

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 18th – January 24th 2008**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Sturgeon action on the mainstem below Bonneville continues to be slow. Sturgeon fishing above Bonneville Dam however is good for anglers using fresh or frozen smelt. Sand shrimp is also a good alternative.

Commercial catches of smelt remain low but continue to come in. Although difficult to find, the baitfish is selling for \$6 per pound. Two sport dippers on the Cowlitz River reportedly caught several pounds each at the Gearhart Ramp on Saturday.

With the lower Willamette water temperature rising as level and flow moderate this week, sturgeon fishing is expected to show some improvement. Shaker action has been great with a few keepers around. Smelt, squid and sand shrimp have been effective. Sturgeon may only be kept on Thursdays through Sundays as of January 1st.

Water color on the Sandy has remained good through much of the high water event although swift water has made for tough fishing conditions. Action has been slow recently but with the water dropping this week and given the time of year, steelheading is expected to pick up.

The Clackamas had been running too high to fish over the weekend, but was just starting to come into shape earlier this week. Anglers are reporting hookups from the mouth up to the McIver stretch.

North Fork Santiam flows remain high, but the color is excellent. Steelheading has been fair for the catch and release fishery of native steelhead.

Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake are scheduled to be stocked this week after being delayed last week due to flooding.

Northwest – A reprieve in the precipitation should finally allow steelheaders to take advantage of adults on the area's larger streams. Smaller streams have been fishing well with the Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem producing the best catches.

Steelhead become more aggressive after they have spawned making streams with early returning hatchery fish a fun place to be. Most hatchery steelhead with a clear sunken belly are past their prime so anglers will have to use their own discretion as to their catches table quality.

Native steelhead should begin to show in small numbers on some of the larger river systems in Tillamook County. The Trask, Wilson and Nestucca Rivers should produce the best catches of wild fish with a few hatchery fish in the mix. Broodstock collection is underway on the Nestucca and Wilson and adults are needed to jump start the early collection period of this program. Call ODF&W at (503) 842-2741 to participate.

Crabbing has been best in Netarts Bay but the strong weekend tide may make boating and crabbing challenging. The best tide will be in the early morning.

The Nehalem will continue to flow muddy through the weekend.

Weekend tides are ideal for sturgeon fishing in Tillamook Bay and anglers have been fishing for keepers in the south channel. Sand shrimp will make the best bait and should be readily available for the weekend effort.

Weekend seas are predicted to be the friendliest we've seen in many weeks. Bottomfishing and crabbing could become good options over the weekend but minus tides in the afternoon will still create hazardous bar crossings. Ocean goers can call Coast Guard Station Tillamook Bay at (503) 322-3234 for updated ocean conditions and bar restrictions.

Razor clam diggers along Clatsop Beaches should take advantage of friendly surf and large minus tides over the weekend.

Sturgeon have been taken recently on the lower Siuslaw.

In the first planting of the 2008 season for the Northwest Zone, Alder Lake, Cleawox Lake, Dune Lake and Munsel Lake are scheduled to be stocked.

Southwest – In addition to getting new license, harvest card and shellfish permit, be sure to affix your 2008 boat tags and verify your requirement to carry a boater education card.

Even prior to the cessation of rainfall on the south coast, crabbing had been improving in local estuaries. It should continue to pick up during the dry weather this week although crabbers would be wise to bundle up against the cold weather.

A series of late-day minus tides is in the forecast beginning in earnest this coming Saturday with the low slack occurring after dark.

Pro guide Jeff Jackson (541-268-6944), reports that south coast rivers are shaping up and that he expects the Elk and Sixes to fish this week.

North Umpqua plunkers have started to see an improvement in steelhead numbers this week.

Fishing for perch has been good in Coos Bay.

With the level of the Rogue at 7.5 at Agness on Tuesday and dropping fast, plunkers are gearing up to take winter steelhead. The lower river should be productive this weekend. The volume of water over the past week will have decent numbers available to anglers in the Grants Pass stretch.

Chetco water levels had hit 5.5 feet and 4,470 cfs on January 15th. While it's currently fishing well, it may be too low and clear to be productive by the weeks end.

Eastern – The Imnaha River is at good flow and showing great color this week. Steelheaders are taking fair numbers of fish.

Steelhead are still being taken in the John Day area of the Columbia River. Walleye anglers are beginning to ply these same waters as fish should become more active when temperatures warm.

SW Washington – The Cowlitz River is still putting out fair numbers of steelhead between Olequa and the Barrier Dam. Side-drifters are taking the majority of fish.

The Lewis River remains a fair bet for steelhead with a stronger component of wild fish likely to

become more evident in the coming weeks.

