lakes and ponds have each been stocked with 140 six-to-ten-pound rainbows. They include I-82 Pond 4 and Rotary Lake in the Yakima area and Mattoon and FioRito lakes in the Ellensburg area. Myron Lake near Yakima will be stocked later. "These big fish really spice up the winter fishery in our local year round waters," Anderson said. For all catchable-size trout plants see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly/>.

Anderson also noted that FioRito and Mattoon lakes should see improved fishing in the future with new funding of aquatic weed-control work at both. "We were just awarded a major grant from the Washington Department of Ecology to control and prevent re-infestation of Eurasian watermilfoil, purple loosestrife and yellow flag iris that threaten these lakes' fisheries," he said. "This grant is the result of a cooperative effort spearheaded by the Kittitas County Noxious Weed Board and the Kittitas County Field and Stream Club."

WDFW fish biologist Paul Hoffarth of Pasco reminds anglers that the **steelhead** fishery in the Ringold area of the Columbia River, from the Highway 395 bridge to the old Hanford town site, remains open through the end of March. Anglers are allowed to retain two hatchery (adipose-fin-clipped) steelhead.

Hoffarth also notes anglers will be allowed to fish for and retain **sturgeon** below McNary Dam Jan. 1.

Reader Email -

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

Write to the TGF staff:

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http://www.dfw.state.or.us/outdoor_skills/workshops.asp

A guide's guide to steelhead featuring **pro guide David Johnson**:

http://www.oregonlive.com/outdoors/index.ssf/2007/12/a_guides_guide_to_steelhead.html

How to catch steelhead on the Deschutes - OregonLive video:

http://www.oregonlive.com/outdoors/index.ssf/2007/10/how_to_catch_steelhead_on_the.html

Weekly Quote – "Today she met me at the door, said I would have to choose, if I picked that fishing pole today, she'd be packing all her things and she'd be gone by noon....well I'm gonna miss her when I get home tonight. Right now I'm on this lake shore, and I'm sitting in the sun! I'm sure it'll hit me when I walk thru that door tonight. Yeah, I'm gonna miss her. Oh lookie there, I gotta bite!" - Brad Paisley

GOOD LUCK!