

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **March 21st – March 27th, 2008**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro - The mainstem Columbia River from the I-5 Bridge to Bonneville Dam re-opened for salmon on Sunday and although pressure was surprisingly light, catches were very impressive for mid-March reports **pro guide Dan Ponciano (360-607-8511)**. A high number of larger 5-year old fish were caught including a 32-pounder by Carolyn Martin of Mulino. A high percentage of the salmon landed (85%) were of hatchery origin, allowing anglers to retain the daily limit of 1 per person.

Summer and winter steelhead counts picked up at Willamette Falls into the past weekend with daily numbers solidly into double digits. Plunkers at Meldrum Bar have been hooking a mix of native and hatchery steelhead although fishing is only fair. Salmon fishing in the Willamette remains poor and effort will likely shift to the Columbia in the coming weeks.

Sturgeon fishing has been best on the lower Willamette from St. Johns to the mouth although some were also taken near the I-205 Bridge. Squid and smelt (if available) are the best baits.

Steelheading has been slow on the Clackamas with early morning effort most productive. Eagle Creek has a mix of bright and dark steelhead available.

The Sandy River water level was high over the past weekend but exhibited decent color. Unfortunately, fishing was poor. Steelheaders should explore the upper river this week.

The North Santiam is shaping up to deliver a worthwhile summer steelhead season this year.

McKenzie River fly fishers should get a window of opportunity mid-week.

St Louis Pond, Dexter Reservoir, Freeway Lake East, and Creswell Pond are scheduled to be stocked with hatchery trout this week.

Northwest – Steelheaders were greeted with tough river conditions for most of the week as constant showers had river levels high and fish on the move. The Wilson remains consistent however with a strong component of hatchery fish present.

It's clear that wild steelhead production is down on most north coast streams although the Wilson River broodstock program is on track to meet egg take goals. The Nestucca program still needs to collect fish in order to make fish production goals.

Smaller streams like the Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem are seeing mostly spawned out steelhead. The mainstem Nehalem remains too muddy for high success rates.

Sturgeon fishers had great tides over the weekend with highest effort at Bay City. Catches were poor however and it looks like many of the sturgeon have migrated to Nehalem Bay reports **Paul Welle of Coastal Hook-R's Guide Service (503-842-6563)**.

The Siletz River is still a viable fishery as side-drifters are still taking fair numbers of fish in the upper reaches.

Crabbing in the bays at Newport and Waldport has been poor.

Hatchery trout for spring break fishers will be delivered this week to Alder Lake, Big Creek Reservoirs # 1 & 2, Buck Lake, Cape Meares Lake, Carter Lake, Cleawox Lake, Coffenbury Lake, Cullaby Lake, Dune Lake, Eckman Lake, Elbow Lake, Georgia Lake, Hebo Lake, Lake Lytle, Lorens Pond, Lost Lake (Clatsop County), Lost Lake (Lane County), Mercer Lake, Munsel Lake, North Georgia Lake, North Lake, Olalla Creek Reservoir, Perkins Lake, Siltcoos Lagoon, Siltcoos Lake, Smith Lake, South Lake, Spring Lake, Sunset Lake, Tahoe Lake, Thissel Pond, Town Lake, Vernonia Pond, and Woahink Lake.

Southwest – Although the North Umpqua water level was up on St. Patrick's Day this week, steelheaders still managed to catch-and-release a few beautiful native fish.

Rain this week is forecast to fall daily, but it's predicted to be moderate so rivers should remain fishable.

Springers have started to show on the lower Rogue River with a couple landed over the past weekend. It's still early, but early catches are a good sign.

While the coming weekend is shaping up to be far too rough for offshore activities, bottomfishing is as good as it gets when conditions allow safe bar crossing.

Steelhead are spawning now on the Chetco and should be given wide berth by anglers. Fishing is slow with a high number of fish being hooked as they're heading back to the ocean after they have spawned.

Spring break trout planting is also scheduled for Empire Lake, Emigrant Lake, Expo Ponds, Lake Selmac, Reinhart Park Pond, Ben Irving Reservoir, Cooper Creek Reservoir, Galesville Reservoir, Loon Lake 1, Marie Lake. and Plat I Reservoir.

Eastern – Smallmouth are beginning to bite on the John Day River. This early in the season is most productive for larger fish versus good numbers, which are more likely to occur in the summer months reports **Steve Fleming of Mah-Hah Outfitters (1-888-624-9424)**.

Showery weather will keep most eastern Oregon streams high due to low snow levels contributing water to these basins.

SW Washington – Most SW Washington anglers participated in the Columbia River opener but some salmon are being caught on the Lewis River. Some large, wild steelhead are still present and falling to plugs here as well.

It's still early for the Wind and Drano Lake fisheries but by early April, this fishery should be underway.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Several reports have come in from the re-opener of the Columbia River from I-5 to Bonneville Dam and beyond. From the Portland Airport area, **pro guide Dan Ponciano (360-607-8511)** reported good catches including a 2 fish limit for his 2 customers on Sunday. Dan was trolling herring upstream of I-5 waiting out the tide change which happened around 10:30 that morning. Other reports that Dan received that morning indicated that most of the fish landed that day came within a 1 or 2 hour time frame- around tide change. It's a critical time to be on the water. Creel checks indicated some of the best catch rates anglers

could have experienced on the mainstem Columbia- especially for this early in the season. With 5.5 rods per fish, the fishing really doesn't get much better than that! Furthermore, a mark rate (that's fin-clipped hatchery fish) of 84%, there were plenty of keepers to go around. Rumors of better action than that came from the Bonneville area where one angler reported seeing an estimated fish for every other boat. It was a short-lived bite, as Monday in this same area did not produce nearly the same results. This is often the case- after a prolonged closure, the opening day can be gang-busters only to cool shortly after that. With no gillnets impeding upstream travel and no effort taking place below I-5, we're going to see some real results in the upper reach until the lower river does open. Even when the season opens downstream on the 24th, there will NOT be gillnets downstream so action should be good river-wide.

