

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 12<sup>th</sup> – December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** Fishery managers will decide Friday on the sport/commercial take of spring chinook on the Columbia River for the 2009 season. Although a larger run is forecasted, anglers may wind up with fewer productive days to fish, depending on the start date of the season around early March. Until the spring chinook begin to show, the mainstem Columbia will not have much to offer.

Flow at Willamette Falls is low and the water temperature has dropped to 46 degrees. Sturgeon fishing is typically slow when water temperatures drop that low. Plunkers at Meldrum Bar are occasionally picking up winter steelhead.

**Pro guide Joe Salvey of Fish Hawk Adventures (503-349-1411)** reports fishing both the Willamette and Columbia for sturgeon with better results in the former as the water was warmer. Squid was the most productive bait.

Steelhead are entering Oregon waters early this year and a few large ones have been taken on the Sandy River which is usually a late starter for broodstock fish.

A very few early winters are being taken on the Clackamas but they seem to be running small.

The McKenzie has continued to produce summer steelhead below Leaburg Dam. These are hatchery fish and about half are bright enough to keep. Trout fishing is holding up well on the lower river.

Catch-and-release fishing for wild steelhead on the North Santiam is slow.

Through December, Walling Pond, Walter Wirth Lake, Salish Pond and Junction City Pond are scheduled to be stocked weekly with steelhead weighing eight to 15 pounds.

**Northwest –** Virtually little change in river levels this week created challenging conditions for boaters seeking late run chinook and steelhead on north coast streams. Low, clear water conditions calls for stealthy tactics but couple that with a weak tide series and there simply wasn't a lot of fresh fish available for harvest.

Chinook should begin to phase out from the catches and steelheaders are just waiting for a good rain freshet to stimulate what seems to be a good return. A predicted storm system should begin the early run of hatchery steelhead on the Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem, Kilchis, Wilson, Nestucca and Three Rivers. A few wild fish are likely to show as well and must be released unharmed.

The Siletz and Alsea Rivers also hold promise following the weekend precipitation.

Afternoon minus tides early this week had sturgeon anglers plying the waters of Tillamook Bay. Effort was low however and catches light. Low slack will occur after dark, making for unsafe navigation. The next good opportunity will occur just before Christmas.

Crabbing has been productive in and outside of Tillamook Bay when safe bar conditions allow.

The crab are in a filled-out state and the presence of large numbers of juveniles promises good catches in the years to come.

**Southwest** – Low, clear water plagues most southwest rivers and it remains to be seen if precipitation starting Friday will be sufficient to put them back into good condition.

A 10 to 12 foot exchange will occur afternoons with extreme minus tides in the evening this coming weekend. Another round of rough ocean conditions is forecast off the central and southern Oregon coast. Ocean crabbing has been good when the ocean has lain down as it is usually best at the first of the season.

**Pro guide Bill Kremers (541 754 6411)** reports that he's still waiting for enough rain to bring in the steelhead on the Alsea. He fished the Siletz last Friday, not much happening with only a couple of cutthroat to show for it. Fished out of Depoe Bay in Wednesday this week and bottom fishing was fairly good.

Siltcoos trollers have been experiencing fair to good results with the wild coho fishery. A few of the fish here are running into the mid teens.

While a poor winter steelhead return is expected this year, the Coos River has given up a few fish. Rainfall will improve prospects here. Clamming is good near Florence and ocean crabbing has been worthwhile.

Anglers making the long hike out to the mouth of the Elk River have been taking a few fall chinook on sand shrimp and cured eggs. Low water is preventing fish from running upstream.

There's not enough water in the Umpqua system to encourage winter fish to venture any higher than Sawyers Rapids.

Winter steelheading has picked up on the lower Rogue with the stretch from Agness to Lobster Creek most productive. Plugs, jigs and bait have been taking fish.

Rock and ling cod fishing has been good when boats have been able to launch out of the Port of Brookings.

The low, clear waters of the Chetco have yielded steelhead and a few late chinook to back-bouncers.

**Eastern** – Crescent Lake has continued to deliver large brown and lake trout. Winter weather this coming weekend is likely to make Crescent and other high lakes inaccessible until spring.

Steelheaders are still trolling plugs in the John Day Pool and River. Action continues to taper off and the cold snap ahead will likely only dampen success.