Columbia River Fishing Report – The Columbia River continues to be a non-factor in the production of salmon, steelhead and sturgeon this week, with one outstanding exception. The fishing in the John Day Pool this weekend was pretty good for the 2 boats that reported fishing in the fishery. The 2 boats indicated they landed 4 hatchery steelhead and released 9 wild ones for the days effort! This is an unprecedented catch as the effort level indicates. Just as most thought the fishery was winding down, maybe it's actually heating back up again?

Sturgeon effort is also low but there were some keepers reported in the Portland to Longview stretch. Three keepers and 21 shorts were reported for 19 boats. Fresh smelt may become more readily available for bait but even though this stretch seems the most likely area to target sturgeon with smelt, it may be better spent in the lower Willamette River where higher densities of sturgeon are likely to exist this time of year.

The Guide's Forecast – With better weather on the way, effort may increase for sturgeon and steelhead in the same areas mentioned above. Starting with sturgeon, anglers may want to take a hard look at the Bonneville pool for good action. Rumors of good fishing are out there and with the right bait (fresh smelt being the best option), there could be some pretty good opportunity there.

Steelhead anglers will want to focus their efforts in the John Day area of the Columbia River and the John Day River itself. Trollers working the mainstem Columbia may reap the greatest rewards. Trolled plugs upstream of the John Day Dam should continue to produce steelhead with metallic plugs more effective in the cool, clear water with sunny skies in the forecast. Chrome plugs seem to be a favorite in these conditions.

Motivated bottomfishers may want to look at ocean conditions and bar conditions this weekend as south jetty rockfish and lingcod opportunities may exist if the ocean cooperates. This is a very volatile time for the seas however so exercise extreme caution if you are considering such an option. Ocean crabbing although commercial catches have not been impressive, could prove productive for sport crabbers south of the south jetty out of the mouth of the Columbia.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Although the water temperature at Willamette Falls was rising from 40 degrees on January 10th to 43 on the 14th, data has not been updated since that date. Sturgeon fishing remains entertaining of size doesn't matter but keepers have been elusive. If and when the water temps rise a few degrees warmer than that of the Columbia, the lower Willamette will deliver worthwhile winter sturgeon fishing.

Although the vast majority of native winter steelhead crossing Willamette Falls are destined to enter the Santiam system, numbers have been low. Only about 200 have been counted this season. The South Santiam is high but the North is huge, that is, too high for fishing and likely to remain that way for awhile.

The Guide's Forecast – The sturgeon bite on the lower Willamette remains light, so holding the rod rather than using a rod holder will improve the number of hookups. At this time of year, sturgeon will often be found in shallower areas so stay on the move to find larger fish. Try smelt, sand shrimp and herring which have been the most effective baits recently.

McKenzie levels remain high this week, but, as with all Oregon rivers, is dropping and may fish this weekend. This is a favorite of fly anglers.

License controversy:

A new design for the 2008 Oregon angling licenses has the ODFW concerned about the manner in which fishers store these documents. It seems that the new fishing licenses will deteriorate when in contact with plastic - like those little holders dispensed at many agent's counters. The ink may fade so the license looks blank or in some cases the whole document may turn solid black.

The ODFW urges anglers to handle the new license like a receipt; fold it and keep it in your wallet. Tyvek folders will be available from agents around mid-February.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports –Water level at the Clackamas will continue to fall this week, creating an appealing fishery by the weekend. Steelheading should improve with fish concentrated and structure of the river better defined. Eagle Creek has been productive at times through the high water event but it remains to be seen how the conditions pan out here following dry weather this week.

Sandy anglers have done well periodically with early-arriving winter steelhead this season, and this week should give them reason for optimism. Expect to find fish scattered in the coming week. The ODFW indicates there have been a greater number of hatchery steelhead than wild fish but anglers report just the opposite. Bank fishers have taken steelhead this week from lower Oxbow and Dabney parks.

North Coast Fishing Report – It was still not a productive week for steelheaders on the north coast. With most rivers still high, the smaller streams remained the go-to areas. Most of these "go-to" streams have spawned out steelhead in them but a few fresh ones continue to trickle in. The peak is now passed and a mix of a rare, fresh, early run hatchery fish, spawned out early run hatchery fish and a few wild fish will begin to make up the catch.

Although most anglers feel we're finally getting the conditions we deserve, in reality, the hatchery season for many of the north coast streams is about over. The North Fork Nehalem hatchery reported slow fishing on the 16th despite some of the best river conditions of the year and the Necanicum River produced a few fish but most were already spawned out.

