

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 16<sup>th</sup> – January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** Keeper sturgeon were taken on the lower Willamette during the last retention period. Keep at it with fresh bait and be sure to measure fork length, not to the tip of the tail.

As Willamette flows once again come under control, plunkers working Meldrum Bar should begin to intercept steelhead close to the bank over the weekend. On years of high returns, the first spring chinook of the season can be intercepted in this fishery. It's unlikely to happen with the low return predicted this season to the Willamette.

Fishing has been slow on the Clackamas but the color is very good. Best results are coming to those fishing the seams with bait. Eagle Creek came into shape but was slow over the weekend.

Snowmelt is delaying the Sandy dropping into shape but the color is good. It was still over 11 feet at Bull Run as of January 13th. Oxbow Park has been re-opened and the Dabney launch has been cleaned up. It will likely fish good by tomorrow.

Junction City Pond, Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake are scheduled to be planted with legal and larger trout. Huddleston Pond was stocked the week of January 5th The 2009 stocking schedule is online at <http://tinyurl.com/4spacl>.

**Northwest –** Steelheaders finally had something good to report in recent days. The Kilchis River fished well early in the week with most of the fish released under the wild fish rule. Hatchery returns are minimal on this river.

The North Fork Nehalem produced some good fishing on Tuesday and adult collection at the hatchery is going well.

The Necanicum is a good bet for bank anglers and a serious problem for boaters as multiple trees are impeding passage. It's likely that early returning hatchery fish will begin spawning in smaller tributaries in these streams beginning this week.

The Trask River put out multiple steelhead for bank anglers working the Dam Hole from the bank. This hole fishes best in high water and will likely slow as flows drop. Driftboating the lower stretches however should be fruitful over the weekend.

The Wilson River will be jammed with anglers over the weekend but some quality fish are likely to be caught. The first good shot of broodstock fish should arrive and given current ocean conditions, they should be large. Most anglers have taken to side-drifting small baits but plugs will take fish as well in the softer water along the rivers edge.

The Nestucca will also be an angler favorite over the weekend with the higher drifts producing the best results on the early part of the receding river flow. Quality hatchery fish should also be available on this system although better returns are more likely in about 3 weeks.

Morning tides will be fair for anglers in pursuit of Tillamook Bay sturgeon. With all the bait-pickers pushed out to sea, this could be a good opportunity for quality keepers. Sand shrimp will

produce the best results.

**Southwest –** Anglers could get a window of opportunity over the weekend to pursue offshore species. Lingcod will be the target of choice and sport crabbers could see good results as well.

Coastal river conditions will give anglers reason for optimism as they will be in prime shape. Steelheading is expected to be good in most rivers. Water has cleared for the most part and levels are dropping.

Steelheading was slow over the past weekend on the mainstem Umpqua with the water color fair and improving. The South Umpqua has been producing a mix of wild and hatchery fish. The water on the North Umpqua is coming down, producing a few steelhead and should fish well in the coming weekend.

Anglers are hooking a few winter steelhead on the East Fork of the Coquille River.

As of Tuesday this week the Rogue was flowing 6,860 cfs at Agness, a good level for plunkers although driftboats were hooking fish as well by side-drifting and pulling plugs. Winter steelhead are well distributed through the Grants Pass stretch.

The Chetco was running at 2450 cfs and at four feet on January 13th. It was fishing well for winter steelhead but drift-boating will be challenging when flows drop below 2,000 cfs. Offshore fishing for lingcod, rock fish and cabezon will be excellent whenever ocean conditions allow.

**Eastern –** Nymph fishers have been taking some nice trout on the Crooked River this week.

Although much warmer water is needed to stimulate a smallmouth bass bite, steelhead will be an option for motivated anglers in the Clarno to Service Creek stretch. Hardware is the best option under these conditions.

Lake Billy Chinook will be a good bet for bull trout this weekend.

**SW Washington –** After the major flooding of last week, rivers are dropping fast and surprisingly, should produce fair catches of steelhead late into the weekend. Although the bulk of the early hatchery fish have gone through, a mix of later returning hatchery fish as well as a few wild ones should be available on the Cowlitz and Kalama Rivers.