**SW Washington** – The Cowlitz is beginning to clear but catches have been light. Bait typically produces the best catches in colored water but go to jigs if you find a pocket of holding fish. The highest concentration of fish and anglers will be at Blue Creek.

The Lewis River is another early season option for anglers seeking hatchery fish. Hatchery plants have dropped recently however so persistence is key. This is a better late season fishery when the native run begins to show.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – Don't forget the upcoming Friday meeting to decide the spring chinook seasons on the lower Columbia River. This is your chance for input. Check last weeks archived report for more details.

Sturgeon fishing continues to taper on the lower Columbia. This week, no keepers were tallied for any of the sport effort below Bonneville Dam. With colder weather on the horizon, success rates will further deteriorate.

Crabbing on the Columbia remains good despite the commercial effort now taking place on the lower river.

Upriver, steelheaders did uncharacteristically well on the last creel check. Although nearly half of the catch was wild, 23 steelhead were tallied for 25 boats fishing in the John Day Arm last weekend. Although these success rates aren't uncommon for this time of year, given the recent history of this fishery, it seems surprising to me that we're seeing catch rates this good.

**The Guide's Forecast** – If you are going to stick to the mainstem for sturgeon, it's best to go near the mouth of the Willamette or just downstream. The slightly warmer water of the Willamette may allow for more active fish. Keep in mind however that the dropping air and subsequent water temperatures will likely further degrade success rates.

The weather change will also likely effect the steelhead bite. Although the John Day Arm itself should remain the best bet for steelheaders, a dropping barometer and significantly colder weather should slow what some would say was a good bite last weekend. Dropping, clearing water will call for bobber and jigs with brighter colors often working better in the colder water conditions.

Get after those holiday crab! There should still be easy limits to have in the lower Columbia but expect commercial competition in this area. The crabs are in great shape however. Ideal tides shift to the mid to early afternoon by the weekend. How perfect is that? Keep buoys out of the shipping channel as crab boat traffic will be making for shore with fresh ocean catches and to avoid the severe weather headed our way.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – Flows at Willamette Falls have been falling by 100 cfs per day. The water temperature is a chilly 45 degrees. Sturgeon catches have slowed and they're biting very lightly in the cold water.

**Pro guide Joe Salvey of Fish Hawk Adventures (503-349-1411)** reports, "I spent a few days winter sturgeon fishing here this last week, one day in the Willamette and one in the Gorge, I found more fish to be moved into the Willamette and the water temp of the Willamette was 48 degrees as the Columbia was 45.5 degrees. We marked a lot of fish on the fish finder and also caught a lot of fish. We ended the day on the Willamette with about 30 to 40 fish and had a couple nice keepers that were fresh looking fish that were nice and fat. There was defiantly more action on the Willamette then the Columbia. Smelt was the bait that was preferred as it out fished squid and sand shrimp."

The McKenzie is producing few trout at this time of year but those few have been of exceptional size and quality. This pristine river is all catch-and-release, attracting primarily to fly anglers.

There aren't enough winter steelhead in the North Santiam to attract even the most hard-core catch-and-release angler. All of the winters here are natives.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Lower Willamette anglers trying for sturgeon this week should stay on the move to find larger biters. Sand Shrimp and squid have been drawing the greatest interest. Hold your rod to detect light bites. anglers at Meldrum Bar have been taking the occasional winter steelhead. Plunk Spin 'n' Glos to draw strikes and if not familiar with this fishery, strike up a conversation with the old-timers. You'll find 'most all of them friendly and helpful. While the water at the middle Willamette is lower than summer levels and hovering in the lower 40-degree range, hardy anglers have been making decent catches of trout over the past week.

Nymphing will be most productive on the McKenzie. It's best to fish mid-day at this time of year.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – There are a few winter steelhead in the Clackamas but few enough that hooking one remains a long shot. The water is extremely clear, creating challenging conditions and spooky fish. Eagle Creek closed for coho on December 1st.

Good numbers of winter steelhead are yet to arrive at the Sandy River but some anglers are taking a few. This fishery will continue to improve through January and February.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – Low, clear water conditions has many anglers anxiously awaiting the next weather system to move fish. The tides are building but only a few fish are motivated to move into the rivers in the condition they are.

