

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 1st – February 7th, 2008**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- The chilly water of the lower Willamette has sturgeon biting even more timid this week. While there are plenty of shakers around, only a few keepers have been taken by anglers willing to move around to find the fish, then offering a variety of baits. Plunkers at Meldrum Bar have had a very slow week for steelhead.

A few native winters are being caught on the Santiam system but there just isn't a lot of fresh steelhead in the system. While the flow is at seasonal average, the water temperature is in the high 30s, making it difficult to get the available winters to bite. Numbers should build into March.

Clackamas anglers are finding steelhead scattered throughout the system. Fishing has been fair.

Steelhead were taken through the recent cold snap on the Sandy but keep an eye on river conditions now that the freezing level is on the rise.

While the McKenzie was in great shape over the past weekend, fishing was poor with water temps in the 30s. Rain is likely to blow it out this week.

E. E. Wilson, Sheridan Pond and Junction City Pond are scheduled to be stocked with trout this week. Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake will receive legal and larger-sized rainbows.

Northwest – Low flows kept most anglers from being motivated over the weekend. Clear, cold water and inclement weather made for challenging conditions and the bulk of the early run winter steelhead are spawning.

Some quality broodstock steelhead were taken in the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers but these prized fish will be present in higher numbers later in February and into March. The upper reaches of these systems, particularly the Wilson are still holding biting steelhead. Low water conditions allow for alternative techniques and bobber and jig fishing is likely to produce well under these conditions. Wild fish numbers will also build into March with most coastal systems likely to see good returns.

The Trask River yielded some fish early in the week and a rare winter chinook can still be found. These late-run fish must be released as the salmon season won't open until April 1st in this district.

Area rivers are forecast to rise for most of the week but could remain fishable. Anglers are likely to find mostly spawned out hatchery fish on the Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem, Wilson, Kilchis and Nestucca Rivers. Cold weather will keep success rates low and coast range passes treacherous. Use caution when traveling.

Only a few sturgeon anglers braved the weekend weather but a few keepers were taken in the upper end of the south channel of Tillamook Bay. Keepers ranged from 42 to 48 inches and fell to sand shrimp late in the incoming tide.

On the Nestucca, **pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** reports that the bite has slowed

with cold temperatures.

Crabbing remains slow but Netarts Bay is still producing a few keepers and is likely holds the most promise on the coast.

Siletz water levels are predicted to rise about two feet this week, hitting the seven foot level by the coming weekend. Steelheading has been fair when the water conditions have been favorable but a far cry from good success rates earlier in the season.

Pro guide Bill Kremers (541-754-6411) reports that he fished the Alsea in harsh weather Thursday this week without landing any steelhead.

Crabbing in Alsea Bay has not been productive over the past week.

Southwest – Offshore boaters caught limits of nice ling cod last week when the ocean laid down, but rough seas and high winds will prevent bar crossings this week.

Rain and snow hit the south coast hard this week. **Pro guide Jeff Jackson (541-268-6944)** predicts it'll take a stretch of dry weather for it to fish again.

Plugs took steelhead over the weekend on the Umpqua. Both the North and South Umpqua have been productive this season.

Action slowed for steelhead plunkers on the lower Rogue recently but drift boaters have done well from Foster to Quosatana. Side drifting has been most effective.

Chetco steelheaders are looking forward to rain this week as the river was running very low into the past weekend. Fishing has been outstanding overall this season and effort has been running high as well.

Eastern – The John Day River is choked with ice jams and is unsafe for boating. Cold temperatures may keep the river locked up for several more weeks but a warming trend should set off a steelhead bite and a few smallmouth bass.

The same holds true for the Grande Ronde and Imnaha Rivers where staging steelhead remain untouched until the region experiences a warming trend.

Walleye anglers await the same weather change in the mainstem Columbia above the John Day Dam.

Cooper Creek Reservoir is scheduled to be planted with hatchery trout.

SW Washington – Still no sign of smelt in the Cowlitz and mainstem Columbia. River temperatures, both the Cowlitz and Columbia, remain too cold for fish to migrate.

Hatchery workers are seeing their first returns of second run steelhead on the Cowlitz. Although bank anglers are still challenged in finding fish, boaters fishing the Blue Creek area tagged steelhead in recent days.