The Lewis River should also produce a few fish but anglers continue to be disappointed with the returns in recent years.

Commercial netters have reported pilot schools of smelt in the lower Columbia River but no signs of returns to the Cowlitz this week. The warming trend is likely to trigger mainstem migration but spawning fish likely won't hit the Cowlitz for another few weeks.

**Columbia River Fishing Report –** It will be many more months before there is something worthwhile to report on the mainstem Columbia but since the sturgeon quotas above Bonneville Dam have zeroed out again, effort is picking up with catches only fair. The Bonneville Pool has traditionally produced some of the best catches on the Columbia in years past but effort has dropped off and so have catches. The Dalles Pool is producing fair results for the few people participating in the fishery. In The Dalles Pool, weekly checking showed one legal white sturgeon kept, plus nine sublegals released for 20 bank anglers; and four legal white sturgeon kept, plus one oversize and 40 sublegal sturgeon released for seven boats.

Commercial netters reported smelt in the lower river last week although I have no confirmed reports of commercials taking smelt and putting them up for sale but this is often when pilot runs begin to make a fair showing.

Anglers are still waiting for news on what the 2009 spring Chinook season is going to be and hopefully, the bi-state managers will come to a compromise so we know what to expect. We should be able to report that information in the next week or two.

**The Guide's Forecast** – It'll be a nice day to catch nothing on the mainstem although anglers in the know may be able to target sturgeon in the river near and downstream of the mouth of the Willamette. Some anglers claim to have good luck in higher flows and with smelt in the river, if an angler can get his/her hands on some fresh smelt, you may stand a chance at some good numbers of fish. The warming trend we are currently experiencing often triggers better numbers of smelt to return to the Columbia.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – Water visibility of the lower Willamette remains at less than one foot, just the way sturgeon prefer it. They'll be more active, however, when the temperature is above the current low 40s.

The Santiams are high and expected to remain that way for weeks to come.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Sturgeon fishing should be rewarding in the lower Willamette during the Thursday, Friday and Saturday retention periods. Until (and if) fresh smelt becomes widely available, try frozen smelt, squid or sand shrimp. Portland Harbor, Multnomah Channel and Oregon City have been productive areas recently with shakers keeping anglers entertained while seeking legal-sized fish.

While attention will be focused on sturgeon this week, it won't be long until we see the first spring Chinook hopefuls trolling the lower Willamette. Until and unless special regulations are put in place, the river will be open seven days per week with a two-fish bag limit. Springers must be of hatchery origin to be retained.

ODFW officials are looking for is seeking volunteer McKenzie River anglers to help conduct catch surveys. The purpose is to estimate the abundance of particular species. Fishing can occur at any time of the year anywhere on the McKenzie. For more information and to obtain a survey form, contact ODFW biologist Erik Moberly at 726-3515 Ext. 28 or Email [erik.r.moberly@state.or.us](mailto:erik.r.moberly@state.or.us).

**Northwest Trout** - Eight to 15 pound brood stock rainbows were released this week at Sheridan Pond, Walter Wirth Lake, Walling Pond, Junction City Pond and Salish Pond. These waters will be planted with large brood trout again next week.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – The Clackamas will drop below the 13-foot level over the coming weekend. This is generally considered to be a good level for fishing. Steelhead are scattered and will respond to cured coon shrimp or fresh sand shrimp. Catches have been decent and it looks like the time has come to hit this river. Eagle Creek has produced multiple winter steelhead hookups this week but as is the case with these fish, many more were hooked than were landed.

The Sandy River dropped and cleared mid-week. Winter steelhead are available in decent number now and catches have been fair to good. Wade with care: the sand is deep in places and very soft.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – It's the week NW steelheaders have been waiting for. After several weeks of low flows, followed by several weeks of high flows and floods, water levels on all NW streams have stabilized and are currently fishing well. Reports have come in from all river systems and as usual, after such a prolonged period of poor conditions, action was good.