Most anglers are still targeting late run chinook on the larger north coast streams. The Wilson, Nestucca and Trask Rivers are getting the most traffic but traffic is hardly the word for it since effort is light. Steelhead are available however but low water tactics are necessary to inspire one to bite. The approaching weather system will have a large impact on upcoming success rates but you'll read about that in the Forecast section. Three Rivers Hatchery has recycled a couple of dozen steelhead already.

Fair sturgeon tides hit Tillamook Bay at mid-week but like most other areas, effort was light and so were the catches.

Crabbing has been good on Tillamook Bay. We soaked our pots overnight on Tuesday for a Wednesday morning picking taking home 19 keepers for 4 pots crabbing effectively. Effort was light on this day too.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Winter weather conditions should keep most anglers home this weekend, and for good reason. First, traveling conditions will be hazardous and what worse way to start the steelhead season by jackknifing your boat and trailer? Snow levels are expected to drop to 500 feet in the north coast range.

Secondly, you'll likely be fishing in either rising water conditions or high water conditions AND rapidly dropping air and water temperatures. It's a poor combination. The good thing about it is that there shouldn't be much pressure on the river but don't expect much action either.

However, when flows do drop back in, which is forecasted to be early next week, the freshet should jump start the early return of hatchery fish to the north coast. The Columbia tributaries should be some of the first good prospects with Big Creek and the Necanicum River good bets as these are smaller systems and more likely to clear first. The North Fork Nehalem Hatchery is also a good bet and fair bank access is available near the hatchery. The Kilchis and Three Rivers should be fishing by as early as Sunday but are receiving smaller hatchery plants. The Wilson and

Nestucca will be the last to clear and fish and although my preference is for mid-February/early March wild and broodstock fish, there should still be some early returning Alsea stock fish available for harvest.

Again, when it comes to weekend recreation, use common sense when traveling. The estuary crabbing in Netarts and Tillamook Bays should be pretty productive however. The tides are right and the crab should be plentiful for those willing to brave the inclement weather (and I hope that's not very many of you).

And how does "combined seas" to 27 feet sound for a Saturday forecast? Don't even think about the ocean or anywhere near it from shore or ship this weekend; you're asking for trouble.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – While the weather forecast for the weekend is still volatile and subject to frequent changes as of Thursday, December 11th, it appears we will get some precipitation. Steelhead, which have appeared early in southwest rivers, will be running in earnest if sufficient rainfall materializes.

With ocean crabbing open now, commercial and recreational boats launching out of southwest ports report taking Dungeness are in good condition with hard shells that are packed with meat. While winter ocean conditions can be challenging at times, there have been windows of opportunity when the wind eases off and the seas lay down. It won't be this weekend, however, with swells and winds forecast in the double digits. It's supposed to calm down and flatten out by Wednesday next week.

When crossing into the ocean has been possible, anglers have scores limits of rockfish and ling cod in fairly short order. Winter bottom fishing is usually about as good as it gets. Be sure to bleed out your catch immediately for the best quality table fare.

Steelheading at the Siletz is a non-event. There are a few dark Chinook around but no evidence of withers in the crystalline water here.

The Alsea is too low and clear to fish. Rain will entice winter steelhead but there's no reason to fish here until that happens.

**Pro guide Bill Kremers (541 754 6411)** reports that he's "still basically waiting for enough rain to bring in the steelhead on the Alsea. Did fish the Siletz last Friday, not much happening, a couple of cutthroats and that was it. Fished out of Depoe Bay yesterday. Was the only boat out. Bottom fishing was fairly good, 4 lings, an assortment of bottom and a few big hard shell crabs. At times the schools of rock cod were so thick we could not get our jigs to the bottom. Unfortunately most of the suspended fish were small to mid size. All and all a nice day out on the ocean, not sure when the next will be, but and if I am confident the fish will be there. The water temperature was a surprising 52 degrees, lots of bird life and schools of bait fish."

Easy rockfish and ling cod limits have been the rule for experienced boats launching out of Newport but ocean crabbing has been strangely slow with a some who have tried in previously productive areas have blanked. It has been much better further south. Commercial crab gear is working water at well over 200 feet.

Late-day minus tides will provide opportunities for clamming this weekend if harvesters can tolerate the weather. Crabbing has been very good in Winchester and Coos Bay. The taking of mussels remains closed coast-wide.

