

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 2<sup>nd</sup> – January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**\* \* \* Be Safe and Enjoy the Holiday Season ! ! \* \* \***

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** 2008 licenses and tags are no longer valid. Be sure to purchase 2009 paperwork before your next outing. The outlook for salmon and steelhead is one of the best in several years.

Although sturgeon fishing on the mainstem Columbia is poor, anglers are reminded of the new head-to-fork length measurement for sturgeon beginning January 1<sup>st</sup>. Under the new rule, a 42-inch sturgeon translates into 38 inches with the upper limit at 56 inches. Check the ODF&W website for additional conversions.

Rain has warmed the Willamette to over 40 degrees at Willamette Falls and pushed the visibility below one foot. While this isn't ideal for steelhead plunking, these conditions should improve sturgeon fishing.

The North Santiam is unlikely to fish well until mid-February and into March when late run, wild winter steelhead oftentimes produces good catches.

Waters of the Sandy River are high and muddy. Explorers should be cautious as there is woody debris and ice washing down this week. The level was 12 feet at Bull Run on Tuesday.

There has been no action reported from the swollen, muddy Clackamas this week. When we get a break in precipitation, Eagle Creek will come into shape early and steelheading should be worthwhile this late in the season. Chrome winters were spotted here as recently as Christmas day. The Clackamas is forecast to drop to 14 feet at Estacada with little change in the level for several days thereafter.

Planting of legal-size and broodstock trout to 15 pounds will resume this week. Skipped last week due to snow and ice, Huddleston Pond, Junction City Pond, Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake will all get a visit from the ODFW tank truck. A tipster tells us stocking will take place on New Year's Eve.

**Northwest –** Local rivers witnessed the most significant rise in river levels in several weeks. Stockpiled snow in the headwaters of these watersheds will likely keep rivers charged for the next few weeks barring a swift warming trend.

Anxious steelheaders were close to getting optimum river levels by the New Year holiday but another weather system will keep the more productive streams off-color at least until the weekend. Smaller streams may offer some opportunity but bank fishing will likely be the only option as high winds and saturated river banks will have large wood debris impeding navigation.

Astoria area streams may offer the best opportunity with Big Creek, Gnat Creek and the Klaskanine River fair options until the next river rise. Action has been reported as fair at best however and this is peak season for returning steelhead adults on these smaller streams.

With estuaries saturated with fresh water associated with snow melt and rough seas in the

forecast, crabbing will be a poor option on most coastal bays with the exception of Netarts Bay. High winds will challenge boaters through the weekend.

High water in coastal estuaries often draws sturgeon in and sends bait-picking crab back out to sea. Although we certainly have muddy waters at the coast, a weak tide series will limit success for sturgeon anglers until the next good minus tide series the following week.

The Alsea rose to 13.5 feet overnight on December 28th but has been receding since then. While it's not forecast to drop below the eight foot level this week, winter steelheading is expected to be good when the water clears. Fish were caught here as recently as Saturday.

**Southwest** – With wind and waves predictably high, offshore fishing will not be an option out of any central or southern Oregon port.

The mainstem Umpqua started to blow out Sunday, December 28th and is still out of shape. It is expected to fish well when there is a break in the weather.

The Rogue River blew out on Monday this week, rising to over nine feet at Grants Pass and almost 16 feet at Agness. It's dropping rapidly and may fish by New Year's Day. The recent freshet is sure to have brought in bright fish.

The Elk River rose from 4.5 on December 24th to nearly 15 feet on Monday this week. While it's a muddy mess now, it will recover quickly when the rain stops for a couple of days.

After hitting 50,000 cfs, the Chetco River has been dropping but as of Tuesday this week the water level was still over 10 feet at Brookings, muddy and unfishable. Steelheading was excellent prior to the deluge and is expected to be worthwhile once the water recedes.

**Eastern** – For anglers who can endure cold temperatures and difficult roads, the Deschutes has been in good shape and is exhibiting decent color. Fishing for trout and steelhead has been fair to good.

**SW Washington** – The North Fork of the Lewis is producing a few steelhead although they are small in size. District rivers have stayed within their banks due to cold weather maintaining snow packs in the upper watersheds.

The warming trend should stimulate action on the Cowlitz and Washougal Rivers as well. This can be a great week for hatchery steelhead on these area streams and anglers may find some fish already beginning to turn dark.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – With another horrendous week of weather, anglers had no desire to be on the Columbia River this week in pursuit of anything. Sturgeon fishing remains poor and steelhead fishing in the John Day Arm is poor as well.