Early reports from the North Fork Nehalem and Three Rivers indicated action was fair for this time of year. The North Fork Nehalem Hatchery reported good catches on Tuesday with the best action at the handicap platform for anglers using corkies and eggs. Some limits were taken and good numbers of fish were entering the trap. Three Rivers on the other hand was not really all that good. Water temperatures remained fairly cold but planted numbers of steelhead in Three Rivers has dropped in recent years although that is supposed to change back so bank anglers can have better opportunity for them. As for this freshet, the effort was fairly high but the production wasn't.

The Kilchis was fishing good at about the same time with reports of 5 to 7 fish for one guide boat that had lots of room to fish. Some powerboats were working the lower stretches of this mostly wild fish fishery. There are some hatchery fish available in this river but hatchery plants have dwindled in recent years.

Reports from the Necanicum were less than impressive for a group that floated the river on Wednesday. They reported a large number of downed trees making it very challenging to get the boat downriver. They had to rope their boat over one tree, only to find an upside driftboat on the downstream side of that tree. I hope everyone got out ok; (didn't they read last week's edition?). The river was going to be more dragboating than driftboating by Thursday. The team of two only hooked 2 fish, landing one of them.

**Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** floated the Trask River on Wednesday having 4 opportunities for fish but only landing one. The wild fish weighed in at an estimated 11-pounds. Most boats were sidedrifting but no one reported double-digit fishing on the Trask. There were rumors however of phenomenal fishing at the Dam Hole on Monday but by Tuesday, the action had dropped off substantially.

Boaters were working the Wilson River in light numbers on Wednesday but action was not all that good. One boat reported catching 2 fish later in the afternoon but boats that worked the high and somewhat turbid water on the lower stretches did not find much reward. The upper watershed was clearing nicely and there was some bank angler effort. Fish are certainly on the move and better reports are sure to come in by the weekend. By the weekend however, you'll have to bring your own water to row your boat on. It WILL be busy!

The Nestucca River was still running high and cold at this writing but boaters were still working the upper stretch by mid-week, they just weren't finding any fish. It should improve slightly when the river clears just a bit more.

With all the focus on steelhead on the coming weekend, the bays and mighty Pacific should be a desert for only a few to take advantage of. Although we are not on a minus tide series along the coast, tides are still significantly low enough to allow for good opportunity for sturgeon angling. Effort has remained light with all the debris floating in the estuary and the ocean being upside down. Ocean conditions changed around for the better on Tuesday and Wednesday although it's likely that not many anglers took advantage of the bounty waiting to be harvested.

Crabbing remains poor in freshwater laden estuaries and only slightly better in Netarts Bay where fresh water doesn't have the same impact on the crab fishery.

**The Guide's Forecast** – A river by river breakdown on weekend steelhead action on the north Oregon Coast (from north to south):

Highway 30 streams: Gnat Creek, Big Creek and the Klaskanie River will have fish present but flows are already dropping where these streams will be low and clear by the weekend. Stealthy anglers should take a few fish, particularly at sun-up.

Necanicum River: Only fair numbers of steelhead present and bank anglers will have the best chance at them. Fish upstream of the Largest Sitka Spruce Tree using small baits and light lead. It too will be low and clear by the weekend so target the obvious deeper water and slots for holding fish.

North Fork Nehalem: Will likely be jammed with pressure, the fishing really won't be all that good although hatchery workers may start recycling fish after egg take goals are met. The fish will cruise through the lower river like a jet-boat making the hatchery stretch the best area to put in the most time.

Mainstem Nehalem: Too high and dirty for fishing. It'll be a while before this stream fishes effectively.

Kilchis River: Few hatchery fish available but there should be good numbers of wild fish present. Bank anglers will have the best chance at them where access is available. Early rising driftboaters will have the best chance at them downstream of the Logger Bridge. Plugs should become effective.

Wilson River: Likely the best chance at a quality hatchery fish but you won't be alone. It's likely this will be the most crowded river in NW Oregon this weekend (but there is a reason for that). The upper float should fish well until Saturday when the lower stretch will then put out the most fish. Like other streams, the early bird will get the most action.

Trask River: By the weekend, action is likely to slow but early risers should still be able to take some fish. There are a few hatchery strays in the Trask but the bulk of the fish should be wild. The lower stretch from Loren's Drift downstream will produce the best results.