Low, clear water on the mainstem Umpqua has kept most fresh winter steelhead below the Sawyers Rapids stretch. There are a few coho left in the system, but they are well past their pull date. With Chinook wrapped up on the Umpqua, anglers are anxious for winter steelheading to get underway although a few have made it up into the North Umpqua. Most of those being hooked are wild requiring release. The South Umpqua, which opened for winter steelhead on the first of December, is too low to drift.

In previous winter steelhead seasons, anglers were allowed to keep one wild winter steelhead per day up to five per year. Starting this season, steelhead must be of hatchery origin to be retained. Since the majority of winters entering the Umpqua system are natives, this has become a catch-and-release fishery for the most part but numbers are so good that most steelheaders consider the effort worthwhile.

Spinners have continued to take at the Siltcoos Lake wild coho fishery. The most effective lure will invariably be pink for these fish. When it's hot, many anglers are choosing to release the hens to reproduce, keeping only the bucks. Coho have been averaging 12 pounds here.

Few hatchery winter steelhead will be available on the Coos system due to a loss of about 146,000 juvenile steelhead intended for stocking in the South Coos, Millicoma and Tenmile rivers to disease in 2007. As a result, most of the fish returning to these systems this season will be wild. Not so on the Coquille where hatchery winter steelhead returns are expected to be good. In fact, a few anglers have already been scoring on the Coquille although fishing has stalled in low water conditions.

Elk and Sixes rivers, productive for fall Chinook when they had water in them, have slowed dramatically. These two are very near midsummer levels now.

Anglers launching out of Gold Beach have had little problem scoring limits of ling cod as well as varieties of rockfish. The low, clear waters of the lower Rogue are unproductive at this time. Anglers on the Grants Pass stretch have continued to take half-pounders along with adult steelhead. There's little of interest to fishers on the upper Rogue at this time.

There is some concern that Chinook may spawn in the turbulent mainstem rather than Chetco tributaries as they normally do which is likely to result in a lower survival rate. Most Chinook historically spawn in December. A few steelhead are being taken in the low waters of the Chetco by stealthy anglers drifting bait beneath a float. While rockfish limits have been coming out of the Port of Brookings, ling cod are in deeper water now so catches have slowed.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – Steelheading on the Deschutes has been worthwhile but action is cooling along with the water temperature. It should fish for another couple of weeks although it's liable to be a little chilly over there. Trout fishing will remain closed along Warm Springs until April next year.

Steelhead are finally showing up and a few have been caught on the Grande Ronde River. Most years, steelhead start arriving in the first week of November.

**Northwest Trout** - Devils Lake is producing some dandy trout to trollers willing to endure winter weather.

According to the ODFW website, Walling Pond, Walter Wirth Lake, Junction City Pond and Salish Pond were planted again this week with rainbow brood trout weighing eight to 15 pounds from Roaring River Hatchery.

E. E. Wilson Pond is closed until spring.

### **Washington fishing reports:**

#### **From the WDF&W Weekender Report December 10<sup>th</sup> – January 6<sup>th</sup> 2008**

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

Fishing at some of the region's rivers and streams has been decent as the winter **steelhead** run continues to pick up steam. On Puget Sound, the **blackmouth** fishery is under way, and the catch rate could increase as additional marine areas open for salmon.

"We've seen a drop in effort in the marine areas since the holiday season began," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "But those anglers who did get out on the water have found some fish in the last several days." Creel checks in the region show fair fishing for **blackmouth** - resident chinook - in Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton). At Shilshole Ramp, 26 anglers were checked with two chinook Dec. 5, while 48 anglers took home eight chinook the following day.

Those fishing Marine Area 10 can keep two hatchery chinook as part of their two-salmon daily limit. They must, however, release wild chinook, which have an intact adipose fin.

Beginning Jan. 1, options will increase for blackmouth fishing, when marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay) and 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) open for salmon. Anglers in those two marine areas will be allowed to keep two hatchery chinook as part of their two-salmon daily limit.

While out on the Sound, why not drop a **crab** pot? Sport **crabbing** is open in marine areas 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 9 (Admiralty Inlet), 10 and 12 (Hood Canal) 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, 8-2 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 freshwater, the winter **steelhead** fishery is under way throughout the region. The fishery usually peaks around Christmas, but already there have been reports of anglers hooking some bright steelhead in several rivers, including the Skykomish, Snoqualmie, Skagit and Cascade.

Brett Barkdull, WDFW fish biologist, said there have been decent numbers of steelhead in the Skagit and Cascade rivers, which are both running low and clear. "They're catching a few steelhead in the Skagit, and the Cascade has been very good at times," he said.

