

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 5<sup>th</sup> – December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** The Columbia River Gorge has dried up for sturgeon and despite relatively warm temperatures for this time of year, catches are likely to keep falling off.

Willamette River flow is moderating with the latest temperature reading at Willamette Falls dropping to 47 degrees. About 150 wild winter steelhead have been counted. Sturgeon fishing has been fair with keepers going to those who move around to find them.

A few random reports of steelhead hookups have come in from the Clackamas but it's still early to expect much action here.

Early steelhead have been taken with jigs on the Sandy River which doesn't normally get decent numbers of fish until January and February.

There are a few summer steelhead in the McKenzie but they're starting to take on spawning characteristics and therefore, make poor tablefare.

The level of the North Santiam has dropped but it's still a poor choice for fishing.

While no trout planting is scheduled this week, historically the ODFW will stock large trout and broodstock steelhead over the winter months.

It's a good idea to purchase your 2009 fishing and hunting licenses ahead of time. The department has made it even easier this year with online sales now available. Go to ODF&W's website at: <http://www.dfw.state.or.us/> for full details.

**Northwest –** Persistent anglers continue to ply the waters of Tillamook Bay, specifically, the Ghost Hole. Catches have remained consistent there, despite poor returns overall to the coastal systems. John Kirby of Cape Meares has landed at least 3 bucks in the mid-30 pound range in the last several days. Herring trolled on the bottom are responsible for all the action.

District rivers were in excellent condition at mid-week but catches were light on Tuesday. Both steelhead and late run chinook should be prevalent in the Wilson River with the Trask, Kilchis and Nestucca also likely to give up an occasional salmon or steelhead.

Dropping flows and a weak tide series will make conditions challenging by the weekend. Fish the lower portions of the north coast systems for your best opportunities. On Tuesday, a harbor seal was spotted above Sollie Smith Bridge on the Wilson.

Crabbing has been sporadic on Tillamook and Netarts Bays. Good catches were had just before Thanksgiving but a fair portion of those caught in fresh water were still in a softshell state.

Sturgeon are expected to make a stronger showing in many coastal estuaries this month. Tides will once again become favorable beginning early next week. Sand shrimp or mud shrimp will take most of the keepers.

**Southwest –** Ocean crabbing opened on Monday, December 1st but ocean forecasts are

marginal so check at the last minute to see if crossing the bars will be safe. Commercial catches were best on the north coast.

Winter steelheading has been slow for the most part in southwest Oregon rivers. While December can be rewarding, the better steelheading here occurs in January and February.

**Pro guide: Bill Kremers (541 754 6411)** reports that he's waiting for the rains to raise the Alsea to a driftable level and that no steelhead have shown up as yet.

The wild coho fishery at Siltcoos Lake has been producing only fair results recently.

Steelheaders have had on-and-off success on the mainstem Umpqua for winters. The South Umpqua opened Monday for winter steelhead fishing. Crabbing has been slow in Winchester Bay over the past weekend in very crowded conditions. Mild tides are predicted this coming weekend with incoming tide starting mid-mornings.

The prediction is for a better winter steelhead return on the Coquille than on the Coos.

Elk River chinook anglers have had some luck over the past week at the mouth. Both the Elk and Sixes are very low and clear. Deeper waters nearby have produced lingcod limits.

Chetco River anglers have continued to pick up a few chinook despite low, clear water conditions. A few early winter steelhead have been in the mix. Small baits will be most effective for taking fish in skinny water. Bottom fishing out of Brookings has remained great, whenever ocean conditions have allowed a safe crossing.

**Eastern** – Steelheading has slowed on the Deschutes but decent numbers of fish are around, particularly upstream of Maupin. With pressure light, steelhead are willing if you can find them.

Catches dropped off significantly in the John Day system and in the mainstem above the John Day Dam. This fishery is going to continue to fall off.

Crescent Lake has been rewarding anglers with large lake trout and will continue to do so until snow prevents access.

**Pro guide Steve Fleming (1-888-624-9424)** reports one of his guides hooking several steelhead in the Clarno area.

**SW Washington** – Anglers will focus on the Cowlitz River for the best chance at a quality winter steelhead in the weeks ahead. The Cowlitz is known for a good component of 2-salt fish that average between 10 and 14 pounds. Side-drifters will take the lion's share of fish but plunkers working the bank with spin-n-glos can also have a reasonable shot at a keeper in higher flows.

The Kalama and Lewis Rivers are also fair winter steelhead bets but can't match the run size of the Cowlitz River.

Coho are still coming into some district streams but are reaching maturity and will likely need to be released.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – Sturgeon fishers in the gorge continue to struggle to find keepers for their efforts. This isn't uncommon for this time of year and action will likely continue

to drop off in the coming weeks. Fall is the best time for keepers in the gorge these days, especially since the spring closure above Marker 82 that was designed to protect spawning sturgeon. As the temperature cools further, so will the bite. Sturgeon that remain in the area will become lethargic in the chilled waters and some will succumb to sealions over the coming months. Many of the fish that were present in the gorge will migrate downstream to the warmer Willamette River and whatever food source may be there. This fishery has been on the rise in the last several years and winter time catches have become quite significant. Although every year is a toss-up with sturgeon, it is likely to turn back on in the coming weeks as mainstem temperatures continue to drop. The weekend creel check revealed the following:

**Gorge Bank:**

Weekly checking showed two legal white sturgeon kept, plus one legal and 12 sublegal sturgeon released for 92 bank anglers.