There was one boat angler that checked in no steelhead last weekend but seven bank anglers reported 2 wild steelhead released in the weekly creel check. Although warmer weather may have inspired a few more people to try this fishery, effort and certainly catch remained relatively low.

Most anglers are anxiously awaiting the spring chinook season; or at least waiting to find out how much of a season we are going to get. The sportfishermen's hero's, the Washington Department

of Fish and Wildlife, will meet on January 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> in Olympia to decide the approach they are going to take in the 2-state negotiation of the spring season. Public testimony will be taken at this meeting so here are the details:

**WDFW NEWS RELEASE**

**Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife**  
**600 Capitol Way North, Olympia, WA 98501-1091**  
<http://wdfw.wa.gov/>  
**December 31, 2008**  
**Contact: Susan Yeager, (360) 902-2267**

**Commission to consider adopting plans  
for Columbia River chinook fisheries**

OLYMPIA - The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission will consider adopting new fishery management plans for Columbia River spring and summer chinook salmon during a public meeting scheduled here Jan. 9-10.

Those plans, which include guidelines for allocating sport and commercial harvest opportunities for the popular chinook fisheries, will top the commission's agenda Jan. 10, the second day of the two-day meeting.

The first day of the meeting will be devoted to briefings on a variety of other issues, including a pilot grazing program on lands owned by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and Gov Gregoire's 2009-11 budget proposal for the department.

The public meeting is scheduled to get under way at 8:30 a.m. both days in Room 172 of the Natural Resources Building, 1111 Washington St. S.E. on the state Capitol Campus in Olympia. An agenda for the meeting is available on the commission's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/com/meetings.htm>

The commission, which sets policy for WDFW, held a public hearing earlier this month on new guidelines recommended for Columbia River spring and summer chinook fisheries by a bi-state subcommittee established in conjunction with the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission. The subcommittee addressed conservation buffers as well as management objectives for both sport and commercial fisheries.

But the Washington commission delayed action on those guidelines after the Oregon commission approved a plan to direct a larger share of the spring chinook harvest to commercial fisheries than recommended by the bi-state panel.

The Washington commission will again address the management policies for Columbia River spring and summer chinook after receiving briefings on several other issues on the first day of the meeting. Issues scheduled for discussion Jan. 9 include:

- Gov. Gregoire's proposed budget for the department in 2009-11.
- An analysis of the economic value of recreational and commercial fisheries in Washington state.
- A pilot-grazing project on lands owned by WDFW in Asotin County and a separate partnership, established under the Wild Horse Coordinated Resource Management Plan, with landowners in Kittitas County
- The status of a timber salvage and thinning operation on portions of the Olympic and Johns River wildlife areas near Grays Harbor.
- The commission will also hear public testimony on a policy proposal addressing the North of Falcon season-setting process for 2009 salmon fisheries.

You think the spring chinook situation is bad, how about when they closed off coho fishing in the lower Columbia prior to the Labor Day holiday last year? The last sentence of this press release gives the public the opportunity to weigh in on the North of Falcon process where these summer and fall seasons are set! Now is the time to testify!

It now looks like we'll have LOTS of salmon for the taking on the Columbia River this spring and fall. It all lies in the hands of the policy makers right now on how meaningful a season we will get. This meeting is a rare opportunity to voice your opinion on how to craft those seasons.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Stay at home if you're a Columbia River fisher. The best option may be a sturgeon however near the mouth of the Willamette River. Keep in mind however that the Columbia is running colder than the Willamette so fish will be much more active in the Willamette River and willing to bite an angles offering.

Steelheaders may wish to venture out near the John Day but you still can't have high expectations with the recent success, (or lack thereof) that this fishery has witnessed. Trolled plugs is the method of choice in the mainstem but I think you would find it more rewarding to work on your tackle for when you have a reasonable chance at a fish later on in the year.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – A rapidly rising river will put fish off of the bite, particularly winter steelhead that are falling to plunkers at Meldrum Bar this time of year. Although the water is turbid, fish will still likely be traveling very close to shore but gear is likely to get fouled by leafy debris and sticks.

