

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 11th – January 17th 2008**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- With sturgeon fishing still slow below Bonneville Dam, anglers often look upstream to the Bonneville and The Dalles Pools for sturgeon action this time of year. The small quotas behind these impoundments start over again at the first of the year. Quotas will be established early next month but these fisheries rarely last into late spring.

Although reports of fresh smelt for sale in Astoria area fish markets are unconfirmed, the season's commercial landings hitting the docks for the only 2 openers total an estimated 126 pounds.

Sturgeon effort on the Willamette has also let up but with the next warming trend, the bite could reinstate.

While the Clackamas River and Eagle Creek were high as of Monday this week, the color was good. With the low number of steelhead in the system, fishing has been slow but best up high on the system.

Pro guide Brandon Glass (503-260-8285) reports, steelheading on the Sandy River is uncommonly good. Avid anglers are reporting great catches for this early in the season; an indication of better things to come. Some large native fish to 18 pounds were landed from Dodge Park to Lewis and Clark. With low freezing levels, the water level should remain stable into the weekend.

The Santiams are too high and swift to fish this week.

McKenzie levels remain too high and muddy to be of interest to anglers as of January 8th.

Huddleston Pond in Willamina is scheduled to be planted with hatchery trout.

Northwest – Most area streams remained too high for productive fishing but smaller streams like the Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem produced over the weekend. Hatchery workers on the North Fork Nehalem hatchery begin spawning this week; an indication that the run has peaked on most north coast streams for early run hatchery fish.

The Wilson River below the North Fork remains muddy and a downed tree remains a hazard between Siskeyville and Mills Bridge. The trap in the upper reaches of the watershed has seen a good return of steelhead.

Due to poor weather conditions, effort remained low for Tillamook Bay sturgeon. No reports were available.

Steelhead are being recycled from Three Rivers to Cloverdale on the Nestucca River. The Nestucca itself remains too muddy for successful fishing but the predicted drying trend could have it fishing by early next week.

The Siletz River remains the bright spot on the north coast with good reports of broodstock and wild fish showing in the catches. Side-drifters are taking the most fish but when river levels

recede, plugs and spinners will become more effective.

Although a break in the weather is forecasted, seas are predicted to be too rough for recreation well into next week. A bounty of bottomfishing and crabbing awaits sportanglers when conditions allow.

Southwest – Offshore conditions will be too rough to allow crossing any of the bars this weekend and wind and wave action will make jetties potentially hazardous.

South coast rivers will rise into Thursday, January 10th, with another round of precipitation but are predicted to be dropping over the upcoming weekend and into next week. If the forecast model holds true, southwest rivers will fish by mid-month.

On the Siuslaw, **pro guide Jeff Jackson (541-268-6944)** reports, "Steelhead fishing is good in Lake Creek when conditions permit. Lake Creek may come into shape by Sat or Sun, but the mainstem Siuslaw will almost certainly be unfishable."

South fork Coquille anglers took a few steelhead on Friday, January 4th, but the water started to rise and turned muddy mid-day and the river has been blown out since. It will fish again when the water recedes, possibly as early as this weekend.

Umpqua anglers report high, muddy water over the weekend and into this week.

While larger rivers were blown out, the Elk was at 5.6 feet, 45 degrees and showed great color on Monday, January 7th. Winter steelhead are present.

Rogue flows were high at Agness earlier this week, raging at 13,600 cfs. Prior to the rise, steelheading was fair to good. When the water returns to fishable level and flow, winter steelhead should be available in the Grants Pass stretch.

The Chetco was running at 5160 cfs and over six feet at Brookings on Tuesday this week. That's good for plunkers but not good for drift boating. Steelheading has been excellent here this season. Rising this week, the level is expected to approach 10.5 at Brookings mid-week, dropping thereafter.

Eastern – Rainbows, brown trout and whitefish are being taken by fly anglers on the Metolius River, mostly on wet offerings as hatches are rare in cold weather. Bundle up and expect to find snow on the ground here.