**Gorge Boats:**

Weekly checking showed 23 sublegal sturgeon released for six boats.

**Troutdale Boats:**

Weekly checking showed 14 sublegal sturgeon released for six boats.

**Portland to Rainier Bank:**

No report.

**Portland to Longview Boats:**

Weekend checking showed one legal white sturgeon kept and 115 sublegal sturgeon released for 71 boats.

The salmon fishing is over until the managing states (Oregon and Washington) decide when the season will open again. That decision is right around the corner and your input may be very important to the process. With more fish coming back this year, we may actually end up with a less meaningful fishery. You'll want to pay attention to the details that are going to be presented at the December 12<sup>th</sup> meeting in Vancouver. Here are the details of the meeting from a recent press release:

For Immediate Release  
December 3, 2008

**Commission will consider proposals for Columbia River Chinook fisheries**

**PORTLAND, Ore.** -- The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission will consider adopting a catch-sharing plan for sport and commercial fisheries on the lower Columbia River at a public meeting on Friday, Dec. 12 in Portland.

The meeting, which includes an opportunity for public comment, begins at 8 a.m. in the Oak Room at Embassy Suites Portland Airport, 7900 NE 82nd Avenue. An agenda for the meeting is available on ODFW's web site:

[http://www.dfw.state.or.us/agency/commission/minutes/08/12\\_december/index.asp](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/agency/commission/minutes/08/12_december/index.asp)

On Thursday, Dec 11, the Commission will meet with the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission to discuss recommendations developed by a joint working group for apportioning harvest opportunities for spring and summer chinook salmon between sport and commercial fisheries in the lower river.

At the joint meeting, the commissions will also hear recommendations on longer range issues, including salmon recovery, selective fisheries and hatchery reform. The meeting begins at 12:30 and is also in the Oak Room at Embassy Suites Portland Airport.

A lunch is scheduled for both commissions on Thursday from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at The Water's Grill restaurant, Pine Room II, first floor of the Embassy Suites hotel. Members of the public are welcome to join but must purchase their own meals.

While Thursday's joint meeting is open to the public, public testimony will not be taken until Friday, when Oregon Commissioners will vote on whether or not to adopt the recommended plan. (The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission will consider the plan on Saturday, Dec. 13—see [meeting agenda](#)).

### **About the Columbia River spring/summer chinook five-year plan**

The five-year plan was developed by the Columbia River Fish Working Group. This advisory group included three fish and wildlife commissioners from Washington and three commissioners from Oregon to serve as voting members. Non-voting members include two fishery managers from each state and a total of 10 citizen representatives from communities on both sides of the Columbia River. Citizen representatives were chosen by their respective commissions for their breath of experience with Columbia River fisheries.

The plan is designed to bring some level of stability to what has been a historically unpredictable fishery while still meeting conservation goals. To do this the Working Group recommended several guiding principles in making the chinook allocation:

- A high likelihood that there will be at least a 45-day sport fishery in March and April.
- Provide a stable commercial fishery in the select areas – off channel fisheries in places like Youngs Bay and Blind Slough. Most of the fish entering these areas are hatchery fish and potential impacts on wild, endangered spring chinook are minimal.
- A high likelihood that that the Columbia River sport fisheries above Bonneville Dam and into the lower Snake River will not be subject to emergency closures.
- Provides mainstem commercial fishing opportunity in most years.

To meet these management objectives, fishery managers will use a sharing formula that bases the allocation between sport and commercial fisheries on the strength of the spring chinook runs on both the upper Columbia and Willamette River fisheries.

In addition, the group recommended a 35 percent conservation buffer to minimize the risk of exceeding federal Endangered Species Act limits on the take of wild chinook.

### **Other Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission business**

During its Friday meeting, the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission will be asked to appoint a hunter representative and chair to the Access and Habitat program Board of Directors. The A&H program is funded by a \$2 surcharge on hunting licenses and provides grants to open up public hunting access or improve wildlife habitat on private land. The Commission will also consider funding two separate projects recommended by regional A&H boards.

The Commission will consider amending the falconry rules to make minor house-keeping changes and allow lottery-draw permits for the limited take of nestling "eyas" peregrine falcons by Master Falconers during the 2009 season. The Commission first authorized the take of nestling "eyas" in February 2008, after peregrine falcons were de-listed from Oregon's Endangered Species Act.

The Commission will be asked to adopt amended rules for the Developmental Fisheries Program and set the 2009 Developmental Fisheries Species List per statutory requirement.