The Highway 30 streams were also a strong option this week and catches were made on Big and Gnat Creeks but like most of the other rivers, spawning season is upon us and the quality of fish will quickly go downhill.

The Kilchis River has been in good shape but success remains low.

Other, more popular rivers with larger watersheds are just now coming into shape and should be prime for this weekend. These systems include the Wilson, Trask and Nestucca Rivers; all which should have a mix of steelhead described in the first paragraph. It will be important to remember however that the Trask River is still blocked off with a log-jam upstream of the highway 101 bridge and there is a log across the Wilson River at Poff's, which is above Mills Bridge less than 1 mile. River hazards still exist out there so wear your life-jacket and use extreme caution when fishing these systems.

Experienced sturgeon anglers have been working the south channel of Tillamook Bay although reports were not available at this writing.

Crabbing was productive for Netarts this time of year and the crab were reported as "Ocean Jumbo's". A commercial crabber was working outside of the Netarts entrance last week- it's unclear if that will effect success rates inside the bay.

The Guide's Forecast – If it weren't the middle of January, I'd be a lot more enthused about fishing this week. Conditions will be ideal over the weekend for many of the larger streams but the question is, how will the quality of the fish be? The Wilson and Nestucca may offer the best opportunity for a quality hatchery fish as brood stock fish should become available. It's also important to note that collection of broodstock for this program is underway but next to no fish have been collected considering the water conditions we have been experiencing on the north coast. Be sure to sign up for these programs by calling the local ODF&W office at (503) 842-2741.

Regardless of what stream you fish, spent steelhead will be on the menu. I am sure these fish bite better for biological reasons as they are quite wary from the spawning season but when it comes time to harvest or release, it's really up to the angler to decide what they are going to do with their catch. If it's poor tablefare, I personally release it even though I don't appreciate hatchery fish spawning in the wild. If I liked the taste of spent smoked steelhead, I would harvest every one that I caught and I often do if my customers want to. I just like to stress use of the fish if you decide to take it- only here, only hatchery steelhead. Salmon don't exhibit the same quality since they die after spawning but I have taken plenty of hatchery steelhead that still cut orange inside.

There are some great sturgeon tides this weekend for anglers looking to get out on Tillamook Bay. Although we're still shy on reports, effort is picking up with the improvement in weather. Anglers fishing the south channel and channels in the middle of the estuary are likely to hold good numbers of sturgeon. With all the fresh water we have been experiencing, crabs intercepting your bait should not be an issue.

If you are going to crab, choose Netarts or "big blue" (Ocean) if the weather and bar crossings permit. It could be wicked good for sport crabbers out there right now. Caution comes first however!

Central & South Coast Reports – The Siletz has been productive and should reward through the coming weekend. Forecasts indicate the water level will drop to about five feet at Siletz by Saturday, January 19th.

North Fork Alsea anglers are taking winter steelhead this week as the water level continues to drop and good numbers of fish return to the hatchery facility here. Crowds have been problematic so start early or fish weekdays if possible.

Both the Siletz and Alsea Rivers are expected to be in good shape with fresh hatchery winter steelhead available for the weekend. This is not a secret, however, so ample participation is anticipated.

Pro guide Jeff Jackson (541-268-6944), reports, "South Coast rivers are starting to come into shape. The Elk should fish very well for the next few days, with the Sixes in shape by Tue (barring any more rain). Effort was high and catch rates were good on Sunday. We didn't do great, but did manage to land an estimated 20 lb. wild steelhead on Sat. (only boat on the river)."

Even prior to the cessation of rainfall on the south coast, crabbing had been improving in local estuaries. It should continue to pick up during the dry weather this week although crabbers would be wise to bundle up against the cold weather.

Productive prior to the last round of storm fronts. the Coos and Coquille rivers are expected to fish well as they drop back into shape this week.

From the "Didn't see this coming" department:

While the change in 2008 regarding the release of wild steelhead on the Umpqua system was considered to be aligned with the opinion of the angling community, there has nonetheless been some backlash in the form of complaints from - you guessed it - anglers.

Two angler groups, one led by professional fishing guides and the other an organization of Umpqua fishers known as the Steamboaters (so-named for an Umpqua angling area), have objected to the restriction on keeping one wild steelhead (up to five per year in 2005 through 2007) as the population is natives is acknowledged to be healthy and stable despite selective harvest.

How do you feel about the issue of retaining wild steelhead? Several opportunities for Oregon anglers to offer input on future fishing regulations affecting the 2009 through 2009 seasons are available this year. Speak your mind.