Soapbox Update:

The 8 AM meeting on February at the Oregon Fish & Wildlife Commission headquarters at 3406 Cherry Avenue NE in Salem will be the last opportunity for recreational anglers to share their

opinions regarding the upcoming spring Chinook season and allocation. One of the proposals on the table would close the Columbia River to sports angling while gill netters are working. If you care, speak up!

Directions: <http://www.dfw.state.or.us/directions/>

Catch a bus ride for free from the Portland area:

http://www.totalfisherman.com/ifish/salmon_allocation_meeting_bus.pdf

Columbia River Fishing Report – With no fishing effort on the mainstem, there is really nothing to report. The next commercial gillnet opener, targeting sturgeon with “incidental” chinook catches allowed, happens for 18 hours beginning 6 p.m. January 31st. Catches will likely be low.

Effort and catch for sturgeon was low from The Dalles Pool to Longview. No keepers were reported in this stretch.

A few steelhead are being taken in the Bonneville Pool. Two boats reported catching 4 wild steelhead and one hatchery fish in the weekend creel. An admirable report for such low effort. I wish I had more information on this fishery.....anyone?

The Guide’s Forecast – Not much of a fishery to invest time in. Sturgeon anglers may want to poke around near the mouth of the Willamette where momentum seems to be growing for keepers in the Portland Harbor. The warmer Willamette will likely draw more anglers this time of year.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Brrrrrrr. Water temperature at Willamette Falls has been hovering in the mid-30s since January 26th. While wild steelhead have been crossing at steady single digits as the year-to-date total approaches 350, plunkers targeting hatchery fish destined for the hatchery on the Clackamas system have had very few opportunities over the past week although rumors of spring Chinook catches persist although we're holding out for photographic proof.

Steelhead counts are expected to accelerate in February and March. Let's hope the numbers live up to those expectations. The January 2007 counts were higher by about 1,000. 2006 counts were similar to 2008 with daily counts jumping to several hundred by the second week of February. It remains to be seen this year.

The Guide's Forecast – Few anglers braved the cold over the last sturgeon retention period and those who did reported marginal results. While cold water in the lower Willamette hasn't shut off the sturgeon bite, the fish are biting more softly than ever, requiring anglers to hang onto rods to detect the delicate take. Shakers were once again plentiful over the past Thursday through Friday retention period with the occasional legal sized sturgeon taken. Success with lower Willamette sturgeon requires willingness to try various locations, depths and baits. A combination of baits and scents will turn the trick for some winter sturgeon fishers.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Clackamas anglers have been taking steelhead on a variety of baits and lures with fish scattered. Boaters are seeing success pulling plugs. Rain this week has muddied the Clack to the point that it was punishable the morning of January 31st and as bad as it is, it's likely to stay out of shape through the weekend. Eagle Creek

may be steelheader's only hope, and that opportunity may not present itself until there's a break in the precipitation.

Look for the Sandy rise as well as precipitation puts some color into river and with the freezing level up, it may be slow to recover. Steelhead catches have been very good this season, and the Sandy is expected to deliver anytime water conditions are passable.

North Coast Fishing Report – North coast steelheaders are already craving the kind of fishing that we saw a few weeks back. The days of double digit catches may happen again in late February or March but that Wilson fishing was so epic, it oftentimes only happens once a year if not once every other year. Rain is once again upon us and the north coast rivers are on the rise. Although not forecasted to go way out of range, the larger systems like the Wilson and Nestucca will likely be too high to fish for a while. River conditions and especially cold weather kept many anglers home but fishers working the upper stretches of the Wilson still produced good catches if their favorite fishing holes were approached in a stealthy manner. Bobbers and jigs took a fair number of fish in the slower, deeper pools and drift fishermen also took biters in the faster, broken surfaced flows. Colder weather certainly kept steelhead from being active until air temperatures warmed.

Most streams produced poor results last week with the Wilson still likely the best producer. The Nehalem remained off color and likely will stay that way until an extended period of dry weather comes our way.

On the Nestucca, **pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** reports, "We are snowed in over in the coast range. The Nestucca was fishing well, however, since this really strong cold snap, it has since tapered off. It has been fair at best over the last several days. Most of the best action will take place on the lower river. The temperature is really cold both water and air. If we see a good warm up, and get a little rain, we should see it pick up. Have a great week!"

As previously mentioned, the Trask River log jam is clear and there are fish available. Most of the catches recently have been native fish but a winter chinook was recently taken there as well as on the Kilchis River. These fish must be released unharmed. Smaller sized flatfish can be productive for both species this time of year with salmon and steelhead often holding in the same type of water. Bug bucks often succumb to plugs in the deeper runs and holes.