While most anglers have turned their attention to winter steelhead, some are still finding some **chum** salmon in the region's rivers. Barkdull reminds anglers that chum retention, however, is prohibited on the Skagit River.

Anglers should also be aware that a portion of the North Fork Nooksack River closes to sportfishing Dec. 15 until further notice. The river will be closed from the yellow post located at the upstream most corner of the hatchery grounds, approximately 1,000 feet upstream of the mouth of Kendall Creek, downstream to the Mosquito Lake Road Bridge.

For more information on the rules and regulations for all fisheries check WDFW's Fishing in Washington pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm> ).

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

From the coast to Puget Sound, anglers have several opportunities to add seafood to their holiday menu, including **razor clams, chum salmon, Dungeness crab** and **steelhead**.

Four evening razor clam digs are scheduled at Copalis and Mocrocks Dec. 11-14; Long Beach and Twin Harbors are scheduled for three evening digs Dec. 12-14. Digging will be restricted to the hours between noon and midnight.

Harvesters are allowed to take no more than 15 razor clams and must keep the first 15 they dig, regardless of size or condition. Each digger's clams must be kept in a separate container.

A license is required for anyone age 15 or older. Any 2008 annual shellfish/seaweed license or combination fishing license is still valid. Another option is a razor-clam only license available in annual or three-day only versions. Descriptions of the various licensing options are available on the WDFW website at <http://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov> . Opening dates and evening low tides are:

- Thursday, Dec. 11 (5:23 p.m. -1.1 ft.) Copalis, Mocrocks
- Friday, Dec. 12 (6:13 p.m. -1.5 ft.) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Saturday, Dec. 13 (7:02 p.m. -1.6 ft.) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Sunday, Dec. 14 (7:50 p.m. -1.4 ft.) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks

More digs are tentatively scheduled Jan. 8-11 and Feb. 6-8. Kalaloch Beach in Olympic National Park (ONP) will remain closed through the winter but may open in spring 2009 if the clam population grows to harvestable size.

If fresh salmon sounds good, Hal Michael, WDFW fish biologist, suggests fishing the Nisqually River where the late-run **chum salmon** season is starting to pick up. "When everything else slows down, the Nisqually chum run is still building," Michael said.

The Nisqually River remains open through Jan. 31, with a limit of six salmon, only two of which may be adults. Wild, unmarked chinook must be released. Minter Creek in Pierce/Kitsap counties also is open for chum fishing through Dec. 31, with a limit of four chum salmon per day.

Meanwhile, **winter steelhead** are showing up in Olympic Peninsula rivers, where a recent creel survey on the Bogachiel River showed 181 anglers catching 67 hatchery steelhead, while 69 anglers checked on the lower Hoh River caught 15 of the popular fish.

However, fishing conditions could be better, Michael said. "Right now it's taking some experience and skill to land a fish," Michael said. "The area needs some rain to bring more steelhead into the rivers."

Michael reminds anglers that wild steelhead-retention rules are now in 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).

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

In Puget Sound, all salmon fishing closes on Dec. 31 in Marine Area 11 (Tacoma/Vashon) and Marine Area 12 (Hood Canal).

Michael strongly recommends that anglers check the 2008-09 Fishing in Washington pamphlet ([wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm](http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm)) for rules on area rivers before heading out.

Recreational **crab** fishers have a few more weeks to drop a pot or two, but should note that all Puget Sound marine areas close to crab fishing Jan. 2, 2009. Until then, crab fishing is open seven days a week in marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu), 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 9 (Admiralty Inlet), 10 (Seattle/Bremerton), 12 (Hood Canal), and 13 (south Puget Sound). Marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands), 8-1 and 8-2 (east of Whidbey Island), and 11 (Tacoma/Vashon Island) remain closed.

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 [wdfw.wa.gov/fish/shelfish/crab/index.htm](http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/shelfish/crab/index.htm).

Rich Childers, WDFW shellfish policy coordinator, reminds crabbers to make sure they report their winter crab catch by sending their catch cards to the department or recording their information online between Jan. 2-15, 2009 ([https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/wdfw/puget\\_sound\\_crab\\_catch.html](https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/wdfw/puget_sound_crab_catch.html)).