The Commission will be briefed on the 25-Year Angling Enhancement Plan, a framework to guide ODFW's efforts to enhance recreational fishing opportunities over the next 25 years.

The Commission is the policy-making body for fish and wildlife issues in the state. The seven-member panel meets monthly. Agenda item exhibits may be requested by calling the ODFW Director's Office at 800-720-6339 or 503-947-6044.

Members of the public wishing to testify on an issue not on the formal agenda can do so Friday morning immediately following the expenditure report. Please make arrangements with the ODFW Director's Office, at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting, by calling 800-720-6339 or 503-947-6044.

Reasonable accommodations will be provided as needed for individuals requesting assistive hearing devices, sign language interpreters or large-print materials. Individuals needing these types of accommodations may call the ODFW Director's Office at 800-720-6339 or 503-947-6044 at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting.

This is your spring chinook season and a 45-day March/April season is likely to begin on March 1<sup>st</sup>, thus, close on April 15<sup>th</sup>, just when the run is about to peak. One might ask, why the shorter season when we have more fish coming back? The 35% buffer would hold off the sport fleet until after the run size update (first week in May) when most of the fish will be over Bonneville Dam and spring spill begins in earnest, reducing catch rates in the lower river. Smells pretty fishy to me.....

This is precisely why sport anglers must take a hard look at the new proposal that is being shepherded forward by the Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association and a team of bright scientists called the Safe For Salmon Campaign. Check out the web site and PLEASE, PLEASE consider donating to this effort. I've already donated and plan to give more. Log onto: [http://www.nsiafishing.org/safe\\_for\\_salmon.htm](http://www.nsiafishing.org/safe_for_salmon.htm).

What little salmonid fishing remaining on the mainstem is happening way upriver of the John Day Dam. To date, the season thus far has been rather poor from what anglers have been used to but some fish are still being caught. Only 5 fish for 25 boats was tallied in this fishery over last weekend and 3 of those 5 were of wild origin and were released. A far cry from the action these anglers witnessed just a few short years ago. It's not a matter of a poor return, it's just the fact that water temperatures were more conducive to faster migration upriver. Idaho steelhead fishing is quite good now for the few people taking advantage of it.

The final fishery worth reporting on in the Columbia River is lower river crabbing. It has been a great year for that but that could all change with the commercial crab pot placement now taking place out of Astoria. Although the commercials are restricted to taking crab larger than 6¼", there will be some nice keepers culled from the area. There should still be some quality keepers available to the sport fleet for the next couple of weeks however. **State OSP Trooper Trygve Klepp** reports from the area: "Crabbing was very good at Hammond, with about 50 boats out on Saturday with nearly all limits. The commercial fleet went in last night, so that will reduce the large crab but those between 5 ¾ and just under 6 ¼ inches will still be available."

**The Guide's Forecast** – It's about time to write off sturgeon fishing in the Columbia River. Gear up for the Willamette however if you plan on taking your winter fishing seriously. Bank and boat fishing are on the way out!

Steelhead effort is much like the sturgeon effort. It may still be worth your time if you are just looking to get out but don't have high expectations of taking home a fish. It'll be mostly a boat ride. Check previous editions of The Guide's Forecasts in our archived section if you want plug color choices.

Still looking for an easy limit of crab? No other estuary will likely produce results like the lower Columbia River right now. Crab downstream of Hammond on the incoming tide or the last part of outgoing on the softer tides. Good tides this weekend but high slack is at first light or after dark. Use good baits as the competition is likely to be stiff.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – Effective January 1st, 2009, sturgeon anglers will be required to use a **new method of measurement** to determine legal size of sturgeon. This will be from the nose to the fork of the tail rather than the tip. This necessitates the creation of new slot limits and to further confuse the matter, there will be no fewer than three different slot limits depending on where you're fishing and the wording in the 2009 regulations state some figures given are "likely," which means they may not be accurate. Heavy sigh. It appears the new slot limit nose-to-fork will be 38 to 54 inches in the lower Willamette. Most likely, anyway. **Read your regulations** and stay tuned for updates.

Water temperatures are holding in the mid-40s at Vida on the McKenzie River.

The level of the North Santiam is fishable, but the few fresh fish entering are all natives and the steelhead present are too few to make it worthwhile targeting them for catch and release.

Oregon residents may purchase 2009 fishing or hunting licenses as a gift anywhere licenses are sold. The buyer has to know the recipients full name and date of birth. If the person receiving the gift has not held a license previously, you will also need to provide the recipients Social Security number. For an online purchase, you will also need to provide the person's ODFW hunter/angler ID number, found at the top of a previous license.

**The Guide's Forecast** – The lower Willamette is producing keepers to anglers who are moving around to find keeper-sized fish. The areas around the St. Johns Bridge and the Toyota Hole have put out some nice fish. Sturgeon have showed a preference for sand shrimp and squid recently.

There are still a few late summer steelhead available on the McKenzie below Leaburg Dam. but they will be colorful.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – A few bright winter steelhead have entered the Clackamas River but it's still early to expect stellar results. The water is low and clear and all the reports this week have been the same: poor.