Level and flow are good and the water of the lower Deschutes is clear. Fishing is slow, however, for both trout and steelhead.

Some of the lakes and ponds in northeast and southeast Oregon have frozen sufficiently to allow ice fishing but use caution.

SW Washington – The Cowlitz River continues to slow for steelhead but Kalama Falls Hatchery workers are reporting some quality sized fish returning to the hatchery. Fish are being recycled back downstream to the lower river boat ramp.

No reports or signs of smelt in the Cowlitz River. Through March 31, 2008 sport smelt dipping is open from 6:00 AM to 10:00 PM Saturdays only. Daily limit is 10 pounds per person. No other Washington Columbia River tributary is open to fishing for smelt.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Most anglers are waiting for the eagerly anticipated spring chinook run of nearly 280,000 fish. With sturgeon still on the downturn and steelheading near the John Day Dam also slowing, it may be a long wait.

Smelt have shown in the lower Columbia as some gillnets made landings totaling over 100 pounds over the last 2 openers. This is a typical show this time of year but the run is not forecasted to be large by any means.

Crabbing effort in the lower Columbia has also dropped off. Foul weather and excessive amounts of fresh water have put people off for likely the rest of the season.

The Guide's Forecast – If you're a sturgeon fisher, you may want to explore the Bonneville Pool for keepers this time of year. Fresh smelt, although hard to get, would provide some excellent opportunity for anglers in this area. The river remains quite cold and therefore, unproductive for sturgeon are much more likely to be lethargic in these conditions.

Although open, it is highly unlikely that spring chinook fishing is a viable option this time of year. Your Saturday would be much better spent going to the Washington commission meeting in Vancouver where public testimony will be taken on how to split up the allocation of salmon impacts between sport and commercial fishers this year. That program starts at 8:15 a.m. See you there!

The Columbia Compact meeting at which the 2008 recreational and commercial spring Chinook fishery on the Columbia River will be discussed, originally scheduled for January 24th, has been rescheduled to February 15th. The public is encouraged to attend to express opinion. The meeting is at 10 AM at the Water Resource Education Center located at 4600 SE Columbia Way in Vancouver, WA.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Water temperature at Willamette Falls has dropped to 40 degrees which will slow the sturgeon bite. Sturgeon fishing has been spotty on the lower Willamette although catch and release fishing for shakers has been good. Anglers may retain keeper-sized sturgeon Thursday through Sundays. Visibility is less than one foot and while this is far less than ideal for steelhead, the trend may improve the lackluster sturgeon fishing which will definitely pick up with higher water temperatures.

The Santiam system is on the rise and will remain high through the weekend.

It appears the sea lion problem has started early this year with sightings of several eating sturgeon at Bonneville, a few working Willamette Falls and one spotted upriver on the Clackamas.

The Guide's Forecast – No hotspots have emerged over the past week with sturgeon being taken around the St. Johns Bridge as well as Oregon City and points between. Plunking for steelhead has been productive for bank anglers from the mouth of the Clackamas down to Meldrum Bar.

Anglers will find the water of the Santiam too swift to fish effectively. Try elsewhere.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – A good run is expected on the Clackamas this season even though recent catches have been slow. Mid-week, the color started to muddy

up and the water level here is expected to rise through Friday. Anglers indicate a mix of wild and hatchery fish. With winter steelhead scattered throughout the system, fish are being taken on Eagle Creek as well. This hatchery tributary will drop and clear in advance of the main river.

With a prediction of an upcoming break in the weather combined with an early and strong return of broodstock steelhead, the time will be right for decent steelheading on the Sandy River. Recently, boaters have been taking fish while bank anglers have gone home empty-handed.