Nestucca River: Although there should be some fish present, it'll likely be a bit longer before you can expect better results from this river system. Broodstock fish seem to be showing in better numbers later on in the season. The best drifts however will be from 5<sup>1/2</sup> Bridge to Three Rivers but you can still expect high water conditions into the weekend but water clarity should be great.

Sturgeon tides should be favorable over the weekend with an all morning outgoing tide. Sand shrimp should fish effectively in the deeper channels as the tide goes out. Competition for your baits should be at a minimum with most of the crabs washed out to sea.

And speaking of sea, check the local buoy reports as bottomfishing and ocean crabbing could be a nice option for the weekend. With an east wind blowing, the ocean could be quite comfortable although a 10 foot swell from the west is in the forecast. Action should be great if we can get out!

**Central & South Coast Reports** – Limits of good-sized, hard-shelled Dungeness were taken offshore earlier this week when the ocean was calm. Fishing for rockfish was excellent and larger ling cod are showing in catches as they move closer to shore to spawn at this time of year.

Prospects don't look positive for bar crossings this weekend with seas kicking up again. Try it on the afternoon incoming tides this weekend.

Crabbing has improved in bays and estuaries on the central and southern Oregon coast which are recovering from the influx of fresh water from rain storms. Yaquina, Winchester and Coos bays have all reported worthwhile results but give Alsea Bay some more time; it's been very slow.

The Alsea has been producing winter steelhead daily this week and by the look of the anglers lined up on the banks, it's no secret. Baits of shrimp or good-quality cured eggs have been most effective.

Well over 200 steelhead have returned to the hatchery.

Steelheading has been slow on the Siuslaw but the lack of action hasn't had an effect on the number of anglers trying, even on weekdays. Pressure has been very heavy this week but about 90% of the anglers here are going home empty handed.

Coquille anglers have continued to experience good catches of winter steelhead on a variety of baits and lures. Side-drifters on the East Fork Coquille have been doing well all week.

Steelhead are being taken on the mainstem Umpqua by plunkers. Multiple hookups have been the rule but most of the steelhead landed have been wild, requiring release here. Some of the better catches have come from the lower South Umpqua where anglers are drifting bait for best results. The North Umpqua has been slow even though over 200 have returned to the hatchery facility.

The Rogue was flowing at 6,400 cfs at Agness on January 15th and the river is dropping and getting clearer. Steelheaders are employing lighter leaders and stealth tactics to take fish now. While the majority of steelhead in the system now are wild, one unclipped winter over 24 inches may be kept per day up to five per year below the Hog Creek Boat Ramp. Action has slowed on the lower Rogue and in the Grants Pass stretch and has remained slow on the upper river.

Elk River level are getting low for the best results although steelheading has been good recently and even a few late fall Chinook have been caught.

At 1,800 cfs and dropping at Brookings on Thursday this week, the Chetco is getting low. This level is likely to ding up some driftboats. While fishing has slowed, anglers employing ling, light leaders have continued to hook up. Offshore fishing for rockfish, cabezon and large ling cod yielded limits earlier this week in mild offshore conditions.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – Prospects are good this weekend for fishing on the Crooked River. Anglers are reminded that no bait is allowed as the Crooked is restricted to flies and artificial lures only.

#### **Washington fishing reports:**

**From the WDF&W Weekender Report January 7<sup>th</sup> – January 24<sup>th</sup> 2008**

#### **Whether fishing, hunting or clam digging, be wary of weather-related hazards**

Wild weather – including a deep freeze followed by a Pineapple Express – has presented challenges for anyone hoping to fish, hunt or otherwise spend time outdoors in the new year.

With much of the state buried in snow, simply getting to recreation areas has been a problem in recent days.

As conditions improve, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is urging everyone to exercise caution as they venture outside to take advantage of recreational activities around the state.

"Right now, many rivers are near flood stage, and many lakes in eastern Washington are covered with a thin layer of ice. Many roads are still slick or buried in snow," said Mike Cenci, WDFW deputy chief of enforcement. "These and other weather-related conditions should be on the top of everyone's mind as they head outdoors to take advantage of recreational opportunities now available around the state."