Rough seas kept anglers at bay but some were crazy enough to freeze their behinds off pursuing sturgeon on Tillamook Bay. Although it took a while to find the fish, **pro guide Andy Betnar (503-791-4094)** reported good success in the west channel. Andy caught 2 thick 48-inch keepers and a small handful of short sturgeon using sand shrimp for bait. Miraculously, the group caught the keepers towards the high part of the incoming tide- an unlikely time for catching on Tillamook Bay. It was cold and wet and likely why they didn't have much other competition.

Siletz River action has also slowed. After such a good early season, many were surprised of the slow-down. There are still likely many fish to come for these mid-coast anglers as broodstock and wild fish will once again build into February.

Crabbing remains poor in our coastal estuaries.

The Guide's Forecast – Offshore boaters caught limits of nice ling cod last week when the ocean laid down, but rough seas and high winds will prevent bar crossings this week.

With rivers steadfastly on the rise, the smaller streams will be the best option for weekend

steelheaders. The forecasted amount of precipitation will likely keep the larger systems like the Trask, Wilson, Nestucca and Nehalem off-color into the weekend.

Motivated steelheaders willing to brave bad road conditions in the coast range pass may find a mix of a rare quality hatchery steelhead and a few wild fish. The bulk of the catch until late February and early March will be made up of spent hatchery fish on their way back to the ocean. These fish become more aggressive after they spawn and the Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem, Three Rivers and the Nestucca should all have these fish present. The Highway 30 streams- Big Creek and Gnat Creek along with the Klaskanine River should also have fair numbers of these less-than-ideal fish available. Harvest only what you will use.

Sturgeon fishing may be a fair option for weekend boaters. Bank anglers can also take advantage of a few select spots in the middle of Tillamook Bay- accessed by the Bay Ocean spit on the west side of the bay. Bank anglers often walk out on the sand flats and plunk shrimp on an outgoing tide. The weather forecast however does not look all that friendly.

Crabbing won't be all that fun either.

Central & South Coast Reports – While the south coast was supposed to receive a much milder lashing from the storm from than northerly locations this week, mother nature once again had a little surprise in store and it just got hammered overnight and into the morning hours on Thursday, January 31st. The long-range weather forecast indicates a possibility for moderation in the rainfall next week, but as unpredictable as conditions have been recently, we won't be placing any wagers on it.

Pro guide Jeff Jackson (541-268-6944) sums up the situation succinctly: "There's a lot of snow in the hills here, and most everything is blown out right now. Probably need a stretch of clear weather before the Siuslaw will fish again."

The level of the Alsea was forecast earlier this week to increase to just over eight feet at tidewater on Thursday, then drop into the weekend. As of Thursday this week, however, that was revised to something over 12 feet although the water level is still predicted to fall over the next several days. This may create some passable steelheading opportunities, particularly on the North Fork. The Alsea hatchery had counted a total of 968 winter steelhead as of January 29th. Crabbing in Alsea Bay has not been productive over the past week and there's no reason to think it'll improve soon.

Pro guide Bill Kremers (541-754-6411) reports that he "tried to fish the Alsea yesterday (01/29. Ed.). We ran two boats with Jim Martin captaining the other boat. There was rain, snow, sleet and hail and a raising river. Jim boat did hook into 3 fish, but lost them all. We only got a trout in my boat. One of these days the conditions will improve."

Rainfall was firing up the winter steelhead fishery on Elk River anglers once again early this week with the lower river delivering bright fish before heavy rain put it out of shape. Pressure was very light over the weekend in low water conditions, but the number of anglers increased with the water level. The Elk and Sixes rivers are the diamonds in this rough weather, recovering rapidly from a deluge such as that which has besieged southwest Oregon this week. Anglers fishing these as they drop should be rewarded with fresh steelhead.

Although steelheading has only been fair at best on the Applegate River, catches generally improve into February and this one may be worthwhile as it recovers from rain this week.

Winter steelheading held up on the lower Rogue over the past weekend as pods of fresh fish moving through created flurries of action interspersed with stretches of time-outs for coffee breaks. Cold water has prevented the fishery middle Rogue from taking off, but when temperatures moderate and the water level drops, this area will be worth the trip.

