

The Guide's Forecast - volume 10 issue number 16

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 19th – December 25th, 2008**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro - Although the first day of winter is December 21st, the current arctic air has brought a sudden halt to already challenging fisheries.

Anglers anxious to strategize on a spring chinook season will have to wait a bit longer for a defined guideline. Oregon commission members voted to lower the sport share of the harvest while Washington commission members voted to increase it. It's anyone's guess where the allocation will end up but it looks unlikely sport anglers will get a meaningful season despite a predicted return nearly double of last years run. This years forecast has come in at nearly 299,000 adults.

The lower Willamette is in the lower 40's and moderately clear. Plunkers bundled up against the arctic chill are taking a few steelhead at Meldrum Bar. Sturgeon fishing was fair over the last retention period prior to the freeze.

Freezing rods, fluctuating levels and poor angling is the story on the North Santiam. Fishing on the South Santiam is poor as well. Coastal rivers are a better bet.

While it's been slow for winters on the Clackamas, a few hard-core anglers braving the cold have hooked up on Eagle Creek. Eagle creek steelhead plants are scheduled to cease in the very near future so enjoy the fishing while you can.

The Sandy is always clear in cold weather but there is ice floating downstream now. Steelhead are in the river but fishing has been slow.

Legal and larger trout are scheduled to be planted at Junction City Pond, Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake.

Northwest – Treacherous conditions have kept most anglers from traveling this week and with low, cold and clear water conditions, action would be sparse anyway. Prior to the freeze, winter catches of chinook and a few steelhead were happening on the lower Wilson River.

Cold weather is predicted to keep its grip in NW Oregon. Although this makes for less than ideal conditions, steelhead will acclimate to the colder temperatures and become more receptive to gear in the warming afternoon. Once air temperatures begin to match water temperatures, success rates go up. Small baits and subtle colors will work best in these conditions as river levels will remain consistently low during these cold snaps.

Low flows and poor tides will keep most of the action in the extreme lower portions of north coast streams. Few anglers are adept to catching steelhead in tidewater but this could make for an exciting new challenge for steelheaders desperate to connect with holiday chrome. The Wilson and Nestucca will offer the best chances.

Sturgeon fishing is a poor option on the open, cold estuaries this week. A warming trend will improve this fishery as well. Crabbers should be excited about weekend prospects. Target the weak afternoon incoming tides on Tillamook, Nehalem, Netarts and Nestucca Bays. The ocean is forecasted to be too rough for safe passage.

Southwest – Mild tides this weekend favor bay crabbing if the participants can tolerate the weather although much of the southwest coast will dodge freezing temperatures entirely. This means precipitation will fall as rain, possibly improving low water conditions.

The Coos has produced a few hatchery steelhead this week despite poor expectations on this system for the 2008-09 season.

The Umpqua is running at near-summer low levels. While a few steelhead are being caught daily in the Scott's Creek area, most are wild. Winters are on the move despite low levels and cured salmon eggs are most effective in taking them upstream into the North Umpqua. A few coho have been in the mix but the majority are turning dark. Substantial rainfall will be required to get it back into decent shape.

A little rain fell on the south coast Sunday and Monday this week - along with hail which is still on the ground. A few hardcore anglers hit the Elk and Sixes river but there have been no reports of any fish caught.

The low, clear waters of the Chetco are producing winter steelhead to stealthy anglers. Use roe or live sand shrimp for best results. Long-range offshore forecasts indicate crossing into the ocean should be possible on Saturday but ocean conditions may dictate otherwise.

Eastern – Pro guide Steve Fleming (1-888-624-9424) reports the John Day river will likely be frozen over by Friday this week.

Recent winter storms put a halt to Cascade lakes fishing. It was great while it lasted.

Dangerously cold weather has gripped area rivers where freeze up is making fishing impossible. It will be at least 2 weeks before rivers have even a chance to thaw enough to wet a line.

SW Washington – Cold weather has an already challenging bite on district rivers in a slump. The Cowlitz is still typically going strong but action is less than impressive for this time of year. Once the temperatures climb, action should heat up substantially if there are adults returning to these river systems.

A joint state hearing will take place via teleconference today to decide the 2009 recreational sport fishery for sturgeon. Smelt seasons will also be set but it's likely we'll have to endure a more conservative dipping season again this year.

Coho returns to the Cowlitz and other district river systems is all the buzz lately. Record returns of adults and jacks to a few facilities has managers excited to predict next year's returns.

Columbia River Fishing Report – And so begins the winter doldrums. With frigid temperatures and poor opportunity, the Columbia River is a ghost town these days. There are still a few die-hard sturgeon anglers working the gorge and the Portland to Longview stretch but overall, effort and catch are at all time yearly lows. No keepers were reported for the few anglers working the mainstem as many will turn their focus to the Willamette River in search of winter action.

Steelheaders upriver are becoming a rare find but there was one hatchery fish kept and two wild ones released for 12 boats in the John Day Pool over the weekend. Kudos to those people that are still putting in the effort.....what are you thinking anyway?