One such opportunity is a razor clam dig scheduled Jan. 8-11 at Twin Harbors, Copalis and Mocrocks, and Jan. 9-11 at Long Beach. Digging will be allowed only during the hours between noon and midnight.

Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager, reminds diggers to bring a lantern or a flashlight, and to be mindful of the surf. "There are plenty of clams to harvest and, hopefully, the weather and surf will cooperate," he said.

Some lakes in eastern Washington have also been producing good catches of trout, although area biologists are advising anglers to steer clear of those covered by thin ice. According to U.S. Coast Guard guidelines, no one should venture onto ice less than four inches thick. As much as nine inches may be needed to safely support snowmobiles or other vehicles.

"All the snow we've had in this region has insulated a relatively thin ice cover on many lakes," said one WDFW biologist working out of the department's Spokane office. "We don't recommend going out on ice like that."

### **North Puget Sound**

A snowy holiday season made for tough fishing throughout most of the region. But weather conditions have improved for anglers, who now have a choice to make: cast for **steelhead** in the local rivers or fish for **chinook salmon** on Puget Sound.

Since the start of the new year – when marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay) and 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) opened for **salmon** fishing – the catch rate has improved on the Sound, said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist.

According to creel checks in the region, 14 anglers were checked with five chinook at the Camano Island ramp Jan. 2, while six anglers took home six chinook the following day. "That's good fishing," Thiesfeld said. "Hopefully that wasn't just an opening week spurt, and fishing continues to be good in the coming weeks."

Those fishing for chinook – resident chinook – in marine areas 8-1 and 8-2 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.

Anglers also are finding a few nice-size chinook in Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton), which is open through January under the same regulations as 8-1 and 8-2. But, overall, fishing has been slow in Marine Area 10, said Thiesfeld. Beginning Jan. 16, anglers will have more options, when Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet) opens for salmon.

With Puget Sound now closed to **recreational crab fishing**, all crabbers licensed to fish in those waters are required to report their winter catch to WDFW by Jan. 15. Reports are due for the season running Sept. 2 to Jan. 2, whether or not crabbers actually fished or caught Dungeness crab. Sport crabbers who file their catch reports by the Jan. 15 deadline will be entered in a drawing for one of 10 free combination fishing licenses, which allow the holder to fish for a variety of freshwater and saltwater species during the 2009-10 season.

To submit their catch reports, crabbers may either send their catch record card to WDFW by mail, or file their report on a special webpage on the department's licensing website. Catch record cards may be mailed to WDFW CRC Unit, 600 Capitol Way N., Olympia, WA 98501-1091. The online reporting system is available Jan. 2-15 at <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov>.

In the freshwater, hatchery **steelhead** fishing has been fair in a number of rivers, including the Snoqualmie and Skykomish. However, returns of hatchery steelhead to a few rivers have been low, prompting the department to close some areas. Unscheduled closures in the region include:

- A portion of the North Fork Stillaguamish River, downstream from the Whitehorse Bridge approximately four river miles to the French Creek confluence, is closed to sportfishing until further notice.
- The Cascade River, from the Rockport-Cascade Road downstream to the river's mouth, is closed through Jan. 31.
- A portion of the North Fork Nooksack River, 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, is closed until further notice.

The early closures are necessary to ensure egg-take goals are met for hatchery winter steelhead in the three rivers.

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**

A chilly start to the new year slowed angler effort on some area rivers, but a warming trend should help pick up the pace. Meanwhile, several razor clam digs are set to take place on four ocean beaches.

Evening **razor clam** digs are scheduled at Twin Harbors, Copalis and Mocrocks Jan. 8-11, while Long Beach is scheduled for three digs Jan. 9-11. Digging will be allowed only during the hours between noon and midnight. "There are plenty of clams to harvest and, hopefully, the weather and surf will cooperate," said Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager.

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 Washington state annual shellfish/seaweed license or combination 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 <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov>.