There were some uncharacteristically large fish in this week's creel. Not unprecedented as we saw similarly good catches about 5 years ago in March but to see that high of a percentage of 5-year olds in the catch is certainly a good thing. The bulk of the Columbia run is typically made up of 4-year old fish that return in mid-April. Springers have already started crossing Bonneville Dam- with favorable water conditions on the horizon, it may be the best season of the year!

Sturgeon effort remains low on the Columbia as anglers chasing gators are much more likely to try their luck on the Willamette. Sturgeon catches were very poor during the last round of creel checks last weekend.

Bass and walleye effort is increasing with the warming weather. Success was best in the Bonneville Pool as anglers averaged 1 of each species per rod last weekend. That could change in the near future when snowmelt takes its toll on these shore-oriented species.

The Guide's Forecast – We'll see another opener in the lower river starting Monday, March 24th. The river from Buoy 10 to Hayden Island West Powerlines near I-5 will open with expectations running high given the recent success witnessed in the above I-5 fishery last Sunday. Although most anglers will likely still take advantage of near-home opportunities, the chance to fish in the shortened season downstream is a privilege many should take advantage of. Lower river areas such as Tenasillahe Island and Clifton Channel out of Westport are prime areas to intercept salmon (both Willamette bound and Columbia bound) in a beautiful part of the state. Trolling herring is common here but anchored with plugs is also very effective.

The tide series will weaken late this week making trolling a better option for weekend anglers. I can't say the weather is going to cooperate so propane heaters may be a nice addition. When the Monday opener rolls around, the winners will be the boats that cover the most water at the prime time of the tide. Unfortunately, bank anglers won't have an advantage here as the weaker tides coupled with the relatively low water (due to lack of snowmelt) will keep fish in the deeper water. Until then, keep after 'em in the upstream of I-5 stretch with your herring fishing close to the bottom of the river. Bonneville anglers will focus much of their effort at the Shad Rack although action will likely continue to be sporadic until the bulk of the run arrives around the second week of April through the end of the month.

Sturgeon anglers should stick to the Willamette and anglers working the pools above Bonneville need to check current regulations for those areas as quota's have been met in some reaches. Temperatures are likely to drop somewhat so the bass and walleye bite won't improve much this week.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Water conditions on the lower Willamette started deteriorating on March 15th and with the water level continuing to rise and the visibility dropping to nil, effectively shut down spring Chinook efforts. With the water visibility

less than one foot following the deluge over the past weekend, it is probable that the lower Willamette will probably not fish well for spring Chinook until next week. That leaves angler two viable options. Fish the Willamette for sturgeon or head out to the Columbia where early springer results have exceeded expectations. Sturgeon fishing held up well through Sunday with the occasional keeper showing up amongst scores of keepers.

The Guide's Forecast – Muddy water always seems to turn on the sturgeon bite, however, and that was be the cast during the last retention period. Sturgeon fishing has been best on the lower Willamette from St. Johns to the mouth although some were also taken near the I-205 Bridge but keepers have also come from Oregon City. Smelt has remained the top bait for sturgeon, but due to availability and cost of procurement, try squid, herring or anchovy as alternates. The lower Willamette showed signs of clearing slightly on Thursday this week, but dirty water washing down from upstream is likely to keep it too dirty to fish well for springers this weekend.

The North Santiam is high again this week, but for those not intimidated by fishing some serious flows, the color and clarity are excellent. Reports are of more hatchery summer steelhead hooked than native winters, but most steelheaders would agree that summer fish just bite better. A few steelheaders reported hooking hatchery summer steelhead on the North Santiam once again this week.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – As the water of the Clackamas drops into the weekend, it should present some steelheading opportunities if the NOAA forecast remains accurate. Try spinners which have been effective here recently.

With the Sandy water level up to 11 feet at Bull Run as of March 20th, the best anglers can hope for is that it drops to fishable levels by the weekend. Needless to say, steelheading is slow and will stay that way until the river comes back into shape.

North Coast Fishing Report – Steelheaders are still plying the waters of the north coast for a wild run that has yet to materialize in any great numbers. Most coastal streams do have returning numbers with the Wilson, Trask and Nestucca leading the charge but watersheds with later returning broodstock to supplement them (the Wilson and Nestucca) seem to be faring better. The Wilson is likely the most consistent with quality broodstock still available into early April. Although wild fish are still needed for the Wilson program, the Nestucca needs more attention.

Rivers have been a bit high to expect great action this week but **pro guide Kent Anderson (503-550-6303)** reports consistent action between 6th bridge and Farmers Creek. Although Kent states he hasn't posted any big numbers, it's been one of the more consistent seasons in his recollection. Kent also mentioned the harbor seals working the holes upstream including eyewitness of an actual take off an anglers line. Kent said it seemed like the seals were actually following the boats downstream!

The Nehalem has remained too high for productive fishing and recent reports from the smaller streams indicate a lack of wild fish present. Downstream spawners are still fairly common this time of year.

Most of the sturgeon effort has been taking place on the Bay City side of Tillamook Bay. Action has been slow as reported by **pro guide Paul Welle (503-812-6234)**. Paul states, "After fishing Tillamook Bay on the last bunch of low tides, its obvious that the numbers of sturgeon are not as high as they should be. Moving north to Nehalem Bay, the numbers improved and reports

from other anglers proved that the concentration of fish was from the state park to Wheeler. Sand and mud shrimp were used with sand shrimp getting the most bites."

The Guide's Forecast – A moderating trend for north coast rivers should allow for some fair opportunity for weekend steelheaders. With the Wilson being the best prospect, it should be the most crowded although most anglers will have salmon on the mind as this fishery is in their back yard.