Despite the fact the fin-clipped winter steelhead are the progeny of wild fish, meaning that they run with the same timing of native fish, there have been a surprising number of early fish taken at the Sandy River. A native fish measuring 42 inches was released over the past weekend. Results here have come on bait, spinners and jigs. While still considered early, this one is actually worth the trip for patient and persistent steelheaders.

According to Eagle Creek Hatchery management, owing to budget cuts resulting from the Mitchell Act, winter steelhead will no longer be produced at this facility. Sandy winter steelhead will be

phased out entirely over the next few years and will produce only enough coho to meet the requirements of an agreement with Native American tribes.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – Anxious anglers are still waiting for some sort of magical moment when these Tillamook fish are going to show up. And we can't go a year without someone saying there is a slug of them still out in the ocean as someone spotted a big black cloud of them just a few miles offshore. Just after you buy into that rumor, log onto [www.gotta-get-me-santa.sucka](http://www.gotta-get-me-santa.sucka) to follow Santa's journey from the North Pole in just a few short weeks.

Folks, they're not coming! It's good however that the bad news isn't necessarily detracting anglers from wetting a line this winter. There are fish in the system and I did pull into Sollie Smith Boat Ramp to check why **pro guide Brad Vanderzanden (503-799-8105)** was in so early today. He stated he had his customers 2 fish and one for him by 11:00 a.m. this morning. It sounded like he was the exception however as most other boats reported very little action at all. All three of Brad's fish were bright hens in the 20-pound class, all with sea-lice still attached.

Another boat fishing downstream of Sollie Smith with 2 very qualified fishermen, reported NO take-downs for an afternoon's effort. They backbounced and pulled plugs to no avail.

Anglers fishing the Ghost Hole were still taking fish this week however as **pro guide John Kirby (406-930-1133)** has had a consistent week in the bay. I fished with him on Tuesday only witnessing 2 fish for about 8 or 9 boats that morning. But wouldn't you know it, within minutes of dropping me back off in the Ghost Hole turnout, they hooked up and landed a nice 30-pound class chinook pictured here:



John had a 2-fish day on Monday and a 3-fish day on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving. He is turning quite a herring out there but admittedly, is doing a bit better than most, he's claiming luck as he's a modest one. Don't let the out of state area code fool you either. John was born here and knows how to troll a herring!

No new recent reports of steelhead from our area rivers but in the ideal conditions we were experiencing at mid-week, there certainly should be some around. Not many people are targeting them however as most anglers are still after the late run chinook that should be in the system.

Not the best tides to be targeting sturgeon either and many will wait until they hear better reports in the coming weeks.

Rough seas and high effort kept many crabbers from scoring great results this last weekend. It seems almost everybody got some crab but very few did great on Tillamook or Netarts Bay. Everyone wanted some holiday appetizers, thankfully, I got mine on Wednesday- 2 limits for neighbor Pat and myself. We crabbed near the inside of the south jetty.

Crabbing has been fair to good at Netarts Bay although seals are a problem if using fish carcasses for bait. Chicken, turkey or mink castoffs (from a farm that raises them) are baits that pinnapedes will avoid.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Fluctuating flows will leave north coast streams a viable option for driftboaters into next week. Flows are expected to continue to drop through the weekend. Couple that with weak tides and the action will likely come to those that have first water on most of the lower drifts. Chinook will certainly be "holed up" in the deeper water and if the boat traffic continues like it has been, will be a bit reluctant to bite. Although there should be some steelhead in the systems, bank anglers working the holding water in the upper drifts may have the advantage. Lower river anglers targeting steelhead water may find success as well however as fish are likely to slow down their upstream migration in the dropping rivers. Also, since most anglers are still targeting chinook, much of the steelhead water will remain untouched. Regardless of whether you are fishing for salmon or steelhead, you'll have to drop down in leader size and strongly consider some of the fluorocarbon leader material. I use the Berkley Big Game in conditions like these and drop down to 20 or 25-pound test for best results.

Try chinook (in order of higher probability) on these rivers: Wilson, Kilchis (but it'll be low!) Trask, Nestucca, Nehalem and steelhead: Necanicum (low and hazardous), North Fork Nehalem (also low), Wilson, Nestucca, Kilchis, Trask (for stray hatchery steelhead).

Tillamook Bay itself may be the best option for anglers, especially with the weaker tide series at hand. Although most effort is taking place in the Ghost Hole, the small hold-over tides on the weekend may make the inside of the north jetty an option. In these weak tides, target the last 2.5 hours of outgoing tide but like I have been mentioning for much of the season, don't have high expectations for great (or even good) fishing. Our numbers are simply down.

Poor tides for sturgeon but crabbing should be an option. Seas may even calm down by Friday and Saturday morning for an ocean venture. BE CAUTIOUS HOWEVER as this is the most likely time to put yourself in danger! Adhere to U.S. Coast Guard reports and restrictions. Don't endanger yourself for a dumb Dungeness crab!