Sturgeon anglers can often produce good results in turbid water but when the Willamette is rising as fast as it is, it can be a treacherous place to recreate. Fishing this week was limited but the Portland Harbor did produce a few keepers and fair fishing for sub-legal fish.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Plunkers will have the best chance at fish in these near flooding conditions but frustration is likely to take over as debris will keep lures from fishing effectively for long periods of time. Oranges or pinks work well but you'll want to fish spin-n-glo's tight to the bank as fish will be taking the path of least resistance. Don't have high expectations in these conditions although they may improve by the middle of next week. When flows begin to drop, opportunity will pick up.

If you have plans on sturgeon fishing, target the Portland Harbor for keepers and fair keeper action. Smelt will be the best bait to use but shrimp can also be effective this time of year. Like steelhead fishing, anchored anglers may want to take the high water seriously as washed out debris can take out boats and anchors and can be dangerous to navigate in, especially if you value your lower unit. In these high flows, you should expect to change baits often or juice up regularly with a potent scent.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – From snow and ice to flood conditions, the Clackamas and Sandy Rivers are expected to do no fishermen any favors this week. Warmer temperatures coupled with rain and melting snow will likely keep these rivers from fishing for the next several days.

The Clackamas did have a few early returning hatchery and wild fish available and they were well distributed throughout the river system. Anglers focused efforts near Eagle Creek and in Eagle Creek itself as it is a clear destination where steelhead were returning.

The Sandy River wasn't producing great catches but a few fish were falling to plunkers working the lower reaches of the river by Troutdale. With the sharp rise in river levels, fish will be on the move but action won't resume until the river is on the drop.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Both rivers should produce a few fish when the river comes back in shape, which likely won't be until the middle of next week. Keep in mind however that these fisheries are now designed to get the bulk of their fish back later in the winter time, mimicking the native runs from which the broodstock was taken. If early runs are any indication, both of these river systems should enjoy a good return of broodstock fish during the spring months.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – River levels remained too high for much of the week on most productive steelhead streams this week. Some of the smaller systems like the Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem offered up the best opportunity but reports from the North Fork Nehalem were poor on the last day of 2008 (December 31<sup>st</sup>) despite high effort. The river was rapidly rising on New Year's Day and expected to get to 100 inches at least before cresting. This may make the parking lot an effective spot to target returning adults.

Larger river systems like the Trask, Wilson and Nestucca Rivers were still too high to expect good results prior to the current flooding situation that is going on. It's likely only fair numbers of fish are in the systems but no one knows for sure as continued high water will put a damper on effort and catches.

Reports should be more consistent now and the Wilson River had an early showing for some broodstock fish higher in the river system. Some folks, including ODF&W and WDF&W personnel are reporting that numbers of returning adults are clearly not up from previous years. Even though we've had low water and a serious cold snap lately, there should be better numbers of fish available for anglers to harvest this time of year.

Each river system is different and many of Oregon's river systems have switched over to wild broodstock, either eliminating out of basin stocking programs or severely cutting them back. Either way, most anglers would agree that the better fishing is clearly coming later in the winter, and there's no reason to believe that there still isn't a great run of wild broodstock and native fish still coming back to our systems in the coming weeks.

The only other viable fishery to think about right now is the winter sturgeon fishery on Tillamook or Nehalem Bays. Again, inclement weather and now large amounts of debris that foul line will distract anglers and keep them from having a real good time in the coming days.

High winds, rough surf and lots of fresh water have crabbing on the ropes this week. The tides are favorable and Netarts Bay remains about the only option for North Coast spider seekers.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Tie your steelhead rigs and start making slinky's because you won't be fishing anywhere this weekend. Although the larger river systems are still scheduled to be nearly bank full through Sunday, some of the smaller streams may be an option by Sunday but will likely still be on the high side so don't have high expectations for great fishing.

By early next week, the Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem, Kilchis and Three Rivers should be fishable but with low numbers of fish likely. The North Fork Nehalem would likely be the best bet

close to the hatchery. Big baits will likely produce the best results and plan on bringing your heavy lead as you will be challenged by the flow conditions.

Don't even bother with the Wilson, Trask, Nestucca and especially the Nehalem as these rivers will not be an option until the middle of next week. The Wilson and Nestucca will be the best option but as we have mentioned several times before, the bulk of the plants on these rivers now are broodstock and more likely to begin heavier returns later on in February.