The Good news for Chetco anglers is two-fold this week: precipitation will add much needed water to the system and while early river forecasts indicated a blow-out unlikely, this river got slammed as well. Waters of the Chetco rose rapidly overnight on January 30th, from 5,000 cfs at 8 AM to nearly 10,000 cfs by early afternoon. And it was still rising! This extreme change came as a surprise as this river was predicted to fish through the week. Traffic earlier this week was substantial, putting heavy pressure on steelhead. Sand shrimp was out fishing cured salmon eggs many times over with tailouts and riffles once again the productive areas. As water conditions recover, plunkers will fare best on the lower Chetco in higher levels. This is a transitional period for the Chetco with the spawn starting on the upper river, downrunners in the mix and numbers of hatchery fish starting to thin, but steelheading will remain worthwhile here for weeks to come.

With the numbers of native steelhead entering coastal streams and rivers on the increase at this time of year, anglers are encouraged to avoid the use of diver and bait, a combo which often results in indiscriminate mortal injury. Regulations regarding native steelhead preclude the use of a landing net and once subdued, wild steelhead should not be removed from the water. Handle this valuable resource gently to insure safe release.

Northwest Trout – Catch all you want, keep all you catch. That's the new rule at Roslyn Lake near Sandy as of Friday, February 1st, at which time all bag and size limits will be eliminated. Removal of Marmot and Little Sandy dams will eliminate the need for Roslyn, so it will be drained starting in the spring. Get 'em while you can.

E. E. Wilson, Sheridan Pond and Junction City Pond are scheduled to be stocked with trout this week in the Willamette Valley along with Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake which will receive legal and larger-sized rainbows. Cooper Creek Reservoir in the Southwest Zone is also on the stocking schedule this week.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report - January 23 - February 5, 2008

North Puget Sound

Fair – but cold – weather has helped anglers on Puget Sound, where fishing for **blackmouth** has picked up recently. Meanwhile, fishing continues to be slow for anglers casting for **steelhead** in several of the region's rivers and streams.

"Both hatchery and wild **steelhead** returns are down this year to a number of rivers in the region, particularly those in the Skagit River basin," said Bob Leland, WDFW's steelhead program manager. "Because of that, steelhead fishing just hasn't been that great this winter."

Those low steelhead returns prompted WDFW to close a portion of the Cascade River to recreational fishing to ensure enough steelhead make it back to the Marblemount Hatchery to meet spawning goals. The Cascade is closed until further notice from the mouth upstream to Rockport-Cascade Road.

"This closure will help the Marblemount Hatchery meet its broodstock needs, but additional fishing closures in the basin also are likely this spring to protect wild steelhead," Leland said. Catch-and-release fisheries in the Skagit and Sauk rivers are among those fisheries that could close, he said. WDFW will continue to monitor returns of wild steelhead, which are listed for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act, to determine when emergency closures could take effect.

A stretch of the North Fork Nooksack River that closed in December to steelhead fishing has re-opened. The river is once again open from a yellow post at the corner of the Kendall Creek Hatchery farthest upstream, approximately 1,000 feet upstream of the mouth of Kendall Creek, downstream to the Mosquito Lake Road Bridge.

Out on the Sound, fishing has been good for **salmon**. Recent creel checks show anglers have been hooking **blackmouth** – resident chinook – throughout the region. On Jan. 19, four anglers were checked with four chinook at the Oak Harbor Marina, while 51 were checked with eight chinook at the Everett Ramp. The following day, 10 anglers were checked with four chinook at the Manchester Ramp, while seven anglers accounted for five chinook at the Maple Grove Ramp. "That's pretty good fishing for this time of year," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. Selective fisheries for hatchery blackmouth in marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) and 9 (Admiralty inlet) continue into April. However, anglers only have a few more days to catch blackmouth in Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton), which closes at the end of January. 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.

Thiesfeld reminds anglers that beginning Feb. 1, a selective fishery for hatchery blackmouth will open in Marine Area 7 (San Juan Islands) under the same regulations as 8-1, 8-2 and 9. 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>.

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

Clear skies boosted the number of anglers – and, in some cases, **steelhead** caught – on area rivers during the third weekend in January. After weeks of heavy rain and high water, boats and trailers again clogged boat launches from the Satsop River to the upper Hoh.

As in previous weeks, the Sol Duc River yielded some of the highest catches. Creel surveys conducted Jan. 18-20 credited 52 anglers with 31 wild steelhead (24 released) and six hatchery fish. At the same time, 34 anglers checked on the Bogachiel had caught only four steelies, all but one of them wild.