Pro guide Brandon Glass (503-260-8285) adds this, "Well, the Sandy has been producing big numbers of hatchery winter steelhead already. I was fishing yesterday in the lower river and seen 6 drift boats and 5 sleds. The word is out that the fish are in, and yesterday we hooked 13 fish with one native that was about 17-18 pounds. The upper stretches have been putting large numbers out also especially Dodge park down to Dabney by the rafts and drift boaters. This has been one of the best returns that I can ever remember this early ever since they decimated the Big Creek strain of fish, which was the early returning fish know for back in the good old days. Anyways go out and catch em."

North Coast Fishing Report – These winter weeks are easy on an outdoor writer! Another week of high water will keep us from reporting on any steelhead success this week. Only the small rivers fished for a few days this week with the Necanicum and North Fork of the Nehalem producing the best results.

One guide reported catching 3 steelhead in the Klootchy Creek to Johnson's gravel pit stretch on the Necanicum River on 1/6. The group was drifting bait (mostly eggs) when the fish were hooked up. Most of their action ceased by late morning even though temperatures had warmed slightly and there was little boat traffic to compete with. In the afternoon however, the snow showers came so there was clearly a front moving on shore.

The North Fork Nehalem hatchery began spawning fish this week and as mentioned in the fisheries update section of this newsletter, this is a sign that the run has peaked and the early return of hatchery fish on the north coast is on its way out. Bank fishing on the North Fork has been fair with a good percentage of the catch coming from the handicap ramp at the facility itself.

Three Rivers has also been a fair option for anglers in the southern part of Tillamook County with the deadline producing the best results. Like most other north coast facilities, the spawn is near so the quality of fish will rapidly decline.

It can often be hard to tell the difference between fresh run winter fish and those already spent. The spent fish will often stay bright (especially the hens) but their bellies will often be sunk and look noticeably skinnier than a fresh run fish. Oftentimes, a spent hen will still cut orange or light orange and it's really up to the individual angler as to whether or not they will utilize that catch. Don't take it if you're not going to use it.

Although tides were good for sturgeon over the weekend, the cold, wet weather kept most from being motivated. Avid anglers say there are fish in the bay and it remains open 7 days/week with a 42 inch minimum size restriction. It'll be another few weeks before tides are favorable again.

Crabbing remains poor in most coastal estuaries with Netarts being an exception. Although big numbers are not being taken, the crab that are coming from Netarts are of quality size.

The Guide's Forecast – For anglers that can be patient, better river conditions are on the way.

Now that we have that in our scope, too bad it's getting to that slow transition time when the early returning hatchery fish are on their way to spawn and only a few wild fish begin to move in.

In chronological order of when rivers will fish best:

Big Creek, Gnat Creek, the Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem, Three Rivers and the Kilchis should start producing a combination of near-spawn hatchery steelhead by Saturday or Sunday. Although fish may be a bit more reluctant to bite if the spawn is underway, there should still be some fair catches with the improvement in the weather conditions.

The upper Trask should fish well in higher flows- particularly the Dam Hole by Sunday or Monday. Large baits should attract the most opportunities.

The Nestucca should clear before the Wilson and that won't be until at least mid-week (of next week) barring any additional weather fronts that may make their way onshore. Higher drifts will fish first but don't anticipate any great numbers until later in the season when the wild fish begin to show. Wild fish in these particular systems are very valuable to the broodstock programs as they will help enhance earlier returning fish when used in the program. Please be sure to call the ODF&W Tillamook office and sign up to collect these valuable fish. Call Tracy Crews at (503) 842-2741.

Crabbing may be a fun option on Netarts Bay this weekend but be sure your gear is in well working order. The seas are still forecast to be quite big- drifting out to sea will be certain disaster.

Bottomfishing and ocean crabbing won't be an option this weekend or for that matter, in the foreseeable future.

Central & South Coast Reports – Rivers on the southwest coast have taken a beating this week. Most everything is blow out as of Thursday this week. The good news is that the weather guessers predict a drying trend going into the weekend and no rain starting Sunday and continuing into next week.