The Trask and Nestucca will also be fair options with the Nestucca the other likely candidate for hatchery keepers. The Trask does get a few hatchery strays and a summer run is likely to start showing in the catches as well. In the dropping flows, side-drifting and plug pulling are the likely ways to go. Both methods should be productive.

A weak tide series puts sturgeon fishers at a disadvantage and a rough ocean will keep bottomfishers at bay. Steelheading will be the best show in town.

Central & South Coast Reports – Watch for the "Whales Spoken Here" signs at various locations along the central Oregon coast this weekend. The program runs weekend through March 29th while whale migrations are most active.

For those checking offshore wind and wave action on the off chance that conditions will moderate should be aware of a simple rule of thumb as those swell and wind wave numbers have been confusing to some. If the two equal 10 or more, forget it. It won't be safe for crossing in recreational-sized boats. While the coming weekend is shaping up to be far too rough for offshore activities, bottom fishing is as good as it gets when conditions have allowed safe bar crossings.

Surf perch fishing from beaches, rocks and jetties continued to deliver worthwhile catches and several limits off the south coast.

Siuslaw steelheaders should anticipate decent fishing this weekend. With only showers in the forecast, river levels are predicted to be dropping.

While primarily a catch-and-release fishery for wild steelhead at this time of year, the outlook for fishing on the North Umpqua is positive. Although the North Umpqua water level was up on St. Patrick's Day this week, steelheaders still managed to catch-and-release a few beautiful native fish. This one will continue to entertain anglers for weeks to come as water conditions and numbers of steelhead improve. On the other hand, numbers of broodstock hatchery steelhead remain in the mix on the South Umpqua and water conditions are forecast to improve into the weekend. The mainstem Umpqua is very high and muddy this week.

While steelheading on the Coos River is winding down and results have been spotty, the Millacoma has delivered bright fish this week thanks to the recent freshet.

Ocean Chinook and coho season will be restricted this year, in time (either the length of the season) or take (daily bag limit). Since the option to close the ocean to both Chinook and coho is still on the table, it remains to be seen how the 2008 offshore season washes out. Further discussions will take place at a March 31st meeting of the Pacific Fisheries Management Council in Coos Bay.

Dismal forecasts for the offshore Chinook salmon runs this year are almost certain to have impacts on river anglers this year. Since the south coast will be impacted most severely, expect restrictions and probable reductions in bag limits on the Elk, Sixes and Rogue rivers.

The Rogue River has risen two feet this week and has doubled in water volume from 5,000 last Thursday to the morning of Thursday, March 20th. That much water is pretty much the realm of the plunker, but with a couple of springers on the scoreboard recently, you can be sure that anglers will be targeting them. Steelheading has been fair to good on the Grants Pass stretch but is slow on the upper river.

Rainfall may have brought a few fresh steelhead into the Chetco system, but with the season winding down here and many fish spawning, be sure to avoid the reds.

Central and Eastern Oregon – The Hood and Deschutes rivers open to spring Chinook retention on April 15th. The bag limit will be one hatchery fish per day.

Pro guide Rick Arnold (541-480-1570) reports, "It has been a much tougher bite for the bulls at LBC of late. Water temps on top colder than last year and off color water up the Metolius Arm have slowed things down. Look for the bite to get better later in the month. My last few guide trips have been slower than average."

Pro guide Steve Fleming (1-888-624-9424) reports from the John Day River, "Only did four trips in the last week, but they produced nice fish. We are averaging about two smallmouth a day per person, but they are usually over 18" with four over 20". We try for the steelhead first thing in the morning for about two hours, but have only produced one nice fish in the last week (one in nine client days), they are usually up in the forks (North, South, or Middle) by now. We have been catching the big smallies on simple 1/8 oz jigs, with 4" grubs or 5" plastic worms in dark colors covered with Smelly Jelly craw/anise, and one 19" on a center-pin fly set up.

"The prediction for the next 10 days is not good, because there are rain storms in most forecasts and we have lots of low level snow. The river is flowing at 3600 now (down from 5500 on last Tuesday) and 6-7 for clarity, but will surely go UP and get dirty-silty."



Josh Cooper of Lamiglas (above) fished with Steve Fleming recently catching this fine smallmouth on a Lamiglas fly-rod. Big fish come early in the season so call Steve for the best chance at your personal best in the coming weeks.

Northwest Trout – In the Willamette Valley, St Louis Pond, Dexter Reservoir, Freeway Lake East, and Creswell Pond are scheduled to be stocked with hatchery trout this week.

Hatchery trout for spring break fishers in the Northwest Zone will be delivered this week to Alder Lake, Big Creek Reservoirs # 1 & 2, Buck Lake, Cape Meares Lake, Carter Lake, Cleawox Lake, Coffenbury Lake, Cullaby Lake, Dune Lake, Eckman Lake, Elbow Lake, Georgia Lake, Hebo Lake, Lake Lytle, Lorens Pond, Lost Lake (Clatsop County), Lost Lake (Lane County), Mercer Lake, Munsel Lake, North Georgia Lake, North Lake, Olalla Creek Reservoir, Perkins Lake, Siltcoos Lagoon, Siltcoos Lake, Smith Lake, South Lake, Spring Lake, Sunset Lake, Tahoe Lake, Thissel Pond, Town Lake, Vernonia Pond, and Woahink Lake.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report March 19th – April 2nd, 2008

North Puget Sound

With **steelhead** fisheries winding down in the rivers, the best bet for most anglers in the region is **blackmouth** fishing in the marine areas of Puget Sound.

The waters around Camano and Whidbey islands continue to provide decent fishing for blackmouth, said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "The best fishing in those areas,

especially on weekdays, seems to be at a few of the usual spots - the Racetrack, Elger Bay and Langley," he said. "Nearby Admiralty Inlet, however, continues to be surprisingly slow."