"In order for us to make the best estimates, we need people to submit their reports, even if they didn't catch any crab," Childers said. He also reminds crabbers that beginning with the 2009 season, those who fail to submit their catch cards will face a \$10 fine when they apply for a license in 2010. "It's a good idea for people to get into the habit of reporting before the fine goes into effect," he said.

### **Southwest Washington**

As **winter steelhead** runs continue to build in area rivers, WDFW will start planting lakes throughout the region with catchable-size and larger brood stock **rainbow trout** and excess hatchery steelhead that become available. Evening **razor clam** digs also are scheduled Dec. 11-14 at Copalis and Mocrocks and Dec. 12-14 at Long Beach and Twin Harbors. Digging will be restricted to the hours between noon and midnight.

Catch rates for **hatchery steelhead** were fairly low in the lower Columbia River Basin through the first week of December, but should improve after a good winter rain, said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist.

"We're getting a good early return to the hatcheries, but a lot of rivers are running low and clear," Hymer said. "Rain should improve fishing and help us determine whether this run is big or just early."

Through the first week of December, 743 winter steelhead had returned to the Cowlitz hatcheries, compared to 84 during the same period last year. Thirty-four boat anglers contacted in a creel survey that week caught five hatchery fish above the Interstate 5 Bridge, but 42 bank anglers accounted for just two fish. Sixteen anglers interviewed below the bridge had no catch.

During the first week of December, Tacoma Power employees transported 630 coho adults and six winter-run steelhead from the Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery to Lake Scanewa above Cowlitz Falls Dam. They also moved 106 coho adults, an adult fall chinook and six cutthroat trout into the Tilton River at Gust Backstrom Park in Morton, 367 coho adults into the upper Cowlitz River at the Skate Creek Bridge in Packwood and 221 sea-run cutthroat trout to the Interstate-5 boat launch.

Six bank anglers fishing Blue Creek caught and kept three summer-run steelhead, but catch rates were generally light on the Kalama River and the North Fork Lewis River. Returns to the Lewis River Hatchery were lagging slightly (408 compared to 489 last year), but about twice as many winter steelhead had returned to hatcheries on the Kalama and Washougal rivers through the first week of December as last year.

"It's still early in the run, but there's a chance of some good fishing once we get some rain," Hymer said. As always, anglers are reminded that any wild steelhead they intercept with an intact adipose fin must be released.

Hymer notes that the section of the North Fork Lewis River from Colvin Creek upstream to the powerlines below Merwin Dam will open for salmon and hatchery steelhead Dec. 16. However, all chinook must be released on the mainstem and North Fork Lewis through the end of the year.

For information on waters currently open to fishing for hatchery steelhead or salmon, see the Fishing in Washington rules pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm> ). It's also a good idea to call the Fishing Rule Hotline (360-696-6211) or check the WDFW website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm> ) for any updates.

Anglers might also want to check the WDFW website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly/index.htm> ) for information on **weekly trout plants** that will get under way this month in lakes throughout the region. Some excess hatchery steelhead have already been planted in Kress Lake in Cowlitz County and Battleground Lake in Clark County, with more expected to follow. In addition, four lakes are scheduled to receive catchable-size rainbow trout from the Vancouver Hatchery this month: Lacamas (5,000), Icehouse (1,500), Battleground (3,000) and Kline Line (5,000).

Meanwhile, anglers are still catching legal-size **sturgeon** downstream from the Interstate 5 Bridge on the Cowlitz River. Sturgeon fishing has generally been slow on the Columbia River, but anglers should be aware of several new developments in that fishery. First, sturgeon fishing will reopen Jan. 1 from Bonneville Dam upriver to McNary Dam under a new annual quota. Also effective Jan. 1, statewide legal size measurements will be calculated from a sturgeon's snout to the fork in its tail, rather than total length.

Finally, Washington and Oregon are scheduled to set 2009 seasons for sturgeon and smelt fishing in the lower Columbia River at a meeting Dec. 18. Watch for news of that action on the WDFW website.

### **Eastern Washington**

WDFW District Fish Biologist Chris Donley said there is "decent" fishing at Hog Canyon Lake in southwest Spokane County, with shore anglers averaging three rainbows each and boat anglers averaging limits of five fish, with multiple fish released.

Most of Hog Canyon's rainbow trout are nine- to 11-inchers from spring fry plants, with lots of 12- to 13-inchers that carried over from spring 2007 plants. "But don't let the length fool you because these are skinny fish," Donley said. "And there does not seem to be any in the two-year-plus class."