In the past several weeks, looking at wind and wave predictions, it seems that both factors have consistently increased as the weekend approaches. Some kind of conspiracy by the elements to protect anadromous fishes from predatory humans? Judge for yourself:

http://www.wetsand.com/swellwatch/swellwatch.asp?catid=292&tabid=438&Tide_Code=NWOB ... Be careful out there.

Waters of the Siletz and Alsea were on the rise mid-week, but should gradually fall into the coming weekend. Both should fish Saturday. Steelheaders may expect to find a mix of wild and broodstock fish in the Siletz. The North Fork Alsea will be the first to deliver action on that system and fishing is expected to be good for winter steelhead in typically crowded conditions.

Pro guide Jeff Jackson (541-268-6944) reports, "Steelhead fishing is good in Lake Creek when conditions permit. Lake Creek may come into shape by Sat or Sun, but the mainstem Siuslaw will almost certainly be unfishable. Plunkers are catching fish on the mainstem between Mapleton and Swisshome. The STEP broodstock program is reporting lots of nice steelhead in the Whitaker Creek trap. Plunking near the mouth of Whitaker may be a good option.

"If the weather holds I'll be fishing the Elk, Sixes or Chetco this weekend. I'll send you a report when I get home."

South fork Coquille anglers took a few steelhead on Friday, January 4th, but the water started to rise and turned muddy mid-day and the river has been blown out since. The Coos and Coquille Rivers are expected to fish well for winter steelhead when the weather breaks and they get back into shape.

Barring an unexpected deluge, plunkers may stand a chance of a hookup on the lower Rogue by Saturday or Sunday. At this writing (01/10), the river gauge at Agness indicates the level a 6.6 feet with the flow approaching 19,000 cfs. That's rippin' but the numbers are on the decline. Steelheading in the lower Rogue was very good prior to the most recent deluge and all this water should provide winter steelhead opportunities to anglers fishing the middle Rogue as well, but it will take some time for this stretch to clear.

As the 70s hair band Styx proclaimed, "Nothing ever goes as planned". This phrase certainly applies to the productive Chetco River which was expected to peak today and drop into the weekend. That forecast has, unfortunately, become a 'maybe' at this point as the waters were high and ugly at this writing on Thursday, January 10th. The water height of 9 1/2 feet at Brookings and the flow of nearly 12,000 cfs were both on the increase today. When this one does actually become fishable, action will be good. Steelheading has been absolutely stellar at the Chetco this season. The prognosticators' best guess is that the river will fall below seven feet by Sunday, allowing plunkers to ply the water at that time.

Social Security Bar, where the ODFW releases 50,000 steelhead smolts annually, has been a hotspot for plunkers on the Chetco when water conditions have cooperated. Steelhead are being taken from many locations and drifts on the Chetco although most are coming from downriver of Ice Box. Many more fish are being hooked than landed which is a common situation with steelhead although odds will improve for anglers who take the time to keep hooks sharp.

Chetco steelheaders have experienced a double bonus this year with the winter steelhead run starting a month early and above average numbers of fish. The hatchery facility on Rowdy Creek, a tributary to the Smith River south of the Chetco, has reported returns of twice as many steelhead as at this time of year in 2007.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Steelheaders on Hood River have seen an improvement in catches recently with some anglers reporting at least one keeper hatchery fish on every trip over the past week.

Northwest Trout – Huddleston Pond in Willamina, Junctions City Pond have been planted with catchable-sized rainbow trout this week. Walter Wirth and Willing Pond in Salem were scheduled to receive a mix of catchable and larger sized rainbows but this has been postponed due flooding, probably to January 14th on which date trout stocking will resume in the Northwest Zone.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report January 9th– January 22nd, 2008

[North Puget Sound](#)

This time of year anglers have a decision to make: cast for **steelhead** in the local rivers or get out onto Puget Sound and fish for **salmon**.

"Weather conditions usually help anglers make that choice," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "If the rivers are in shape, steelheading is a good bet. But if the rivers are blown out, blackmouth fishing in the marine areas is probably the best option."