Selective fisheries for hatchery blackmouth - resident chinook - continue through April in marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay) and 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner). The selective fishery in Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet), however, only runs through April 15. Anglers fishing in those areas can keep two hatchery blackmouth as part of their two-salmon daily limit and they must release wild chinook, which have an intact adipose fin.

Thiesfeld reminds anglers that regulations are different for Marine Area 7 (San Juan Islands), where anglers have a daily limit of one chinook salmon. That area is open for salmon through April 15.

Saltwater anglers looking for a change of pace will soon have an opportunity to hook a **halibut**. The halibut season gets under way April 10 in marine waters throughout the region. The fishery will be open five days a week, Thursday through Monday, with a daily limit of one halibut. There is no minimum size limit for halibut caught in any area.

Meanwhile, anglers still have an opportunity to cast for **steelhead**. Portions of the Skagit and Sauk rivers remain open for steelheaders through March, but anglers should be aware that regulations for those two rivers changed last month, said Brett Barkdull, another WDFW biologist. The changes were made to protect wild steelhead because low returns are expected back this year to the Skagit River basin, he said.

Anglers fishing the Sauk and Skagit rivers, as well as Fisher Slough, must now follow selective gear rules for all fish species. The rules require anglers to use unscented artificial flies or lures with single-point barbless hooks and knotless nets. Those and other selective gear rules are listed on page 26 of WDFW's *Fishing in Washington* regulation pamphlet, which is available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/reggs/fishreggs.htm>. There are some exceptions, however, for the use of motorized vessels on the Skagit River.

On the two rivers and the slough, anglers have a daily limit of two hatchery steelhead.

Barkdull reminds anglers that while most of the Skagit River closes April 1, a stretch from the mouth upstream to the Memorial Highway Bridge will remain open. Before heading out to the rivers, anglers should check the department's website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/reggs/fishreggs.htm>) for details on the Skagit River basin rule changes.

Looking forward to the **summer salmon fishing** season? There's still time to provide input on proposals for this year's fisheries. Three public meetings have been scheduled for the last week of March and early April as fishery managers continue to develop the 2008 salmon seasons. Those meetings are scheduled for:

- March 28 - The final opportunity for anglers and others to provide input on Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor salmon seasons. The meeting is scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. at the Lacey Community Center, 6729 Pacific Avenue, Lacey.
- March 31 - An opportunity for the public to comment on proposed ocean salmon fishing options adopted by the Pacific Fishery Management Council. The meeting is scheduled to begin at 7 p.m. at the Chateau Westport, 710 Hancock Street, Westport.
- April 1 - The public will have an opportunity to discuss salmon fisheries that take place in coastal areas (except Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor), Puget Sound and the Columbia River.

That meeting is scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. at the Lynnwood Embassy Suites Hotel, 20610 44th Ave. W., Lynnwood.

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

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

With lingcod fishing under way, halibut and spring chinook on the horizon, and a proposed April razor clam dig, anglers are reminded to buy their 2008-09 fishing licenses before current licenses expire March 31.

On the ocean, recreational **lingcod** fishing got under way March 15 in marine areas 1-3 and will be open through Oct. 18. In Marine Area 4 (Neah Bay), the lingcod season will be open April 16 through Oct. 15.

All four marine areas will be open seven days a week with the following restrictions:

- In Marine Area 2 (Westport Ocean Shores), recreational fishing for bottomfish or lingcod is not allowed in waters deeper than 30 fathoms from March 15 through June 15.
- In Marine Areas 3 and 4 (La Push and Neah Bay), recreational fishing for bottomfish or lingcod is not allowed in waters deeper than 20 fathoms from May 21 through Sept. 30, except on days the halibut fishery is open.
- In Marine Area 1 (Ilwaco), no bottomfish, with the exception of sablefish and Pacific cod, are allowed on any vessel with halibut on board from May 1 through Sept. 30.

Retention of canary and yelloweye rockfish is prohibited in all waters. The minimum size for lingcod in marine areas 1-3 is 22 inches. The minimum size for lingcod in Marine Area 4 is 24 inches.

Additional information about the lingcod fishery and other bottom fish is available on the WDFW Fishing Hotline (360) 902-2500 and the department's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

Anglers looking for other opportunities will soon be able to try for **halibut** when marine areas 6-11 and 13 open for recreational halibut fishing April 10-June 13. The fishery will be open five days a week, Thursdays through Mondays (Marine Area 12 remains closed). The daily limit is one halibut per angler. Additional openings on the coast and the western Strait of Juan de Fuca will take place in May. This year, fishing out of Westport (Marine Area 2) will be limited to two days a week (Sundays and Tuesdays) after the initial opening day on Thursday, May 1. More information is available on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/halibut/>.

In river fishing, catch rates for **wild steelhead** remain mixed on the Olympic Peninsula, with the Sol Duc providing the most consistent returns. Recent WDFW creel checks showed that 80 anglers caught 69 wild steelhead (59 released) and two hatchery fish on the river. On the upper Hoh, 58 anglers caught 42 wild fish (all released). However, on other rivers in the Quillayute system such as the Calawah, Bogachiel and lower Hoh, the fishing's been slow, said David Low, WDFW fish biologist.

"River conditions have been pretty good, despite some rain," Low said. "But anglers' favorite fishing holes are coming up empty. This is especially true in the lower Hoh, where strong effort hasn't produced many fish." On the March 14 weekend, a creel check on the lower Hoh showed 145 anglers caught 19 wild steelhead and five hatchery fish. On the other hand, a few **spring**

chinook salmon have made their way to the Sol Duc, where fishery managers estimate 1,745 hatchery salmon will return this year, which is a little above average, Low said.