Hog Canyon is full of tench and bullheads competing with rainbows for food, Donley said. But it's the best available winter-only (Dec. 1-Mar. 31) fishery in the region.

Fourth of July Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line is much slower. Anglers checked during the opening week averaged less than half a fish each, and no one had more than two fish, Donley said. "There were very few rainbow in the 20-inch range at Fourth of July," Donley said. "Most fish averaged greater than 14 inches but were in poor condition. There were no **tiger trout** in the harvest despite our spring stocking of catchable-size fish."

Donley said if the Fourth of July fishery doesn't improve, a rehabilitation treatment may be necessary. Hatch and Williams lakes in Stevens County, also on the winter-only season, were treated this fall to rid them of competing species and will not be re-stocked with trout until spring.

The best trout fishing in the region continues to be found at year-round Sprague Lake. The 1,840-acre lake, which sprawls across the Lincoln-Adams county line along Interstate 90, was rehabilitated last year and re-stocked trout have grown well. WDFW enforcement officers who patrol the fishery regularly report lots of five-fish limits of 16- to 17-inch rainbows. Sprague anglers are reminded that only two of the five trout they retain can be over 20 inches.

Lake Roosevelt, the Columbia River reservoir formed by Grand Coulee Dam, is also open year-round and can produce nice rainbows through the winter. Currently, trollers are doing well from the 25-mile area up to the dam and shore anglers are catching fish from Ft. Spokane downstream.

WDFW district fish biologist Bill Baker of Colville says fishing for **burbot** on year-round Sullivan and Bead lakes in Pend Oreille County should be productive later in the winter as ice conditions develop.

Snake River **steelhead** fishing appears to have slowed considerably, especially in the upper stretches. Joe Bumgarner, WDFW fish biologist, said this year's fall chinook salmon run and unusually warm and dry fall weather may be factors. Of the river stretches last checked, the best catch rates were found from Lower Monumental to Little Goose dams. Steelheaders there spent an average of 14 hours per fish caught. See the latest creel summaries at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/snake/index.htm>.

### **Northcentral Washington**

WDFW Chelan district fish biologist Art Viola reports that insufficient numbers of wild **steelhead** have entered the Wenatchee River to date to meet requirements of the NOAA Fisheries permit to open a fishing season this year. "Unfortunately it just doesn't look like we are going to be able to open a steelhead fishery on the Wenatchee this year," Viola said.

On the bright side, Viola reported steelhead angling has been good on the Columbia River from Rocky Reach Dam to Wells Dam. "We estimate that 1,397 anglers fished 5,759 hours and caught 445 steelhead during November," he said. "That's a catch rate of about 12½ hours per fish. Water temperatures are lowering but fishing should be good until later in December."

Elsewhere, WDFW Okanogan district fish biologist Bob Jateff reports steelhead fishing has slowed due to colder water temperatures, although a few fish are still being caught on the Methow and Similkameen rivers. "Anglers who are looking for a steelhead river with less pressure than the Methow should give the Okanogan a try from the mouth on up to the town of Oroville," Jateff said. "Access is more difficult on the Okanogan, but with a little bit of time and effort, anglers can fish spots that do not receive a great amount of pressure, even on the weekends."

Jateff says there are several shoreline access areas on the Okanogan River, from the mouth and upstream, including Monse Bridge, Chiliwist, Malott Bridge, several highway bridges in the towns of Omak and Okanogan, Janis Bridge just south of Tonasket, WDFW Driscoll Island Access and the Highway 97 Bridge in Oroville. Some of these areas are marked with WDFW public fishing signs, he says, and some need to be searched out. Jateff notes selective gear rules are in effect for the Okanogan River and no bait is allowed.

Anglers also need to be aware that bait is not allowed during whitefish seasons on the Methow and Similkameen rivers in areas that are also open to steelhead fishing. "Always check emergency steelhead rules on the website and the current sportfishing pamphlet for descriptions of areas that are now open for both species," Jateff said.

Several lakes in Okanogan County shifted to catch-and-keep **rainbow trout** fishing Dec. 1, including Green lakes near Omak, Rat Lake near Brewster and Davis Lake near Winthrop. All have a five-fish daily catch limit and bait is allowed.