Thiesfeld said he has heard reports of a few nice **blackmouth** – resident chinook – hooked in marine areas 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) and 10 (Seattle/Bremerton). Those areas, along with Marine Area 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), are currently open for hatchery blackmouth. Anglers fishing in each of those areas can keep two hatchery blackmouth 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.

Marine Area 9 (Admiralty inlet) also will be an option for anglers beginning Jan. 16, when the area opens for salmon under the same regulations as 8-1, 8-2 and 10. "Before Marine Area 9 closed at the end of November, fishing was pretty good, especially at Possession Bar, Point No Point and Mid-Channel," Thiesfeld said. "That decent fishing could carry over into this upcoming opening."

Thiesfeld reminds anglers that the waters from Foulweather Bluff to Olele Point in Marine Area 9 remains closed to salmon fishing.

In the freshwater, hatchery **steelhead** fishing has been fair in a number of rivers, including the Green, Skykomish, upper Skagit and Cascade, said Brett Barkdull, another WDFW fish biologist.

Barkdull reminds anglers that a portion of the North Fork Nooksack River remains closed until the egg-take goal is met for hatchery steelhead at the Kendall Creek Hatchery. The North Fork Nooksack is closed from a yellow post at the upstream most corner of the Kendall Creek Hatchery, approximately 1,000 feet upstream of the mouth of Kendall Creek, downstream to the Mosquito Lake Road Bridge.

"Fish continue to move into the hatchery and we are getting closer to meeting our egg-take goal," Barkdull said. "Once the hatchery gets what it needs, we'll re-open the fishery. So anglers should keep checking our website for that announcement."

Other rules and regulations for all freshwater and saltwater fisheries can be found at WDFW's fishing regulation website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm/>.

With Puget Sound now closed to **recreational crab fishing**, all crabbers licensed to fish in those waters are required to report their winter catch to WDFW by Jan. 15. Reports are due for the season running Sept. 4 to Jan. 2, whether or not crabbers actually fished or caught Dungeness crab. Sport crabbers who file their catch reports by the Jan. 15 deadline will be entered in a drawing for one of 10 free 2008 combination fishing licenses, which allow the holder to fish for a variety of freshwater and saltwater species.

To submit their catch reports, crabbers may either send their catch record card to WDFW by mail, or file their report on a special webpage on the department's licensing website. Catch record cards may be mailed to WDFW CRC Unit, 600 Capitol Way N., Olympia, WA 98501-1091. The online reporting system will be available Jan. 2-15 at https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/wdfw/puget_sound_crab_catch.html.

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

January is typically the best month for catching **hatchery steelhead**, but high water, steady rain and even some snow put a damper on fishing the first week of the new year. Less weather-dependent, a four-day **razor-clam** dig is tentatively scheduled to get under way Jan. 18 if toxin tests show the clams are safe to eat.

Provided test results are favorable, Twin Harbors will open for late-afternoon digs Jan. 18-21, while Long Beach and Copalis are scheduled to open Jan. 19 and 20. Digging on those beaches will be restricted to the hours between noon and midnight. Low tides are at 2:56 p.m. Jan. 18, 3:58 p.m. Jan. 19, 4:53 p.m. Jan. 20 and 5:44 p.m. Jan. 21.

Mocrocks will remain closed to digging in January to make sure enough clams are available for harvest in April, when the tides allow for morning digs, said Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager. Kalaloch will remain closed for the 2008 season.

"The clams are out there and hopefully, the weather and surf will cooperate," said Ayres. "The good news is that these digs are scheduled for mid-afternoon and people can start digging before dark."

A license is required for anyone age 15 or older. Any 2007 annual shellfish/seaweed license or combination license is still valid. Another option is a razor-clam only license available in annual or three-day only versions. Descriptions of the various licensing options are available on the WDFW website at <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/>.