No river showed more improvement than the upper Hoh, where 48 anglers caught 19 wild steelhead (all released) and four hatchery fish. But catch rates were still slow below the Oxbow Campground, where 80 anglers caught five wild steelhead (three released) and two hatchery fish that same weekend.

"Even so, it's good to see that the Hoh is finally making a showing," said Dave Low, WDFW fish biologist. "Up until the weekend, we really hadn't seen any action on that river this season." Farther south, the Wynoochee, Satsop and the Skookumchuck rivers are also getting more attention from anglers, although results have been mixed. On the Wynoochee, Low said he'd observed nine boats with seven steelhead near the diversion dam during the third week of January but the action appeared to drop off by the weekend. Although fishing conditions are also good on the Satsop River, success rates have been up and down, he said.

The Chehalis River, meanwhile, has continued to run high and muddy since the December floods, said Scott Barbour, another WDFW fish biologist. "Right now, the river still looks like a chocolate mocha," he said. "I've seen some people plunking, and that's probably the best way to fish it right now."

Anglers should 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. Marine areas 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) and 13 (South Puget Sound) will also close to **salmon** fishing Jan. 31, but several others are scheduled to reopen Feb. 16. Areas reopening to salmon fishing that day include 5 (Sekiu), 6 (Port Angeles), 11 (Tacoma) and 12 (Hood Canal). Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet) reopened to salmon fishing Jan. 16.

With wild fish now becoming increasingly prevalent, Low also reminded anglers that retention of wild steelhead is currently limited to one fish per year in the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Green, Goodman, Hoh, Hoko, Pysht, Quillayute, Quinault or Sol Duc rivers. Elsewhere, they must be released. 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>).

Eager for news about the next **razor clam** dig? Check the WDFW razor clam website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/shelfish/razorclm/season.htm>) Jan. 25 for information about future openings.

Southwest Washington:

Anglers are still picking up some nice hatchery **winter steelhead** in rivers throughout the lower Columbia River Basin, although late-run fish are just beginning to arrive and water temperatures have been a tad chilly for **sturgeon** and **smelt**.

That being the case, anglers might want to focus on catching some **rainbow trout** until conditions improve for those other species, said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist. In recent days, the department has stocked seven area lakes with rainbows ranging from catchable-size fish to 10-pound broodstock.

Lakes planted with catchable-size rainbow weighing up to half a pound apiece include:

- Horseshoe Lake in Woodland got 1,504 fish Jan. 10.
- Battleground Lake got 4,105 fish Jan. 16.
- Kline Pond got 1,000 fish Jan. 14.
- Icehouse Lake near the Bridge of the Gods got 802 fish Jan. 11.
- Kidney Lake near North Bonneville got 1,000 fish Jan. 14.
- Rowland Lake near Lyle got 3,038 fish Jan. 11.

Lakes planted with broodstock rainbows averaging 6.25 and 10 pounds each include:

- Carlisle Lake near Onalaska got 41 of the 6.25 pounders and 34 ten pounders Jan. 14.
- Horseshoe Lake in Woodland got 42 each of the 6.25 and 10 pounders Jan. 10.
- Icehouse Lake got 40 of the 6.25 pounders.

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

In addition to trout plants, the department is also stocking Kress Lake near Kalama with up to 50 to 100 surplus **hatchery steelhead** per week through early February, said Chris Wagemann, another WDFW biologist. During the week of Jan. 14-20 an additional 38 steelhead were released

bringing the total to about 250 fish. Anglers have been catching these fish mostly with spinners. About a dozen late-run hatchery steelhead had returned to the Kalama Hatchery by mid-January, with the bulk of the run expected to arrive in the Kalama and Cowlitz rivers in February, Hymer said. Meanwhile, anglers are still picking up some early-run steelies on rivers throughout the area, notably in the Cowlitz River around Blue Creek. Wild steelhead, bearing an intact adipose fin, must be released in all area waters.

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.

For **smelt** and **sturgeon**, the fishing forecast probably won't improve until water temperatures warm up a bit, Hymer said. Despite some commercial landings on the Columbia the previous week, there was no sign of smelt in the Cowlitz River during the weekly opening Jan. 19. Sturgeon fishing has also been slow in all areas, Hymer said.

"Smelt prefer water temperatures above 40 degrees, and sturgeon are also more likely to bite when the water warms up," he said. "Until that happens, we're probably not going to see much action in either fishery."