**Central & South Coast Reports** – Offshore conditions have prevented anglers from taking advantage of excellent fishing for ling cod and rockfish. Commercial and recreational ocean crabbing is also open as of December 1st, but even commercial operations have been unable to operate some days due to rough seas. Swells are forecast to be six to eight feet at 12 to 14 seconds with light winds this coming weekend.

PSP (paralytic shellfish poisoning which is naturally occurring but just as nasty as it sounds), has

the entire Oregon Coast closed to the harvest of mussels. It is supposed to be safe to eat only the abductor muscle from scallops (who eats any other part?).

The Alsea is too low to drift and there's not really enough water to fish. This is a common story on the coastal streams now with rain desperately needed. The river level is about 2.5 at tidewater as of this writing on the afternoon of Thursday, December 4th, and is forecast to continue gradually dropping through the weekend. A very good winter run is expected and fishing will fire up with the next freshet.

**Pro guide: Bill Kremers (541 754 6411)** reports that he's "waiting for the rains to raise the Alsea to a driftable level. Hopefully that will happen this week as I am anxious to get out. The Siletz has enough water, but from the second reports I been getting, the steelhead have not showed up yet."

Winchester Bay crabbers are taking limits of large, hard Dungeness. A few winter steelhead and late-season coho have been taken in the Umpqua mainstem but low water is hampering efforts. Try Sawyers Rapids to Scott Creek. Angling has stalled on the North Umpqua without enough water to encourage fishing activity. While the South Umpqua opened for winter steelhead on December 1st, no fish have entered due to low water conditions.

Crabbing has been worthwhile in the bay at Florence with limits coming in regularly.

Crabbing in Coos Bay has remained good for Dungeness which are mostly hard at this time of year. A poor return of steelhead is expected this year due to the loss of this season's stocking smolts to disease.

The Coquille is expected to be worthwhile for winter steelhead this season but this fishery won't get underway until the south coast gets some precipitation.

Anglers on the Rogue River are experiencing challenging conditions with the water low, clear and nothing encouraging in long-range weather forecasts. Chinook and coho fishing in the estuary has wrapped up for the year. Middle Rogue drift boaters will find skinny water in some stretches. Despite these conditions, fresh winter steelhead continue to enter in modest number and the Grants Pass stretch is consistently delivering adult summer steelhead and half-pounders. The upper Rogue holds nothing to interest fishers at this time of year.

Fishing has nearly stalled on the Elk and Sixes due to poor water conditions. A local report on Thursday, December 4th, indicated a few Chinook are being taken despite low water.

Chetco anglers are waiting for the first fall rains as flows have fallen below the 745 cfs mark and the water is crystal clear. A 77-foot commercial boat got hung up on the jetty in rough seas last Saturday after running out to drop 500 crab pots to be pulled on the opener December 1st. The crew freed the vessel which returned to port undamaged but certainly sends a message to all boaters: be careful out there. When ocean conditions allow, fishing will be excellent for rockfish and ling cod.

**Central and Eastern Oregon – Pro guide Steve Fleming (1-888-624-9424)** reports from the John Day River, "Went out last week on a Two-day overnight fly fishing trip, and boated one very nice steelhead. Talked with another guide service and they had one fish per day fly fishing. The water is cold, at 36 degrees, and it's cold at night, 28-32 degrees. They days are pleasant enough, and there are fish all the way to Kimberly, but they are strung out. I here about a fish here, and a fish there. The water is dropping, and around 450 CFS, cold, but "gin clear". We've

been catching them on center-pin set ups, fly, lures with rattles in them and covered with Smelly Jelly Anchovy. There should have been a pod that started up river on November 20, and they travel 7 miles per day. So in three to four weeks they will be at Kimberly (river mile 185)."

"I just got a call from one of my guides, he hooked 9 and landed 7 in the Clarno area fishing from the bank in a 1/2 day on Sunday. All on 1/3 oz gold Cleo's."

Dress warmly for fishing at the Deschutes at this time of year. A change of clothing is a good idea in a worst case scenario. There's very little competition with the weather as cold as it is.

### **Washington fishing reports:**

#### **From the WDF&W Weekender Report November 26<sup>th</sup> – December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

##### **North Puget Sound**

Anglers are still finding a few **chum salmon** in some of the region's rivers, but the run is winding down and **steelhead** are starting to take center stage. On Puget Sound, **crabbing** is open in several marine areas and **blackmouth** fishing is beginning to pick up.

"Up until recently, it had been a pretty slow November for **blackmouth** fishing in the region," said John Long, WDFW's statewide salmon manager. "But it has improved in the last several days, and anglers seem to be doing pretty well as we move into December." Creel checks in the region show decent fishing for blackmouth - resident chinook - in Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton). At Shilshole Ramp, 15 anglers were checked with six chinook Nov. 22, while 75 anglers took home 26 chinook the following day.

Those fishing Marine Area 10 are currently allowed to keep one chinook as part of a two-salmon daily limit. Daily bag limits for that area change beginning Dec. 1, when anglers will be allowed to keep two hatchery chinook as part of their two-salmon daily limit. They must, however, release wild chinook, which have an intact adipose fin.