Okanogan County's year-round Starzman Lake was treated this fall to rid it of competing species and will not be re-stocked with trout until spring.

WDFW regional fish program manager Jeff Korth reports that lots of **rainbow trout** running 10- to-12 inches were stocked this fall in several year-round waters on the Seep Lakes unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area. Canal, Windmill and Heart lakes, which lie south of Potholes Reservoir, are producing catches now and could continue to be good fisheries after safe ice cover develops.

"These lakes have lots of springs, so ice fishers need to be especially careful about thin spots," Korth said,

Korth also noted that Beda Lake, a year-round selective-gear fishery just south of Winchester Wasteway, was recently stocked with some catchable-size rainbows and should fish well until the ice comes. Beda Lake and several other year-round Grant County lakes south of Interstate 90 were recently re-opened after being closed earlier this year.

Other re-opened lakes are Brookies Lake and the Desert Wildlife Area chain of lakes, which includes Aztec, Desert, North Desert, Dune, Harris, Lizard, Meadowlark, Sedge, and Tern lakes. Moderate fishing opportunities are available on these lakes, which were not treated when adjacent ponds on the wildlife area were rehabilitated, under the permanent rules listed in the Sport Fishing Rules pamphlet.

Access to some waters south of Potholes Reservoir may be closed through Dec. 16 while the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works to restore Columbia National Wildlife Refuge land damaged by fires this summer. The closure covers lands west of Marsh Unit 1 and the Falcon Lakes, south of O'Sullivan Dam, east of Corral Lake and north of Upper Goose Lake in Management Unit 1. Access to some land north of Upper Goose Lake and around Corral Lake may also be affected. Access to Blythe, Chukar and Scaup lakes may be restricted during aerial herbicide spraying to

control invasive cheatgrass and by aerial seeding to restore native vegetation. For up-to-date information on closures, call 509-546-8300.

**Walleye** fishing on Potholes Reservoir is "pretty darn good right now," according to WDFW Enforcement Captain Chris Anderson. "Lots of 22-inch and bigger fish are being taken around Mardon's Resort," he said.

### **Southcentral Washington**

Paul Hoffarth, WDFW district fish biologist, reports **steelhead** fishing effort on the Columbia River near the Tri-Cities continues to decline as the weather grows colder. The most recently measured catch rate for bank anglers was an average of one steelhead for 14 hours of fishing. Boat anglers averaged one steelhead for 8.5 hours of angling.

The Columbia River Ringold area steelhead fishery is open from the Highway 395 Bridge at Pasco/Kennewick upstream to the wooden power line towers at the former Hanford town site. Anglers can retain any hatchery steelhead, identified by a clipped adipose fin, as part of their daily limit of two steelhead. All wild steelhead must be released.

Eric Anderson, WDFW Yakima district fish biologist, said more big broodstock **rainbow trout** from the Goldendale Fish Hatchery were recently stocked in several Yakima County lakes. Sarge Hubbard Pond, which is a juveniles only fishery in the city park of the same name, received 15 five-pound rainbow broodstock and 25 eight-pounders. Rotary Lake, near Yakima's Greenway Trail, received 44 five-pounders and 76 eight-pounders. Interstate-82 Pond #4 received 15 five-pounders and 25 eight-pounders.

The region's winter-only trout water, North Elton Pond alongside Interstate 82 near Selah in Yakima County, has lots of half-pound rainbows. Anderson reminds anglers the daily catch limit at North Elton is two trout.

Jim Cummins, WDFW fish biologist, said the catch-and-release section of the Yakima River is probably still producing a few rainbow trout for fly anglers, considering the relatively mild weather.

Cummins notes that winter **whitefish** action on the Yakima's 3,500-foot stretch below Roza Dam will likely pick up with more wintery weather. Whitefish are also fair game now 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 of the fish will run from 10 to 13 inches, found in winter groups in deep pools, and usually caught with maggots or small artificial flies or lures.

### **Reader Email -**

Got a question, story to tell or information to share? Shoot us an Email!

Write to the TGF staff:

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### **Random Links**

Razor clam information from the ODFW:

<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/MRP/shellfish/razorclams/>

Lots of rod building information at this commercial site:

<http://www.mudhole.com/Rod-Building-101>

**Weekly Quote** – “Fish always rise about three feet beyond the longest cast that you're capable of making.” - Henry Miller

**GOOD LUCK!**