Opening dates and evening low tides:

- Thursday, Jan. 8 (4:13 p.m., -0.2 ft.) Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Friday, Jan. 9 (5:07 p.m., -0.8 ft.) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Saturday, Jan. 10 (5:58 p.m., -1.1 ft.) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Sunday, Jan. 11, (6:45 p.m., -1.2 ft.) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks

More digs are tentatively scheduled 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.

Ayres also reminds diggers that Washington's beaches, which are managed by the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, are considered state highways and all rules of the road apply. Under the law:

- Seatbelts must be worn at all times.
- The speed limit on the beach is 25 mph.
- Pedestrians have the right-of-way and vehicles must yield at all times.

Visitors should not park on approaches to the beach or block passage for vehicles that are entering or exiting.

Meanwhile, a number of anglers have been fishing for **steelhead** on several north coast rivers despite the recent chilly weather. Creel checks conducted during the January 2-3 weekend found 46 anglers on the Bogachiel River with three wild steelhead (all released), 15 adult hatchery fish and eight jacks. Twenty-one anglers fishing the Sol Duc caught eight wild steelhead (seven released) and 12 hatchery fish.

Catch rates were slower on the lower Hoh, where 95 anglers caught six wild steelhead (four released) and 16 hatchery fish. While effort was low, catch rates were better above the Oxbow Campground, where 18 anglers caught three wild steelhead (all released) and seven hatchery fish.

"Recent weather conditions have stalled overall effort, but anglers venturing out are having some success, especially on the Sol Duc," said Mike Gross, WDFW fish biologist.

With more wild fish beginning to show up in the catch, Gross reminds anglers that they can retain one wild steelhead per year from one of 10 Olympic Peninsula rivers, which include the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Hoko, Pysht, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc. Elsewhere, all wild steelhead-identifiable by an intact adipose fin-must be released.

There is no annual limit for hatchery steelhead, although daily limits apply. For more information on rules and regulations, Gross recommends checking the *Fishing in Washington* rules pamphlet before heading out (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm> ).

The cold snap has also slowed fishing farther south in the region, said Scott Barbour, WDFW fish biologist. "So far, there's been little effort on the Wishkah and Wynoochee rivers, plus the fish are moving slow due to recent cold temperatures," Barbour said.

Warmer weather and rain will get the fish moving, but anglers may not be happy with the result. "High and muddy waters are not the best conditions for fishing," Barbour said.

Anglers should be aware that several area rivers – including the Chehalis Copalis, Humptulips, Naselle, Nemah, Nisqually, Satsop and Wynoochee – will close to salmon fishing Jan. 31. Marine areas 5 (Sekiu), 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 11 (Tacoma-Vashon Island) and 12 (Hood

Canal) are now closed to salmon fishing but will reopen Feb. 14. Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound) remains open through Jan. 31.

With Puget Sound now closed to recreational crab fishing, all crabbers licensed to fish in those waters are required to report their winter catch to WDFW by Jan. 15. Reports are due for the winter season ending Jan. 2, whether or not crabbers actually caught or fished for Dungeness crab.

Sport crabbers who file their catch reports by the Jan. 15 deadline will be entered in a drawing for one of 10 free 2009 combination fishing licenses, which allow the holder to fish for a variety of freshwater and saltwater species.

Catch record cards may be mailed to WDFW CRC Unit, 600 Capitol Way N., Olympia, WA 98501-1091, or reported online at [https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/wdfw/puget\\_sound\\_crab\\_catch.html](https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/wdfw/puget_sound_crab_catch.html).

### **Southwest Washington**

Snow followed by heavy rain created some tough fishing conditions throughout the region during the first week of the new year. Steelheaders took some limits on the Kalama River and creeled a few fish on the Cowlitz River near Blue Creek, but catch rates sank under high water conditions on most area rivers. Sturgeon fishing has also been slow on the Columbia River below Bonneville Dam, where an estimated 900 anglers caught no legal-size fish at all during the month of December.

"These are definitely die-hard fishing conditions," said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist. "Some anglers are catching fish during breaks in the weather, but it's largely a matter of timing and determination."