Meanwhile, **blackmouth** fishing continues to disappoint anglers throughout the region. On the March 14 weekend, 13 anglers surveyed near Seabeck in Hood Canal had caught two chinook, while 45 anglers in the Point Defiance area had caught eight. Farther north at Ediz Hook near Port Angeles, creel checks showed about one fish for every two rods. The blackmouth season ends April 10 in marine areas 5,6,11 and 12. Marine Area 13 is open until April 30.

Anglers may want to put their rods aside and grab a shovel for a **razor clam** dig tentatively scheduled April 6-9 and April 19-23. If approved, Twin Harbors will be open on all days while Long Beach will be open April 6-8 and April 19-20. Copalis and Mocrocks will be open April 19-20. All digs will be held on morning tides.

April 1 marks the beginning of a new license year, so diggers must purchase an applicable 2008-09 fishing license. Anyone age 15 or older must have a license to dig razor clams. Licenses can be purchased at <http://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov>, by telephone (1-866-246-9453), or in person at more than 600 license vendors throughout the state. A list of vendors is available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/lic/vendors/vendors.htm>.

Updates on the razor clam season are available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/shelfish/razorclm/season.htm>

For those interested in the upcoming **summer salmon fishing** season, there's still time to provide input on proposals for this year's fisheries. Three public meetings have been scheduled for the last week of March and early April as fishery managers continue to develop the 2008 salmon season. Those meetings are scheduled for:

- March 28 - The final opportunity to provide input on the Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor salmon seasons. The meeting is scheduled from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Lacey Community Center, 6729 Pacific Avenue, Lacey.
- March 31 - A hearing on proposed ocean salmon fishing options adopted by the Pacific Fishery Management Council. The meeting is scheduled to begin at 7 p.m. at Chateau Westport, 710 Hancock Street, Westport.
- April 1 - An opportunity to discuss salmon fisheries that take place in coastal areas (except Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor), Puget Sound and the Columbia River. The meeting is scheduled from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Lynnwood Embassy Suites Hotel, 20610 44th Ave. W., Lynnwood.

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

Southwest Washington:

The **spring chinook** fishery got off to a fast start March 16, with boat anglers averaging a fish for every 5.5 rods on the lower Columbia River between the Hayden Island west power lines and Bonneville Dam. The turnout was good, too. In all, 368 boats and 170 bank anglers were counted on both sides of the river during an aerial survey opening day.

The highest concentration of boats - 110 - was near the Portland Airport, although 35 boats were counted between the Interstate 5 Bridge and the power lines. Most bank anglers were fishing immediately downstream from the dam, though the fishing there was slow.

"We're getting a strong early showing, the best in several years," said Joe Hymer, WDFW fish biologist. "The best news is this run's just getting started, and we're expecting to see a lot of fish move upriver before it's all over."

According to pre-season forecasts, 269,300 spring chinook will return to the Columbia River and its tributaries above Bonneville Dam, the third-largest run since 1977. That compares to just 86,230 fish last year.

The chinook fishery from the Hayden Island power lines upstream to the dam runs seven days a week through March 23, then switches to six days a week - closing from one hour after official sunset Mondays to one hour before official sunrise Wednesdays - through April 30. The limit is one adult hatchery chinook per day.

Below the Hayden Island power lines, chinook fishing opens daily downstream to Buoy 10 from March 24 through April 4. Fishing in that area, normally the focus of the lower river season, was held to just 12 days this year to protect weak Willamette River stocks. There, too, the limit is one hatchery adult chinook per day.

As most anglers know, hatchery chinook can be identified by a clipped adipose fin. All wild chinook with an intact adipose fin must be released unharmed.

While some chinook have begun to show in tributaries to the lower river, late-run **hatchery steelhead** have been providing most of the action in the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers. On the Cowlitz, the best bet has been from the Barrier Dam downstream to Olequa.

Hatchery steelhead have also been the name of the game above Bonneville Dam, where anglers have been doing well in The Dalles and John Day Pools. As of March 15, only 46 "springers" had cleared Bonneville Dam, so it's not surprising that none had shown up in WDFW creel checks.

But that's likely to change in a big way over next few weeks, Hymer said. Mid-Columbia tributaries - notably Drano Lake and the Wind River - are expected to be major destination points for this year's run of upriver chinook salmon. Hymer noted that Drano Lake, at the mouth of the Little White Salmon River, is expected to see a return of 36,800 spring chinook, which would top the record of 20,600 fish in 2002.

The spring chinook fishery also opened March 16 from Bonneville Dam upstream to McNary Dam, Drano Lake and the Wind River, where anglers can keep two hatchery salmon per day - once they arrive. The White Salmon River, which also has a two-salmon daily limit, opens April 1. The Klickitat River will be open Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays only beginning April 2. The daily limit will be one hatchery salmon or one hatchery steelhead on the Klickitat from the Fisher Hill Bridge downstream.

Hymer reminds anglers that the shoreline outside the mouth of Drano Lake will be open for bank fishing for the first time in 30 years. In all, this year's fishing regulations will open up 40 additional miles of bank fishing on the mainstem Columbia River from Bonneville Dam to the Tower Island power lines six miles below The Dalles Dam.

"I think the best bet will be at the mouth of Drano Lake," Hymer said. "Casting a plug or lure from shore is sure to produce fish." Anglers fishing the newly opened bank are asked to follow three rules: Don't cross the highway, don't trespass over the railroad tracks and don't interfere with tribal fisheries.

With water temperatures rising, **sturgeon** fishing has again sprung to life in Bonneville and John Day pools, where anglers have been catching some legal-size fish. Those fishing John Day should keep an eye out for rule changes, because the catch is quickly approaching the annual quota, Hymer said. The Dalles Pool has already reached its annual quota and is catch-and-release through the end of the year.

Meanwhile, boat anglers fishing the John Day Pool have been averaging three **bass** per rod and a **walleye** for every three rods. In the Bonneville Pool, they've been averaging a walleye or bass per rod, and some walleye are also being caught in The Dalles Pool.