Ayres also reminds diggers who drive on the beach that state highway road rules apply to Washington's beaches. Under the law:

- Seatbelts must be worn at all times.
- The speed limit on the beach is 25 MPH.
- Pedestrians have the right of way and vehicles must yield at all times.

Visitors should not park on approaches to the beach in order to provide clear passage for vehicles that are entering or exiting.

High water hasn't been the only factor affecting **steelhead** fishing on the Olympic Peninsula in recent days. In the Quillayute system – which includes the Bogachiel, Calawah, Dickey and Sol Duc rivers – anglers are also finding fewer hatchery fish, said David Low, a WDFW fish biologist. "Last year was pretty decent, but so far we're seeing lower returns," Low said. "That, together with harsh weather, has made fishing tough for the average angler."

Anglers have had some success catching winter **steelhead** on the upper Wynoochee River and on the east fork of the Satsop River in Grays Harbor, said Scott Barbour, WDFW fish biologist. "Most rivers have been out of shape but – once they drop back in – there's usually a bunch of fresh fish waiting to move upriver."

Barbour cautioned anglers that **wild steelhead** are making up a growing percentage of the fish moving into area rivers. "So it's important to take a close look at them if you plan to keep them," he said. As most anglers know, wild steelhead can be distinguished from hatchery fish by their intact adipose and ventral fins. Retention rules for wild steelhead are outlined on page 33 of the *Fishing in Washington* rule pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>).

Anglers should also be aware that several area rivers – including the Humptulips, Copalis, Nisqually, lower Wynoochee and lower Chehalis (below Porter Bridge) – will close to salmon fishing Jan. 31. Salmon fishing in Marine Areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon Island) and 12 (Hood Canal) is now closed but will reopen Feb 16. Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound) remains open to salmon fishing.

With Puget Sound now closed to recreational **crab** fishing, all crabbers licensed to fish in those waters are required to report their winter catch to WDFW by Jan. 15. Reports are due for the season running Sept. 4 to Jan. 2, whether or not crabbers actually fished or caught Dungeness crab. Sport crabbers who file their catch reports by the Jan. 15 deadline will be entered in a drawing for one of 10 free 2008 combination fishing licenses, which allow the holder to fish for a variety of freshwater and saltwater species.

To submit their catch reports, crabbers may either send their catch record card to WDFW by mail, or file their report on a special webpage on the department's licensing website. Catch record cards may be mailed to WDFW CRC Unit, 600 Capitol Way N., Olympia, WA 98501-1091. The online reporting system will be available Jan. 2-15 at https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/wdfw/puget_sound_crab_catch.html.

Southwest Washington:

The early run of winter steelhead appears to have peaked, but anglers are still picking up some nice hatchery fish in rivers from the Grays to the Washougal in the lower Columbia River Basin. Anglers can also look forward to a return of late-run hatchery steelhead to the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers beginning in late January, not to mention the prospect of catching broodstock rainbows weighing up to 10 pounds in several area lakes.

"This is sort of a transition period between runs, but that doesn't mean there aren't fish to catch," said Joe Hymer, WDFW fish biologist. "If steelhead fishing slows down or the rivers are out of shape, I'd recommend that anglers go after one of those 6- to 10-pound rainbows."

Three lakes have been stocked with excess broodstock rainbows in recent weeks, and two more were planted with half-pound catchables:

- Lake Sacajawea in Longview received 125 broodstock rainbows Jan. 2 averaging 6¼ pounds each and 40 ten-pounders.
- Rowland Lake near Lyle received 83 broodstock rainbows Dec. 31 averaging 6¼ pounds each and 100 ten-pounders.
- Spearfish Lake in Dallesport received 77 broodstock rainbows Dec. 31 averaging 6¼ pounds each and 40 ten-pounders.
- Battle Ground Lake received 2,000 half-pound rainbows Jan. 7 and Kline Pond 1,000 half-pounders the same day.