Sturgeon anglers won't have good tides to try their luck in the estuary and turbid, debris filled water will certainly hamper success. Don't waste your time on this fishery well into next week. Crabbing is much the same although poor tides often spell success. The best bet will be Netarts Bay but competition is likely to be great if the weather is tolerable.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – Rough seas will again keep ocean anglers from reaping any kind of harvest on the big pond. Big wind waves coupled with a high swell and heavy wind may even keep most commercial boats at bay. Big ling cod and modest crab opportunities await the next calm period for ocean anglers.....it may be a while.

Alsea River anglers continue to see disappointing results. The high flows have most anglers focusing their efforts from the bank near the hatchery. For as many anglers participating in the fishery, results have been poor. Most recently, 3 steelhead were reported "hooked" before the river began a significant rise on New Year's Day. This fishery should be well underway.

Umpqua River levels are expected to rise once again but should drop back into shape by early next week. Steelheading should begin to improve but it will likely be several more weeks before we see a dramatic increase in the number of fish present.

Crabbing remains good in Winchester Bay for exceptionally large crab. As long as the river system doesn't receive a large amount of fresh water, the action, especially this week with a weak tide series, should continue to produce quality catches.

While the Coquille may not fall to the same river rises as north coast streams, the river remained high on New Year's Day. Plunkers working the lower reaches were not having a lot of success with fast moving adults but the upper forks (East and North) will clear first giving knowledgeable anglers fair opportunity to get fish destined for the upper watershed.

Rogue River flows are also expected to remain somewhat stable after a slight river rise over the New Year's holiday. Steelhead action should remain fair in the lower stretches of the river with plunkers having the best chance after the river drops from the current rise.

Even though anglers efforts will quickly shift to steelhead in the coming weeks, there was some decent salmon fishing on the Elk River just prior to the Christmas holiday. One boat reported 3 bright salmon and a steelhead for a day's effort. The Elk will remain open to salmon and steelhead into the New Year but the Sixes River closes to the retention of chinook beginning January 1<sup>st</sup>. One wild steelhead per day (5 per year) is allowed on the Sixes along with your daily limit (in aggregate) of hatchery steelhead.

The Chetco River produced some great steelheading to plunkers as the river was on the drop just after Christmas. It too may produce fair results in the coming days if dramatic amounts of rainfall don't swell the rivers again. Plunkers rule the roost in higher flows but driftboat action should begin to pick up as flows subside and fish slow down their migration patterns. Side-drifted eggs should produce the best results for boaters.

Siltcoos and Tahkenitch Lakes are now closed after what most would term a less-than-stellar wild coho season.

It would behoove all anglers to check their favorite bodies of water for any regulation changes that may have occurred since 2008.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – Most bodies of water are now recovering from very cold conditions and pro guide Steve Fleming (1-888-624-9424) reports, "The river is still somewhat frozen, but the ice should start flowing out in the next day or two. No fishing to speak of once the ice starts out, but it is supposed to be in the high 20's and low 30's at night. Might be fishable in 10 days but catchable????

### **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/shellfish/crab/index.htm](http://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](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 –**

**Subscriber Randy** sent in this question: "Do you have info regarding the optimum fishing levels of Oregon coastal rivers for salmon and steelhead?"

**Bob Rees'** reply – “Thanks for your email and thanks for being a subscriber to The Guide's Forecast. This information is often available to our full length subscribers but I will re-post the info here. I typically use the Wilson River gauge as an example for several other rivers that don't have river gauges on them. I am most familiar with north Oregon Coast river levels.

Using the link from our home page at [www.TheGuidesForecast.com](http://www.TheGuidesForecast.com), when the Wilson River is between 4.5 and 6 foot, it is fishing at optimum levels. Any lower than 4.5 foot and it is typically low and clear. When the Wilson is running at 6.5 to 8.0, oftentimes, smaller streams like the Kilchis, Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem are running good. When the Wilson is running at "optimum" levels (again, between 4.5 and 6 foot), the Trask and Nestucca are generally fishing good. Both of those rivers have their own gauges however that you may want to become more familiar with. I know the Trask fishes best between 6.5 and 8 foot. Finally, when the Wilson is low and clear, the mainstem Nehalem is typically fishing well.

Hope that helps, you question is timely as it is getting to be that time of year.....Steelhead! Good luck!”

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

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### **Random Links**

Oregon Fish and Wildlife – regulations for this year!

<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/>

**Weekly Quote** – Happy New Year!

**GOOD LUCK!**