Here's the report for trout anglers:

- Klineline Pond - Including fish released, bank anglers averaged 6 trout per rod. The largest was a six-pound brooder. Best fishing is in the swimming area by anglers using flies, lures, or shrimp.
- Burns Pond in Wahkiakum County - Planted with 2,000 catchable-size rainbows March 12.
- Lake Sacajawea in Longview - Planted with 4,300 catchable size rainbows March 10.
- Battleground Lake - Planted with 2,000 over half-pound rainbows March 10.

Eastern Washington:

Fishing waters in the central district that opened March 1 are finally starting to thaw and produce catches. Liberty Lake in eastern Spokane County, which just shifted to the March 1 opener this year, may be the best now, said Chris Donley, WDFW district fish biologist from Spokane.

"Liberty is completely ice-free and big **brown** and **rainbow trout** are being caught, including browns reportedly up to eight pounds," he said. "**Bass** fishing remains slow, but should pick up as spring advances."

Farther south and west in Spokane County, Downs Lake is also ice-free and should be producing catches of **rainbow trout**, along with **yellow perch**, **largemouth bass**, and **crappie**.

Two other lakes that opened on March 1 - Amber in Spokane County and Coffeepot in Lincoln County - still have some ice but are becoming more fishable. Donley reminded anglers that both lakes have selective gear rule restrictions. Amber is catch-and-release only for its **cutthroat** and **rainbow trout** and Coffeepot has a minimum size of 18 inches and daily catch limit of one trout.

Medical Lake, near the town of the same name in Spokane County, is still iced up, but is expected to provide open water fishing soon. Anglers following Medical's selective gear rules should catch large **brown**, **rainbow**, and **tiger trout**. Donley reminded anglers that only Medical Lake is open at this time. West Medical Lake remains closed until April 26.

Two winter-only trout fisheries - Fourth of July Lake in Lincoln County and Hog Canyon Lake near the Spokane-Lincoln county line - close March 31. Lenny Hahn, WDFW enforcement officer, reported shore fishermen are catching limits at Hog Canyon.

In the south end of the region, the seven Tucannon River impoundments that opened March 1 continue to provide limits of **rainbow trout**. WDFW Tucannon Fish Hatchery crews plan to stock Big Four Lake with trout this week, now that it's thawed out and river levels are down enough to allow hatchery truck access. The other six lakes - Beaver, Blue, Deer, Rainbow, Spring and Watson - have been well-stocked for the past month with one-third to one-half pound rainbows from the hatchery.

Anglers who want to spend rainy spring days indoors can find their fill of fishing enticements at the Inland Northwest Wildlife Council's 48th annual **Bighorn Outdoor Adventure Show**, March 20-23, at the Spokane County Fair and Expo Center, 404 N. Havana St. in Spokane. The show features fishing, hunting and other outdoor recreation seminars and children's activities, along with hundreds of equipment and supply vendors, sportsmen's clubs, and agency information booths, including WDFW. Proceeds from the show go into the council's many cooperative fish and wildlife habitat and enhancement projects. For more information, see <http://www.wildlifecouncil.com/bighornsubsite/default.htm>.

North Central Washington:

April 1 marks the opening of many more Columbia Basin fishing waters. Jeff Korth, WDFW district fish biologist from Moses Lake, reports fair to good prospects for anglers.

Upper and Lower Hampton lakes, on the Columbia National Wildlife Refuge eight miles north of Othello, are among the largest waters opening April 1.

"Both lakes were rehabilitated in the fall of 2004, but now Lower Hampton has an expanding population of sunfish," Korth noted. Lower Hampton should have two sizes of yearling rainbows, 12-inch fish from last spring's 9,500 fingerling plant, and eight-to-10-inch fish from last fall's 3,300 fingerling plant. "The smaller fish will grow quickly this spring and should make for good late spring angling," Korth said.

Upper Hampton, which was stocked with 21,000 rainbow fingerlings last spring has larger fish, probably 13-to-14-inch yearlings and some larger carryovers, but catch rates will be lower. "Upper Hampton has fish-eating birds that play a role in the food chain," Korth said. Lower Hampton has a primitive boat launch. Upper Hampton is a walk-in lake, but Korth said it's not too far to carry a float tube.

The Pillar-Widgeon chain of lakes in the same area include ten small, walk-in lakes spread over about a square mile of beautiful canyon land, with access just southeast of Soda Lake below Potholes Reservoir. Korth noted these lakes were also rehabilitated in 2004 and should provide good fishing for the "persistent angler" from the bank or, better yet, from a float tube.

"The best of the lot will probably be Widgeon, Sago, and Pillar," Korth said, "but never count any of the other waters out." Fingerling rainbow stocking rates were: Pillar - 2,500, Gadwall - 750, Shoveler - 750, Lemna - 450, Poacher - 150, Snipe - 600, Cattail - 1,500, Sago - 300, Hourglass - 300, Widgeon - 1,650.

Para-Juvenile, McManaman, Halfmoon, and Morgan Lakes, in the lower portion of the drainage below the Hampton lakes, are normally stocked with rainbow and/or cutthroat trout fingerlings, Korth said, but due to a shortage at the hatchery no fish were stocked for 2008.

"Sunfish, perch, and bass currently impact trout survival," he said, "so expect just a few large carryover fish, especially the cutthroat." Morgan Lake and much of Halfmoon Lake are on private land and access is from the west end of Halfmoon Lake. Morgan Lake can only be accessed via the waters of Halfmoon Lake. Para-Juvenile Lake is for 14-year-old and younger anglers only.