This is the time of year when we dry out the boat seats and become politicians. It's allocation time and frankly, I'd rather be sitting in a wet boat seat. I don't know anyone that's not tired of the allocation battle and we hope to put an end to it as the Safe For Salmon Campaign gets underway. Learn more about it by going here: http://www.nsiafishing.org/safe_for_salmon.htm. What better gift to give than the future of salmon fishing opportunity?

Sturgeon seasons were set on the 18th and we'll report on the agency decision in next week's edition. The spring chinook season will be set in the month of January.

Down low, crabbing has dropped off as the sport fleet took a good portion of keepers prior to the December 1st opener that flooded the lower river with effort. Although crabbers are still likely to take a limit of Dungeness, you may have to work harder to get them.

The Guide's Forecast – Fishing? In the Columbia? Don't do it! I can't even recommend heading to the John Day area for steelhead although it's still a fair prospect for trollers working plugs. Just get your Christmas shopping done! Don't even bother sturgeon fishing.

Maybe you could consider holiday crab but be cautious given the weather conditions we'll be seeing over the next several days. Winds are swift and very cold and being on the water will be even colder. Easy catches should still be the rule but study the tides carefully as the best times this weekend will be very early or very late in the afternoon. BE SAFE!

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Brrrr. The water temperature at Willamette Falls was 38 degrees as of December 17th. Temps this chilly will have a negative effect on fishing for all species.

While there has been much discussion with regard to shutting down the spring Chinook fishery in the Willamette for the 2009 season, the latest news is that we will be allowed to catch a few. That number appears to be in the 3,400 neighborhood and is likely to involve limited number of Chinook per day and a one fish limit. More to follow, once the ODFW makes a final decision. Water temperatures at the McKenzie have plunged to the mid-30s bringing a halt to angling activity.

Prospects are poor on the North Santiam for a while. When the thaw occurs, the water level will rise dramatically.

The Guide's Forecast – Considering the weather forecast, it'd be hard to imagine anyone braving the sub-freezing temperatures, snow and ice that are supposed to occur this weekend. Winter steelheaders are a stalwart bunch, however, so Meldrum Bar may host a few plunkers who do stand a chance of intercepting fish bound for the Clackamas.

Look for the North Santiam catch-and-release fishery for wild steelhead to improve after New Year's as the weather moderates with we finally get some rainfall.

Bundling up to fish PowerBait at one of the local ponds stocked this week can be a fun activity with the family and is likely to provide enough action to keep the kids interested. See Northwest Trout, below.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – The water level and temperature at the Clackamas River are a season level lows this week. The temps are not expected to rise for a couple of months, but winter steelhead numbers have continued to improve. Fish are scattered throughout the system but start low for a good chance at a hookup. Alternately, try at the mouth of Eagle Creek. Be aware that ramps at Barton and Carver have been closed periodically due to ice-up but were open as of Thursday, December 18th. This could change by Friday. Prospects of hooking a winter are fair and will continue to improve but efforts will remain weather dependant until the freezing weather/snow/ice situation changes to familiar wet Oregon winter conditions. That's what we're hoping for as a Christmas present.

The cold weather has waters of the Sandy running low and clear. Expect to fish amidst ice floes for the next week or so. Winter steelhead are available, however, and while it's slow, they are vulnerable to jigs in dark colors. If that's ineffective, try drifting bait. While rain will turn on this fishery, numbers of broodstock steelhead will continue to improve well into the new year and should be good in January and February.

North Coast Fishing Report – Who really wants to define what true steelheaders are capable of? District rivers were nearly barren this week as fears of jack-knifed trailers and frozen rod guides kept most sensible people next to the fire. The rivers are running very low and clear. There were some salmon caught prior to the freeze and the possibility of salmon and steelhead catches still exist on a few of the coastal streams; it's the drive there that should worry you. The passes are nasty with little sign of relief.

The Wilson gave up a few chinook and steelhead late last week and there are likely a few hardcore anglers pursuing them in the lower reaches of tidewater. It's solitary fishing which certainly increases your chances for success. The Nestucca is also a good bet but fish are well distributed throughout the lower river system. Early plants of hatchery fish are on the decrease making the early spring fishery more attractive. Three Rivers (Nestucca tributary), North Fork Nehalem and Necanicum River are also fair early season bets but rivers are low.

The inclement weather has also kept estuary fishers "at-bay". Fair sturgeon tides at mid-week did entice a few anglers to venture out but success rates were said to be low. Crabbing has been fair however and the early reports indicate that the commercial crab fleet out of Garibaldi was doing the best along the coast.

The Guide's Forecast – Not much in the way of weather changes are forecasted to the north coast this week. There is a system that is predicted to change the water conditions after Christmas but the way forecasters are predicting weather these days, don't count on anything until it actually happens.

There isn't a lot working in favor of steelheaders this week. Travel conditions are hazardous, water and air temperatures are really cold, the river is low and clear, good tides are on their way out and there simply isn't a lot of fish around. How inspired are you now? But when the weather change does come, and along with it, some warmer precipitation, be ready because there should be good steelheading along with it.