The hatchery tanker trucks and crews are scheduled to be busy in the weeks ahead, although release dates are dependent upon road conditions, Hymer said. For a weekly update, see the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly/>.

Rather catch steelhead? At least through early February, Kress Lake near Kalama will be planted with 50 to 100 surplus hatchery steelhead per week from Kalama Falls Hatchery. Fish from hatcheries on the Cowlitz and Lewis rivers also may be released there, Hymer said. "This was a popular – and productive – fishery last year," he said. "Anglers were catching good-sized steelhead on flies, lures, plugs and bait."

Then again, fishing for hatchery steelhead was still good in a number of area rivers through the first week of January. On the Cowlitz River, anglers reportedly caught some fish topping 20 pounds, with the best fishing around Blue Creek and Barrier Dam. On the Kalama, where hatchery crews have recycled 600 hatchery fish downriver this year, the best fishing has been reported from the Beginners Hole at Hatchery Creek to the deadline up the canyon.

Anglers fishing the Cowlitz, Kalama, and Lewis rivers should be aware that the prohibition on retaining chinook salmon in those waters has been lifted. The rules now in effect are those shown in the *Fishing in Washington* regulation pamphlet. "There aren't a lot of spring chinook around just yet, but reeling in a keeper hatchery fish could definitely brighten up someone's day," Hymer said. Per permanent rules, all wild chinook with an intact adipose fin must be released.

Preseason forecasts for the 2008 Columbia River spring chinook return – along with other salmon and steelhead runs – are available on the WDFW website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/forecasts/salmon/salmon_columbia08.htm.

Hoping for some smelt? WDFW is scheduled to begin a test fishery this week to check for evidence that the run has arrived in the Cowlitz River. So far, no smelt have been detected in the Cowlitz, although commercial boats on the Columbia River pulled up a small number of them near Skamokawa in late December and early January.

The sport fishery for smelt on the Cowlitz River is open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. each Saturday through March 29. Like last year, the daily catch limit will be 10 pounds per person. All other tributaries to the Columbia River will remain closed to smelt fishing until further notice. The sport fishery on the lower mainstem Columbia River runs seven days per week through March 31 though finding the small fish in the big river is difficult.

Fishing for sturgeon has also been slow, although anglers have caught some legal-size fish in Bonneville and The Dalles pools. A few legal-size sturgeon were reported taken below Bonneville Dam. "The water's still pretty cold for sturgeon," Hymer said. "Once the water starts to warm up or the smelt run builds, the fish activity will too."

Eastern Washington:

Fishing for rainbow trout continues to be good at Hog Canyon Lake in southwest Spokane County and Fourth of July Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line. But anglers should be extremely cautious about venturing out on what could be unsafe ice on these two winter-only fishing lakes. Several inches of snow covers ice that has thawed and re-frozen several times over the last few weeks.

WDFW does not make regular checks of ice conditions nor 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. Look for more "Ice Fishing Safety" information at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/reg/region1.htm>.

Lake Roosevelt rainbow trout are still available for boat anglers willing to brave winter conditions on the big water. Typically, trout fishing in January is good from Seven Bays up to near Grand Coulee Dam. Year-round Rock Lake in Whitman County, which usually remains open water with prevailing winds, has reportedly produced some good-size brown and rainbow trout.

Snake River steelheading also is an option for anglers. Check for postings of steelhead catch rates throughout the Snake system at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/snake/index.htm>.

North Central Washington:

Efforts to catch steelhead on the upper Columbia River above Wells Dam have slowed in recent weeks due to colder temperatures and snow, said Bob Jateff, WDFW fish biologist from Omak. "A few fish are being caught just above the dam on jigs tipped with shrimp set to drift with the current," he said. "Also, the tributaries above Wells — the Okanogan, Similkameen and Methow rivers — have seen very little angler effort. But any slight warming trend could pick up the fishery considerably in those areas."