With more precipitation in the forecast, Hymer offered a few suggestions for maximizing angling success:

- Check weather forecasts and stream-flow conditions before heading out. Stream-flow conditions are available online at <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/wa/nwis/current?type=flow>
- Fish for trout in one of more than a dozen lakes and ponds scheduled to be planted this winter. Weekly planting reports are available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly/>. During the first full week of January the department planted 4,000 half-pound rainbows in Kline Pond, 1,500 into Battle Ground Lake and 1,800 into Kidney Lake near North Bonneville.
- Look for sturgeon in the plume of the Willamette River, where higher water temperatures improve the bite at this time of the year. Bank anglers have also done fairly well on the lower Cowlitz River. Because sturgeon fishing tends to improve when the smelt run arrives, anglers are advised to check WDFW smelt reports at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/smelt/index.htm>.

Some **smelt** have turned up in sturgeons' bellies on the lower Cowlitz River but the main run isn't expected until February, Hymer said. "The forecast suggests another poor year for smelt, but there are some indications that returns could improve," he said.

Regardless of fishing conditions, anglers planning to fish for **salmon** or **steelhead** on the Columbia River or its tributaries should also be aware of seasonal regulation changes that took effect New Years Day.

- Salmon fishing closed on the lower Columbia River from the I-5 Bridge upstream but opened downstream from the I-5 Bridge to Buoy 10. The limit is six fish, no more than

- two of which may be adults. Anglers must release wild chinook, wild coho, sockeye, and chum.
- Daily salmon limits revert to two adult fish per day on the Deep River, Cowlitz River, Lake Scanewa, Kalama River, Lewis River and the Washougal River. Marked chinook salmon may be retained, but all wild fish – except for adults on the Washougal River – must be released.
  - Salmon fishing closed on the Elochoman River and Drano Lake, Mill Creek near the Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery closed to all fishing.

**Sturgeon** anglers are reminded that a new method of measuring sturgeon for retention took effect statewide on New Year's Day. Under the new rules, sturgeon size limits are based on the measurement from the tip of the nose to the fork in the tail (rather than the tip of the tail).

"The new measurements for minimum and maximum sizes are simple conversions of the old method of measuring sturgeon," Hymer said. "They do not mean anglers can keep smaller fish, only that the method of measuring 'keepers' has changed."

Sturgeon seasons and related regulations for 2009 are summarized below:

**Mouth of the Columbia River to the Wauna power lines:** Retention of white sturgeon is open seven days per week through April; May 9 through June 28; and from July 2 to July 5 or until the harvest guideline is reached. From Jan. 1 to April 30, the fork length of retained **sturgeon** must be a minimum of 38 inches and a maximum of 54 inches. From May 9 to June 28 and from July 2-5, the fork length of retained sturgeon must be a minimum of 41 inches and a maximum of 54 inches. Catch-and-release fishing is allowed May 1-8, June 29 to July 1, and July 6 to Dec. 31.

**Wauna power lines to Bonneville Dam:** Retention of white sturgeon is open three days per week (Thursday through Saturday) through July 31, and Oct. 1 through Dec. 31. The fork length of retained sturgeon must be a minimum of 38 inches and a maximum of 54 inches. Catch-and-release fishing is allowed Aug. 1 through Sept. 30 and on days when retention is prohibited. All fishing for sturgeon will be closed from May through July in the sturgeon spawning sanctuary downriver from Bonneville Dam 5.5 miles to Navigation Marker 85.

**Bonneville, The Dalles, and John Day pools:** Retention of white sturgeon is open seven days per week until individual catch guidelines are met in the Bonneville, The Dalles and John Day pools. In the Bonneville Pool, the fork length of retained sturgeon must be a minimum of 38 inches and a maximum of 54 inches. In The Dalles and John Day pools, the fork length of retained sturgeon must be a minimum of 43 inches and a maximum of 54 inches. Catch-and-release fishing is allowed after the guidelines are met in all three areas above Bonneville Dam. All fishing for sturgeon will be closed from May through July in spawning sanctuaries located below John Day Dam downstream 2.4 miles and from McNary Dam downstream 1.5 miles.

Catch guidelines for areas above Bonneville Dam to McNary Dam will be evaluated in January, but are likely to remain the same as this year for Bonneville Pool and for John Day Pool. The population in The Dalles Pool appears to be on the rebound and the population may be healthy enough to allow managers to relax the guideline for 2009.