The surf forecast is for waves 10 to 12 feet on the north coast while the south coast is predicted to see waves only two feet in height. The leaves the wind prediction as the determining factor for offshore hopefuls, and with the forecast for eight to 12 miles per hour for southwest Oregon, boats may be able to manage a rare winter bar crossing. Check conditions at the last minute for safety.

Offshore angling for rockfish and ocean crabbing are historically excellent in winter months when conditions allow safe crossing and it looks as if this weekend should provides a window of opportunity for recreational boaters to cross southwest Oregon bars.

Steelhead are being taken this week by plunkers in the mainstem Umpqua. While steelheaders have enjoyed fair to good river conditions through recent rain storms, fishing has only been fair although counts at Winchester Dam have topped the 500 mark. Action on the North Umpqua is expected to improve this week with the river level falling. The south Umpqua, muddy at mid-week, should improve as well.

Steelheaders on the lower Rogue have been doing very well for a mix of hatchery and wild steelhead and barring any additional storms and should continue to enjoy good fishing through January and beyond. Yet another indication of a banner winter steelhead season is the size of fish coming from the Rogue. This river is better known for generating great numbers rather than large fish, but this year steelies to 18 pounds have been taken here. Water in the Grants Pass stretch remained high and off-color as of Wednesday, January 16th. As water conditions improve, so should results for anglers targeting winter steelhead in the middle Rogue. Winters have reached Gold Ray Dam with nearly 40 counted as of Friday last. Bait has been most effective on the upper river.

Plunkers have been taking good numbers of steelhead on the Chetco River, including some dandies with a few hitting the 20-pound mark this season. As of the morning of Wednesday, January 16th, the flow dropped below the 4,000 cfs mark, allowing driftboaters to join in the fray. Plunkers are scoring with Spin 'n' Glos while drift boaters have done best by side-drifting. Steelheading on the Chetco has exceeded all expectations this year with the run starting early

and continuing to deliver very well. Fishing on Wednesday this week was outstanding with bait anglers taking most of the scores of steelhead landed. Social Security Bar was a hotspot for bank anglers. Chetco was about 2,950 cfs. 4.3 feet and dropping at Brookings on Thursday, January 17th.

When anglers find the Chetco out of shape (either too high or too low), many drop down south a mere 12 miles to the Smith which has been quite rewarding this season. Sure, fishing the Smith requires meeting the California license requirements but it's often worth the quick trip from Brookings. The Smith has a one-steelhead-per-day bag limit.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Metolius fly anglers have found less than a foot of snow on the ground recently with roads mostly passable. Blue-winged-olives are hatching at mid-day, The Met water temperatures remain in the 50-degree range year-round.

Northwest Trout – ODFW says, "The South Willamette Watershed District stocked Junction City Pond with 350 trophy-sized rainbow trout and several larger brood stock trout the week of Jan. 7. Walter Wirth Lake and Walling Pond in Salem were not stocked the week of Jan. 7 as scheduled due to the high water flows through the ponds. Both ponds have been rescheduled to be stocked the week of Jan. 14. Walling Pond will receive 400 legal and 50 larger-sized trout and Walter Wirth Lake with 1,700 legal and 150 larger-sized rainbow trout. 500 brook trout broodstock ranging from 1-2.5 pounds will be stocked in Junction City Pond the week of Jan. 21, weather permitting."

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 Foul weather Bluff to Olli 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/reggs/fishreggs.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 -

Pro Guide Jim Stevenson (503) 581-5347 wrote, "Looking forward to this week, finally

going to get out with some good weather and rivers getting into shape, probably allot of boats on the rivers. Just maybe remind everyone of good river etiquette boat to boat and boat to bank angler?"

You just did, Jim, and your reminder is appreciated by all.

Subscriber Sam J. wrote via the Contact Form at the TGF website, "Thought you and your readers would like to know that the South Prairie elk herd has an albino member. I don't know how old it is, as I just spotted it 9 Jan."

TGF co-editor **Bob Rees** replied, "I saw this elk today! But from highway 101 just south of the Trask River!"

To which Sam replied, "Yes it is the Tillamook herd. Best viewing is from Brickyard road."

One more reason to enjoy the outdoors near Tillamook, readers!

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

Oregon Outdoors Radio. Broadcast live each Thursday from 3 pm to 5 pm on KWRO AM 630 in Coos Bay: *<http://oregonoutdoorsradio.us/>

Study: Sea lice from salmon farms sending wild fish to extinction:
*<http://www.oregonlive.com/newsflash/regional/index.ssf?/base/news-22/1197578952325790.xml&storylist=orlocal>

Weekly Quote – "Fishing is much more than fish. It is the great occasion when we may return to the fine simplicity of our forefathers." - Herbert Hoover

GOOD LUCK!