But time is running out for anglers to hook blackmouth in Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet). The salmon fishery in that area runs through Nov. 30. Until then, anglers can keep up to two hatchery chinook per day.

Sport **crabbing** also is an option for anglers out on the Sound. Marine areas 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 9 (Admiralty Inlet), 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) and 12 (Hood Canal) are open for sport crabbing seven days a week through Jan. 2. Crab fishing also is open seven days a week through Jan. 2 in marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu), and 13 (south Puget Sound).

Sport crabbing is closed in marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands), 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) and 11 (Tacoma/Vashon Island).

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

In the rivers, anglers are still finding some **chum** salmon. But many anglers are turning their attention to hatchery **steelhead**, which are starting to show up in some of the region's rivers. "Even though it's a bit early, there are some steelhead in the Skagit River," said Brett Barkdull,

WDFW fish biologist. "And fishing has been pretty good so far." Barkdull reminds anglers that chum retention is prohibited on the Skagit River.

Farther south, there also have been reports of fair steelheading in the Reiter Ponds area of the Skykomish River.

**Rainbow trout** also are an option for anglers. About 1,800 hatchery rainbows - averaging approximately 3 to 5 pounds each - were released in Beaver Lake near Issaquah in early November. Beaver Lake, one of several westside lowland lakes open to fishing year-round, is best fished by small boat, although anglers can also be successful fishing from shore. The daily bag limit is five fish, and bait anglers must keep the first five trout they catch.

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

### **South Sound/Olympic Peninsula**

Weather permitting, anglers have some opportunities to catch **winter steelhead** and **coho** and **chum** salmon in the days ahead. Meanwhile, a razor clam dig is scheduled for mid-December.

**Winter steelhead** are making their return to Olympic Peninsula rivers where anglers are catching early-run hatchery fish along with coho salmon in the Satsop, Wynoochee and Humptulip rivers in western Grays Harbor. "With the recent nice days, anglers have been out in force," said Scott Barbour, WDFW fish biologist. "Coming up, it could be promising as long as the weather holds."

Farther north, there's been a decent showing of steelhead on the Bogachiel River, which typically gets early returning hatchery fish the first few weeks in December, followed by the Sol Duc and the Hoh rivers. "Then the wild steelhead start showing up in January," Barbour said. The daily limit for hatchery steelhead is two fish.

Starting Dec. 1, wild steelhead-retention rules go into effect on the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Hoko, Pysht, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc rivers. Anglers fishing those rivers may retain one wild steelhead per license year (Dec. 1 through April 30). Barbour strongly recommends that anglers check the 2008-09 *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>) for rules on area rivers before heading out.

That's good advice for salmon anglers too, because fishing rules change for a number of rivers Nov. 30. Rivers in the Quillayute system, along with the Clearwater and Hoh, close that day to salmon fishing along with the Elk, Hoquiam and Johns rivers and Joe Creek in Grays Harbor, the Bear and Niawiakum rivers in Pacific County, and the Carbon River in Pierce County.

Several popular **chum** fishing sites such as Kennedy and McLane creeks close Nov. 30, but anglers can still try their luck on the Nisqually River, which is open through January. Minter Creek in Pierce/Kitsap counties is open through December, while the Dosewallips and Duckabush rivers in Jefferson County close Dec. 15.

Anglers still have time to catch **hatchery coho** on several Grays Harbor streams where the Chehalis, Satsop, Wynoochee and Humptulips rivers are open through January and the Wishkah River is open through December. The Skokomish River in Mason County closes to all salmon fishing Dec. 15.

Four evening **razor clam** digs are tentatively scheduled at Copalis and Mocrocks Dec. 11-14, while Long Beach and Twin Harbors are scheduled for three evening digs Dec. 12-14. Kalaloch Beach is closed for the fall season. Evening low tides during the dig are 5:23 p.m., Thursday, Dec. 11 (-1.1 ft.), 6:13 p.m., Friday, Dec. 12 (-1.5 ft.), 7:02 p.m., Saturday, Dec. 13 (-1.6 ft.), 7:50 p.m., Sunday, Dec. 14 (-1.4 ft.)

Recreational **crab** fishing continues in four marine areas of Puget Sound and is open seven days a week through Jan. 2. Crab fishing is open in marine areas 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 9 (Admiralty Inlet), 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) and 12 (Hood Canal).

Crab fishing will also remain open seven days a week through Jan. 2 in marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu), and 13 (south Puget Sound), where the fishery has continued uninterrupted since June 18.

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

### **Southwest Washington:**

As Thanksgiving drew near, **winter steelhead** continued to move into tributaries to the lower Columbia, setting the stage for the unofficial start of the season. Meanwhile, anglers are still catching legal-size sturgeon below Bonneville Dam, although strong winds have made boat fishing in the gorge an on-again, off-again proposition.