Jateff also said ice fishing in Okanogan County could be very productive at this time of the year. "Rainbow trout is the main species available and there are a number of lakes that are open to fishing," he said. "Rat Lake near Brewster, Davis Lake near Winthrop, Big and Little Green lakes near Omak, and Sidley Lake near Oroville all provide good wintertime trout fishing."

Patterson Lake west of Winthrop also opened Jan. 1 to give anglers a crack at its abundant yellow perch population. Jateff said perch could usually be caught on small panfish lures tipped with a worm and/or maggot.

In regard to ice fishing, WDFW does not regularly check 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 and 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. At least a week of below-freezing temperatures, day and night, is required to form these ice depths. Additional "Ice Fishing Safety" information is located at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/reg/region2.htm>.

Rufus Woods Lake continues to produce triploid rainbows, Jateff reported. "Both boat and shore anglers are catching two- to four-pound triploids there," he said. "The daily catch limit on trout is two fish and when using bait, the first two trout caught constitute the daily limit, whether kept or released."

Jeff Korth, WDFW fish biologist from Moses Lake said that although most lakes in the Columbia Basin are iced over—including Moses Lake's 6,800 acres—he doesn't recommend ice-fishing. Thawing, refreezing and snow cover have created unsafe ice conditions.

Korth recommends Potholes Reservoir and Banks Lake, which are open and boat accessible. "Walleye fishing is good off and on at Potholes and trout fishing is fairly good at Banks," he said. "Perch fishing should be picking up on Banks at the Coulee City boat basin."

South Central Washington:

WDFW fish biologist Paul Hoffarth of Pasco reminds anglers the sturgeon fishery reopened Jan. 1 in the Columbia River's John Day Pool (from John Day Dam to McNary Dam). "This is a quota fishery," Hoffarth said, "so it's open for retention until the quota is met. The fish are scattered throughout the pool in the winter with good fishing in the Boardman and Irrigon areas and in the usual locations below McNary Dam." Hoffarth notes sturgeon fishing remains open year around above McNary Dam up to the wooden powerline towers at the old Hanford town site. It will open above the power line towers to Priest Rapids Dam Feb. 1.

Hoffarth also says walleye fishing in the Columbia River can be very good both above and below McNary Dam during the winter months. "The state record walleye, 19.3 pounds, was taken in

early February last year above McNary Dam," he said.

The Columbia River from John Day Dam up to the wooden powerline towers at the old Hanford town site is open for hatchery (adipose-fin-clipped) steelhead until March 31. Hoffarth says anglers continue to catch a few steelhead around the Ringold area, with boat anglers doing a bit better than bank anglers last month.

WDFW fish biologist Jim Cummins of Yakima recently reported seeing anglers out on marginal ice at the region's winter-only rainbow trout fishery, North Elton Pond off I-82 near Selah. "Ice on our local lakes and ponds is rarely safe for anglers or other recreationists," Cummins said. "With thawing and re-freezing lately, there are thin spots – even open water – on most of our lakes and ponds. I noticed one fishing party in a canoe sitting on top of the ice with a towrope tied off on the bank. That, and wearing personal flotation devices, might be a safer way to go."

According to fly fisher reports, whitefish and trout are being caught on the Yakima River above Roza Dam. Cummins reminds anglers there are special whitefish rules on the catch-and-release reach of the Yakima now: whitefish gear – one single-point hook, maximum hook size 3/16-inch point to shank (hook size 14) with bait – is allowed only for whitefish.

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

BLM's questionable plan - Hunters and fishermen say tripling logging acres would harm the habitats of prized game:

<http://www.oregonlive.com/oregonian/stories/index.ssf?/base/news/1199672705308380.xml&coll=7>

'Sounds crazy to us, but if you don't go fishing, watch a professional surfing competition in Lincoln City this weekend: <http://www.nelscottreef.org/Nelscott07/index.php>

Weekly Quote – "Never throw a long line when a short one will serve your purpose." - Richard Penn in 1833

GOOD LUCK!