North and South Teal, Herman, and Lyle lakes, among the "Seep Lakes" on the Columbia National Wildlife Refuge north of Othello, have all been infiltrated with spiny-rayed fishes, so rainbow trout survival has been poor, Korth said. "But trout angling pressure has been relatively light so there's a good chance some carry-overs will be caught," he said. "Rumor also has it that some nice bluegill can be caught, too." Fingerling rainbow stocking rates were: North Teal - 6,300; South Teal - 9,000; Herman - 10,600; Lyle - 3,000.

Hutchinson and Shiner lakes, and Coyote, Bobcat, and Hayes creeks and ponds off McMannaman Road in Adams County are all good **bass** and **bluegill** fisheries that also open April 1.

"Coyote and Bobcat creeks and ponds are small waters that usually warm up quickly and provide some excellent early fishing," Korth said. He also noted that only non-motorized boats are allowed on Hutchinson and Shiner, and Coyote and Bobcat creeks and ponds are walk-in access only.

Dry Falls Lake, at Sun Lakes State Park about three miles west of Coulee City in Grant County, opens April 1 under selective gear rules and a daily catch limit of one trout.

"The 2008 opener here should be just like the good old days," Korth said, "with very good fishing for yearling rainbow at 14 inches and about 20 percent of the catch in carryovers from 16 to 24 inches." Dry Falls received 9,900 fingerling rainbows in preparation for this year's season. It also has **brown trout** and **tiger trout** (brown x brook trout).

Bob Jateff, WDFW district fish biologist from Omak, noted a couple of Okanogan County lakes opened for fishing April 1.

"Spectacle Lake near Loomis should provide very good fishing for **rainbow trout**," Jateff said. "The ice is just beginning to melt off, but should be completely gone by the opener." Spectacle Lake has a WDFW access site with a concrete boat launch, as well as three resorts.

"Washburn Island Pond near Brewster should provide fair early season fishing for **largemouth bass**," Jateff said. "Washburn Island Pond will get much better as the water temperatures warm and the bass become more active." Washburn Island Pond has a PUD access site with graveled boat launch, although internal combustion engines are prohibited.

Jateff also reported **steelhead** fishing picked up on the Okanogan and Similkameen Rivers within the last few weeks. He reminds anglers that selective gear rules prohibiting bait are in effect for the steelhead areas on both rivers. The season is scheduled to close March 31.

South Central Washington:

Most lakes in the south central region are open to fishing year-round and stocked periodically with WDFW hatchery **rainbow trout**. Eric Anderson, WDFW district fish biologist from Yakima, reported the most recently stocked lakes are the I-82 Ponds 1,2 and 3 in Yakima County.

"Fishing will be good in these ponds," Anderson said, "but many other stocked lakes and ponds are producing nice catches, too." Anderson acknowledged fishing has been "a bit slow" in some areas, but as the weather continues to warm, fishing will improve for both trout and panfish. Anderson encouraged anglers to regularly check the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/regions/reg3/index.htm> for the latest information on trout stocking in local lakes and ponds.

Anderson also reminded anglers that WDFW is no longer stocking nor maintaining a public access on Wenas Lake, the once popular trout lake about six miles north of Naches in Yakima County.

"We could not reach an agreement with the Wenas Irrigation District on a public access and stocking plan for the lake," he explained. "The old plan expired and we don't have the funds to pay the Irrigation District for access."

North Elton Pond, the region's winter-only rainbow trout fishing water along I-82 near Selah, closes March 31.

Yakima River anglers and guides may want to attend a March 28 program about the river and its fisheries sponsored by the Kittitas Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited and the Yakima Basin Fish and Wildlife Recovery Board, in cooperation with WDFW. The program, which runs 6 to 9 p.m. in the Manastash Room at the Kittitas County Fairgrounds in Ellensburg, includes the history and condition of the Yakima River, habitat restoration efforts, and the status of trout in the upper river. More information is available at: <http://www.ybfwrp.org/>.

Reader Email - Robert G. wrote, via the Contact Form at the TGF website:

"I just heard that the government just closed all Chinook fishing on the coast. If this is true how will effect the fishing on the streams?"

To which, TGF co-editor Michael Teague responded, "With the exception of the widely-publicized periodic closures and restrictions on the lower Columbia, your river fishing is safe. For now.

"On Wednesday, March 12th, the ODFW announced that the scheduled March 15th opening of the Pacific Ocean for Chinook from Cape Falcon to the California border would not occur. This fishery was to continue through April 30th. Commercial trolling for Chinook, scheduled for the same time period, has also been disallowed.

"As Bob Rees quoted in last week's TGF, "Chinook salmon forecasts for runs that contribute to ocean salmon fisheries off Oregon are estimated to be at very low levels," said Eric Schindler, ocean salmon supervising biologist for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. "Critically low numbers of fall Chinook within the Sacramento River and a very low forecast for Klamath River three-year-old Chinook head the list of problems facing salmon managers this year."

"The Pacific Fishery Management Council will meet in April to make a decision on any April ocean seasons.

"While there has been no official word, the fishing community has speculated about a closure of the Willamette for Chinook, as the run has been projected to be only 34,000. This compared to a 2007 projection of 52,000 (actual 40,500) and 2006 of 46,500 (actual 59,700) The fact that counts from 2004 and 2005 were well over 100,000 adds concern over this year's forecast and the plausibility of a closure.

"While Willamette Chinook must be of hatchery origin to keep, incidental catch and release of wild fish inevitably results in a percentage which fail to recover.

"Any other river closures to Chinook fishing this season would be speculation. We'll report the facts when we know for sure.

"Thank you for writing and please do so again any time."