Eager for news about the next **razor clam** dig? Check the WDFW razor clam website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/shelfish/razorclam/season.htm>) Jan. 25 for information about future openings.

Eastern Washington:

Fishing for **rainbow trout** through the ice at winter-only lakes – Hog Canyon in southwest Spokane County and Fourth of July on Lincoln-Adams county line – is good. **Yellow perch** at year-round Eloika Lake in north Spokane County are also coming through the ice in good numbers.

Despite recent below-freezing weather, WDFW district fish biologist Chris Donley advises anglers to be cautious on the ice. Deep snow can cover – and insulate – what could be thinner-than-expected ice on some lakes.

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>.

Open water fishing for rainbow and **brown trout** remains good at year-round Rock Lake in Whitman County for those willing to brave cold and windy conditions, either from a carefully-manuevered boat or from shore.

WDFW fish biologist Jason McLellan reports fishing for big net-pen-reared **rainbow trout** on

Lake Roosevelt is picking up on the lower end of the reservoir near Spring Canyon just east of Grand Coulee Dam. Roosevelt anglers are also occasionally catching a **kokanee** or two, he said. Snake River **steelheading** is cold and slow. See the latest steelhead catch rates throughout the Snake system at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/snake/index.htm>.

North Central Washington:

Colder temperatures on the upper Columbia River above Wells Dam have slowed the **steelhead** fishing considerably in the last few weeks, reported Bob Jateff, WDFW district fish biologist from Omak.

"However, there are still a few fish being caught on the mainstem in and around Pateros by boat anglers," Jateff said. "The Okanogan, Methow, and Similkameen tributaries are still largely un-fishable due to extremely cold temperatures and ice flows."

Rufus Woods continues to produce **triploid rainbow trout** in the two- to four-pound range. Jateff reported both boat and shore anglers are having success with bait, as well as flies and lures. When using bait, the first two fish caught are part of the daily limit whether kept or released. The daily limit at Rufus Woods is two trout.

Patterson Lake in Winthrop is starting to provide some success for **yellow perch** anglers through the ice. Jateff says the perch are mostly in the seven- to eight-inch range, with some fish approaching ten inches. Small perch lures tipped with a worm and/or maggot seem to be the most effective method.

Ice fishing opportunities for **rainbow trout** in Okanogan County include Rat Lake near Brewster, Big and Little Green lakes near Omak, and Sidley or Molson Lake near Oroville.

Jateff reminds anglers to check ice thickness carefully before moving too far out into the lake. WDFW does not regularly check ice conditions nor 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. Look for more "Ice Fishing Safety" information at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/reg/region2.htm>.

South Central Washington:

Ice on local small fishing waters is probably thicker with recent colder temperatures, but there are no guarantees for ice fishing safety, said WDFW fish biologist Jim Cummins of Yakima. A minimum of four inches of solid, clear ice is the safety standard established by the U.S. Coast Guard.

No creel checks have been conducted at the region's winter-only **rainbow trout fishery** – North Elton Pond off I-82 near Selah – but it was well-stocked with half-pound fish earlier. Other year-round fishing waters, including I-82 Pond 4, Rotary Lake, and Myron Lake in the Yakima area and Mattoon and FioRito lakes in the Ellensburg area, received six-to-10-pound rainbow trout broodstock last month.

The Yakima River winter **whitefish** season continues, although anglers should be cautious about shoreline shelf-ice. Cummins also 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.

Sturgeon fishing remains open on the Columbia River's John Day Pool (from John Day Dam to

McNary Dam). WDFW fish biologist Paul Hoffarth of Pasco reminds anglers that this is a quota fishery, open for retention until a certain number of sturgeon are caught. 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.

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," Hoffarth 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.

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The 33rd Annual Pacific Northwest Sportsmen's Show February 6 through 10, 2008 at the Portland Expo Center. Info & discount coupons here:

<http://www.oloughlintradeshows.com/PNWSS/pnwss.htm>

Northwest Fly Tyer and Fly Fishing Expo 2008:

<http://www.nwflytyerexpo.com/>

Weekly Quote – "They say that the time spent fishing is not deducted from a person's days on earth. When you consider that stress is known to exacerbate every illness from flu to schizophrenia, this does not seem so far off; that the gentle art of fishing is not only a pastime, but a tonic. In the seventeenth century, when the average life expectancy of a man was forty, the father of modern angling and author of *The Complete Angler* Izaak Walton, lived to be ninety years old." - James Prosek

GOOD LUCK!