Although the lower Cowlitz River has been running muddy, early birds were catching some bright **hatchery steelhead** and **sea-run cutthroat** below the trout hatchery. They also picked up a few **hatchery coho** , although that run is fading fast, said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist.

"The Cowlitz seems to be getting the most attention right now, but fishing for hatchery steelhead should start picking up soon in a number of tributaries to the lower Columbia," Hymer said. Good bets include the Kalama, Lewis, Washougal, Elochoman and Grays rivers, along with Salmon Creek in Clark County, he said.

Blue and Mill creeks, both tributaries to the Cowlitz, are scheduled to open for hatchery steelhead Dec. 1. Blue Creek also opens for hatchery sea-run cutthroat that day. Nov. 30 is the last day of the extended night closure/non buoyant lure restriction on the Cowlitz from Mill Creek upstream to the barrier dam.

Meanwhile, the Toutle River - including the mainstem, North Fork and Green River - will close to fishing for salmon and hatchery steelhead at the end of the day Nov. 30. It is also the last day of the extended trout season at Swift Reservoir.

Specific regulations for all those waters are described in the *Fishing in Washington* rule pamphlet at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm> . As always, anglers are required to release any steelhead without a clipped adipose fin.

During the third week of November, 186 winter steelhead found their way to the salmon hatchery on the Cowlitz River. During that week, Tacoma Power employees transported 1,122 coho adults, 106 jacks and two winter-run steelhead to Lake Scanewa above Cowlitz Falls Dam on the upper Cowlitz River. They also hauled 374 coho adults 47 jacks, 30 fall chinook adults and

18 cutthroat to the Tilton River at Gust Backstrom Park in Morton plus more than 500 coho to the upper Cowlitz at Skate Creek and to the Cispus River above the mouth of Yellow Jacket Creek.

Like last year, WDFW plans to start planting surplus early run steelhead in Swofford Pond and Kress Lake in the weeks ahead, Hymer said.

The **sturgeon** fishery on the mainstem Columbia River is beginning to wind down, although bank anglers fishing below Bonneville Dam kept one legal-size fish for every 13 rods during the third week of November. Bank anglers also caught a few legal-size sturgeon in the Longview area, and in the lower Cowlitz River. "Sturgeon seem to actually like muddy water," Hymer said.

### **Eastern Washington:**

The winter-only **rainbow trout** fishery in the region won't be the best this season. Two of the four lakes that open Dec. 1 - Hatch and Williams lakes in northern Stevens County - were treated this fall to rid them of yellow perch and will not be re-stocked with trout until spring. Chris Donley, WDFW district fish biologist of Spokane, said Fourth of July Lake, on the Lincoln-Adams county line, is full of fathead minnows and trout fishing may be slow.

"We put some **tiger trout** in Fourth of July Lake to reduce those minnows and some of them will be up to 14 inches now, so it's not like there aren't any trout to catch," Donley said. "But it's definitely not going to be the best year for this usually productive lake. Water levels are down, too, so boat access will be difficult."

Another winter-only lake in the region - Hog Canyon in southwest Spokane County - is full of tench and bullheads and is slated for rehabilitation next year. Donley said Hog Canyon, like Fourth of July, still has rainbows, but fishing may be slow. Some pre-season sampling at Hog Canyon showed the trout range from eight to 12 inches, with most 10 to 11 inches. Both spinning and fly tackle worked, using everything from a gold spoon to a crystal flash dragonfly nymph, and catch rates were better in the afternoon in the middle of the lake.

Donley said better bets for late fall-early winter fishing are year-round open waters like Lake Roosevelt, and Sprague and Rock lakes.

"Roosevelt is full of 15-inch rainbows that can be caught close to shore by bank anglers," Donley said. "A total of about 750,000 rainbows from the net pens are out there waiting to be caught."

Sprague Lake continues to produce limits of one-pound, 16-inch and better rainbow trout. "We've had phenomenal growth rates on the hatchery trout we stocked in Sprague last spring," Donley said.

Rock Lake in Whitman County yields nice rainbow and **brown trout** for those willing to brave the wind there.

Another good cold weather fishery that's open through February is Waitts Lake in southern Steven County. Net-pen-reared rainbow and brown trout carry over well through the winter at Waitts, and there are also **largemouth bass**, **yellow perch**, and **pumpkinseed sunfish**.

**Whitefish** season opens Dec. 1 on the middle section of the Little Spokane River, from the state Highway 291 bridge to the West Branch of the river. Whitefish gear is restricted to one single-point hook with a maximum hook size of 3/16-inch from point to shank (hook size 14). Up to 15 whitefish can be retained daily. Most will run from 10 to 13 inches and can be found in groups in deep pools, and usually caught with maggots or small artificial flies or lures.

Sherman Creek in Ferry County opens to all gamefish Dec. 1 and will mostly produce catches of rainbow trout, with some mountain whitefish in the upper reaches. John Whalen, WDFW regional fish program manager, explains Sherman Creek's unusual fishing season, which runs through Aug. 31, protects an in-stream kokanee spawning trap for hatchery kokanee production during the September through November period. The only year-round closed portion of Sherman Creek is from the hatchery boat dock to 400 feet upstream of the hatchery water diversion dam.