Update: It's obvious from some of the observations in the **Central & South Coast Reports**, above that this situation is changing rapidly, We'll keep TGF readers informed of any updates or decisions as soon as they are released, - MT

Irregular contributor 'Kaptn Ken' Johnson writes this week, "I went fishing last week! My

neighbor Paul, here in Nehalem, invited me to go Steelhead fishing last week, so I did. As you know, my days of walking the edges of any river are pretty much over because of physical compromises. Paul knew that. He wasn't going to "allow" that to stand in the way of a good day fishing! He knows how much I like to fish, so off we went. I kind of hemmed and hawed about going but he finally talked me into it. We drove to several local Steelhead holes along the Wilson and Trask River too. Paul knew of some fairly accessible areas for me to at least try. You know, for people like me, with physical challenges, to get a chance at bank fishing is a rare opportunity. Now, these fishing areas I'm talking about are not for wheelchairs or anyone more physically challenged than me. I'm pretty unstable on uneven ground, I hate round rocks and slippery slopes too. And, what else is there along all streambeds or rivers??? There are many "Physically Challenged" folks out there who would just love to get a chance to work a small river or stream, pitching metal for a Metal Head! But, they can't! Not complaining...Just the way it is! The water was absolutely beautiful and our fishing gear extremely simple. We were both using the same rods and spinning reels...I won't mention brands but they were 9' M H spinning outfits with light tips. We were tossing various spinners tied directly to the line, using 12lb. mono. Very simple fishing indeed! One of the side creeks that fed the main stem Wilson, found Paul pitching his spinner for about 15 minutes before he hooked up to a nice 12 pound buck. Sorry, I don't know all the road names and creeks feeding the Wilson as I'm fairly new to this area...Me Bad! Hey, I've only lived here a year and a half! After about a 15+ minute tussle, Paul gently beached the Native Steelie, admired him for a bit, and let him go. Yes...No Camera! Bright as a newly minted Silver Dollar. Two days ago, Paul went fishing without me, to rivers unknown, and caught two 11lb. & 12lb. natives, a buck and a hen. Back they went. The rivers are producing nicely around these many NW Coastal streams.. We saw several Steelie's hangin' in some of the pools and it was really cool. Haven't seen that for a long time! I was pitching spinners into the main stem of the river, on "safer" ground, non-slick surroundings and flat surfaces for me to stand on. Accessibility is kind of why I'm writing. You guys just need to take the time to look for accessible areas, for us less fortunate 'hikers.' It's tough and sometimes you only find 2-3 special places. But, make those places YOURS! So to speak! And, for obvious reasons, I always have a "buddy" with me, just in case! One slip and you could be there for days! Maybe longer!!! Years ago, I would have dropped into the hundreds of "Fishing Holes" available to able bodied individuals, all day long, working the river up and down, hole to hole! Ahhhhhhhhh, the good ol' days! At least I had them!!! Yesterday, Paul got another 12 pounder.....Again, a native. My cousin Greg, who lives in the small town of Stevensen, on the lower Columbia River, reports many Steelhead are now being caught in Gnat Creek & Fall Creek. According to my Kuzin Greg's 26 year old son, Brandon, who's an avid hunter and fisherman, the secret there is to fish the much smaller creeks that feed the Columbia River from Astoria up to St. Helens. Brandon has been bringing home 2-3 Steelhead each week with little or no pressure from other fishermen. He has lived in the area all his life and knows every Elk trail, Deer trail and fishing hole from the mouth of the Columbia up to St. Helens. He uses spinners primarily, but also drifts Corkies, Cheaters and small Spin-n-Glo's, with a bit of yarn. I've been a bit re-invigorated about fishing again, thanks to Paul. Hopefully, I'll be fishing by the end of this week. Even though I've put bank fishing off for several years now, I just ordered a new Steelhead Spinning Rod Combo from Cabela's a couple of days ago. It will work for me just fine. I can hardly wait to get and use it. This new rod will work well for pitching spinners and spoons for Coho's entering the small tributary creeks and streams around here next Fall too. Even though my bank fishing opportunities are limited, because of insight and the "pushiness" of my neighbor getting me 'off my ass' I now know that I can fish fairly safely, at least a few times each season. And, the percentages being fairly high that I will succeed in catching a fish too! Also, I'm now re-gearing up for the upcoming super razor clam tides in April. A couple of my "Top Secret" clamming beaches are virtually GONE, for the most part, because of the December storm we had down here... You've probably seen those NEWS reports about the ancient shipwrecks that were re-discovered after the high seas washed away the sand during the storm...Well, it has affected a couple of prized clamming beaches down here too! At least I have a couple of other "Secret Beaches" left, but I can't tell anyone about them, because if I did,

well...You know what I would have to do...! Uhhhhhh, see you all out there, soon! BTW...Those secret beaches...They're really not that secret at all!!! See you there!"

Reader Joe A. wrote via the Contact Form at the TGF website: "I had a question about having a motor attached to my drift boat in non internal combustion waters. Can I have it attached to the boat and not use it. I want to fish at Hebo lake and there are regulations that state you can not have a motor in the lake. Thank you for any info."

To which Doug Rees, our esteemed webmaster and the person responsible for the final version of this newsletter, responded, "Thanks for thinking of us. I have passed this around the gang and none of us have come up with an answer we're comfortable with. Have you tried the Marine Board?"

Subscriber Mitchell B. wrote to ask exactly what part of the Columbia was considered the Bonneville Pool? To which TGF co -editor Bob Rees replied, "The Bonneville Pool is simply the reservoir that is formed behind Bonneville Dam. It stretches to The Dalles Dam and behind that is "The Dalles Pool".

"I hope this helps.

"Thanks for being a subscriber!"

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

Finally! Sea Lion Control :

http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/localnews/2004289050_websealions17.html

Kokanee Fishing Class:

<https://oraweb.cocc.edu/2008/100820/cecourses.htm#25317>

Weekly Quote – "There is not the slightest doubt, of course, that the fishing is better on some days than it is on others, and that frequently certain parts of the day are better than others. All fishermen know that. My thesis is that I do not believe anyone can predict those times - at least for any appreciable period in advance." - Robert Traver

GOOD LUCK!