Keep in mind that we are still a few months away from good fishing. The spring steelhead, especially with the broodstock fish coming back on the Wilson and Nestucca, has been the better bet in recent years. This is not likely to change in the near future.

There is still a few weeks left of chinook opportunity but action is slow with the poor adult

returns we have had this year. Most of the fish are dark and even bright hens this time of year can cut pale. Search the deeper holes for bucks as there are some large ones around. I can't remember a year when I have heard of so many fish over 40 pounds but keep it in perspective; there were not many fish around this year.

If you are getting cabin fever, crabbing may be the best bet but don't expect chamber of commerce weather out there, you will suffer for your effort. Watch the tides closely as best tides are early in the morning or late in the afternoon. Bars will likely be rough so be prepared for the worst and always, always, safety first.

Central & South Coast Reports – Although ocean crab are in prime condition and the offshore season is open to both recreational and commercial efforts, storms have prevented any effort. The same scenario exists for bottom fishermen, prevented from experiencing excellent angling for rockfish and improved catches of larger ling cod as these fish move closer to shore to spawn at this time of year.

Off topic: For my wife's birthday a few years ago, I (Michael) booked a charming cabin overlooking the ocean north of Depoe Bay. There was a large hot tub located in an ocean-view bay window and, as a delightful bonus, whales frolicked in a lagoon close to shore. We relaxed in the hot, bubbly water and watched the giant mammals in awe. For more information on whale migrations, where to spot them and how to volunteer to help others enjoy the experience, see **Random Links**, below.

The Alsea remains too low to fish and is forecast to continue a slow drop through the weekend. The water temperature is in the mid 30s which is not conducive to decent fishing.

As of Tuesday this week, no winter steelhead had entered the trap on the Siuslaw. With the low levels and water temperatures hovering right around freezing, this is not surprising. Fish won't enter until the water temps improve. A few sturgeon have been caught in Winchester Bay. Crabbing has been excellent when conditions have allowed effort. The low, cold water of the mainstem Umpqua is producing a few winters as is the North Umpqua. The South Umpqua is too low to fish. As with most south coast rivers, precipitation (in the form of rain rather than snow) will jump start this fishery.

Coos River steelheaders have been scoring with about half the fish hooked of hatchery origin. The Coquille will fish only after we see some serious rainfall. As always, fish as the river starts to drop following a freshet for best results.

Steelhead have been moving through the lower Rogue while ignoring angler offerings. It has been very chilly in this area and only a few are even trying although the occasional winter has been taken around Galice. Summer steelhead are cooperating in modest numbers in the low flows of the Grants Pass stretch. The upper Rogue is too low and cold to be productive.

At the next rainfall, Elk River anglers should find Chinook but concentrate on the water below the Highway 101 Bridge.

The Chetco River got a little bump in level and flow with precipitation this week but not enough to put the river back into shape. It's up about four inches at Brookings. There are some quality steelhead available but they are a challenge in low water. This is definitely a bait show.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Pro guide Steve Fleming (1-888-624-9424) reports from

the frigid east side, "The John Day River will surely be froze up by Friday December 19. There was ice floating in places on the river December 8, and with the continued cold nights (4-10 degrees F.) should be froze up with little to no open water to fish. It doesn't look good for the next two weeks."

Summer steelhead are being taken on the Deschutes, but this fishery will wrap up very soon providing weather conditions allow access at all. Trout are being caught in the Maupin area. Dress accordingly and make a last-minute check on weather and road conditions.

Steelheading at the Grande Ronde and Imnaha rivers are heating up for steelhead but weather conditions will likely prevent access for a while.

Northwest Trout - Historically, larger trout and broodstock fish are planted in valley lakes and ponds. A telephone call to the ODFW a few years ago to inquire about this program met with a curt reply, "it is not a program!"

Whatever it is, it's scheduled to happen this week as Walling Pond receives 50 foot-long rainbows in addition to 400 eight to 10 inchers. Walter Wirth is supposed to get 1,300 legal-sized rainbows along with 100 12-inch trout. Junction City Pond is scheduled for 350 trout measuring 16 inches or better. In addition, according to the ODFW website, eight to 15 pound rainbow trout broodstock will be released at Sheridan Pond, Walter Wirth Lake, Walling Pond, Junction City Pond and Salish Pond this week. Those locations will receive weekly plantings of these big fish.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report December 10th – January 6th 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) 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/shellfish/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).

"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 (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:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com

Michael Teague: Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com

Random Links

Check roads around Oregon before leaving home:

<http://www.tripcheck.com/Pages/RCMap.asp?mainNav=RoadConditions&curRegion=1>

Whale watching info & how to become a 'Whale Watching Spoken Here' volunteer:

http://blog.oregonlive.com/terryrichard/2008/12/jame_branamankitsap_suna_gray.html

Weekly Quote – "The years will bring their Anodyne, But I shall never quite forget. The fish that I had counted mine And lost before they reached the net." - Colin Ellis

GOOD LUCK!