Snake River hatchery **steelhead** fishing has been good with recent rain and snow, especially in the Hellar Bar/Grand Ronde mouth and Clearwater mouth areas along the Washington-Idaho border. The latest WDFW creel surveys are posted at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/snake/index.htm>.

#### **North Central Washington:**

WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff of Omak notes that a few Okanogan County lakes open for catch-and-keep **trout** fishing Dec 1. Rat Lake near Brewster, and Big and Little Green lakes near Omak are on a catch-and-release season through Nov. 30, but change to catch-and-keep Dec. 1 with a daily limit of five trout.

Jateff also notes Little Twin Lake near Winthrop, which used to be open for a winter fishery, closed Oct. 31 this year. "Anglers who used to fish Little Twin in the winter can fish either Patterson Lake, which is open year round, or Davis Lake, which has a split season and is open now through March," he said. Both lakes are in the Winthrop area.

Also opening Dec. 1 is the winter **whitefish** season on portions of the Chewuch, Entiat, Methow, Similkameen, and Sinlahekin rivers. Jateff notes the river stretches open to whitefish angling are listed in the current sport fishing pamphlet. "Anglers need to be aware that in areas where there are ongoing steelhead fisheries, whitefish anglers must use single barbless hooks and no bait is allowed," he said.

In general, whitefish gear is restricted to one single-point hook with a maximum hook size of 3/16-inch from point to shank (hook size 14). Up to 15 whitefish can be retained daily. Most run from 10 to 13 inches. In winter, they congregate in deep pools, and are usually caught maggots or small artificial flies or lures.

Anglers fishing for hatchery **steelhead** in the lower Okanogan and Similkameen rivers are averaging one fish for every 10 hours of fishing. Jig and bobber set-ups are the most popular. Steelhead moving into the Okanogan system are larger this year and are averaging eight to 12 pounds.

"The Methow has slowed considerably due to lowering water temperatures," Jateff said. He reminds anglers that the Methow is closed to fishing for species other than steelhead, unless they're listed under 'special rules' in the current sportfishing pamphlet.

"The docks at Pateros on the mainstem Columbia River continue to provide good fishing for steelhead using jig and bobber tipped with a whole shrimp," Jateff said. Average catch rates there are also about one fish per 10 hours of angling.

#### **South Central Washington:**

On Dec. 1 fishing opens on North Elton Pond, alongside Interstate 82 near Selah in Yakima County. WDFW District Fish Biologist Eric Anderson of Yakima reports North Elton just received 2,000 half-pound **rainbow trout** from the Goldendale Fish Hatchery. The daily catch limit at North Elton throughout the winter season is two trout.

Also opening Dec. 1 is the winter **whitefish** season on sections of the Naches and Klickitat rivers; check the fishing rules pamphlet for specific river stretch descriptions. Whitefish gear is restricted to one single-point hook with a maximum hook size of 3/16-inch from point to shank (hook size 14). Up to 15 whitefish can be retained daily. Most will run from 10 to 13 inches. They are usually found in deep pools, and are usually caught on maggots or small artificial flies or lures.

Anderson also reports that year-round Mattoon and North Fio Rito lakes in Kittitas County were recently stocked with five to eight-pound rainbow trout from Goldendal. Each lake received 140 of the big fish.

WDFW District Fish Biologist Paul Hoffarth of Pasco reports the catch rate recently dropped off in the Ringold area **steelhead** fishery on the Columbia River. "Bank anglers are averaging one steelhead for every 11 hours of fishing and boat anglers are averaging one steelhead for about eight hours of fishing," he said. "We've seen roughly 45 percent fewer anglers and steelhead, compared to two weeks ago."

Hoffarth reported a total of 172 steelhead were caught during the week of November 17-23, including 63 adipose and right ventral fin-clipped steelhead, 105 adipose-fin clipped steelhead and three unclipped steelhead. That creel sample represents about 42 percent of all angler effort, he explained.

The steelhead sport fishery opened Oct. 1 from the Highway 395 bridge at Pasco/Kennewick upstream to the wooden power line towers at the former Hanford town site (Ringold area fishery). Starting Nov 1, WDFW regulations allow anglers to retain any hatchery steelhead identified by an adipose clip as part of the anglers daily limit of two steelhead. All wild steelhead (adipose fin not clipped) must be released.

**Reader Email** - We received a question this week. If you have any suggestions please let us know and we'll share it next week!

From **subscriber Delbert** – Does anyone have instructions for building a round crab pot?

Got an answer, question, story to tell or information to share? [Shoot us an Email!](#)

#### **Random Links**

"Killer steelhead driftfishing rig for clear water":

[http://www.currypilot.com/news/story.cfm?story\\_no=18674](http://www.currypilot.com/news/story.cfm?story_no=18674)

**Weekly Quote** – "At some point technology becomes not an aid but a substitute for sportsmanship" - Aldo Leopold

**GOOD LUCK!**