### **Eastern Washington**

Lake Roosevelt **rainbow trout** fishing may be the best bet, said WDFW District Fish Biologist Chris Donley, although boat access on the federal reservoir is limited (call the Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area headquarters office at 509-633-9441 for current information). Donley

said shore anglers on the reservoir's bays where open water may still be available, might do as well as anyone in current winter conditions.

Eloika Lake in north Spokane County is one of the few year-round fisheries that is reachable because county road crews plow the right-of-way at the public access site. Donley says fishing for **brown trout, yellow perch** and **crappie** could be decent at Eloika.

Most other year-round or winter-season fisheries in the region are tough to get to or fish safely at this time, Donley said. Deep snow and ice conditions have made Hog Canyon Lake in southwest Spokane County and Fourth of July Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line almost unreachable. Sprague Lake's trout fishery continues to draw some anglers but ice conditions may be risky there.

"All the snow we've had in this region has insulated a relatively thin ice cover on many lakes," Donley said. "We don't recommend going out on ice like that."

According to U.S. Coast Guard guidelines, no one should venture onto ice unless it's at least four inches thick, clear and solid. As much as nine inches may be needed to safely support snowmobiles or other vehicles. Such ice depths can form after at least a week of below freezing temperatures, day and night.

WDFW advises ice fishers to not fish alone; let others know where you are going and when you plan to return; keep fishing holes few and small (under eight inches diameter); disperse weight and fishing holes across ice; avoid ice fishing near streams, known springs, or otherwise potentially weak ice; and be prepared for weather conditions and emergencies. For more information on ice fishing safety see [http://wdfw.wa.gov/factsheets/ice\\_fishing.htm](http://wdfw.wa.gov/factsheets/ice_fishing.htm).

Snake River **steelhead** action is reportedly good from the mouth of the Clearwater River to the mouth of the Grand Ronde River along the Idaho border. Check for latest Snake River steelhead creel surveys posted at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/snake/index.htm>.

### **Northcentral Washington**

Recent cold temperatures and snow have slowed fishing for **steelhead** on the upper Columbia River, according to WDFW District Fish Biologist Bob Jateff in Omak.

"A few fish are still being taken above and below Wells Dam as well as from the docks in Pateros," Jateff said. "But it's pretty slow, overall."

Other fishing opportunities continue to improve as colder air temperatures have helped increase ice cover on many Okanogan County lakes, he noted. Rat Lake near Brewster, Davis Lake near Winthrop, and the Green lakes near Omak all should provide good fishing for rainbow trout in the 10- to 15-inch range.

"Those wanting to fish for **yellow perch** should give Patterson Lake near Winthrop a try for catches in the seven- to nine-inch range," Jateff said. "A small panfish jig tipped with a mealworm is an effective method. There's a public access site at Patterson, but anglers will need a four-wheel drive vehicle there."

Jateff reminds anglers to be prepared for possible access problems at any of these lakes due to frequent snowstorms, and to be cautious about safe ice cover.

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### **Southcentral Washington**

WDFW Fish Biologist Jim Cummins said there is a lull in fishing activity in the region because of changing weather conditions. "The warming trend and rain will increase flows in the rivers that are open for **whitefish** fishing," he said. "The Yakima and Naches rivers were flowing ice last weekend but that's changing rapidly. Shelf ice along the shorelines makes these rivers dangerous to fish."

Cummins also noted local year-round and winter-only **rainbow trout** fishing lakes are ice covered, but the warmer weather could make walking onto the ice dangerous.

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**Reader Email - Subscriber Steve S.** wrote to ask, "I would really like to see more information about surf fishing on the Lincoln and Lane County beaches, what is the best current bait, locations, what is being caught, salmon, steelhead, sturgeon and Dungeness are all great, but how about some action on the surf perch, rock fish, lingcod, and more being caught off of the rocks surf fishing or sandy beaches, is this possible?"

TGF co-editor Michael Teague responded because he enjoys surf fishing and has done so for a few decades.

"To begin with, you quarry off ocean beaches will be perch. Specifically, pinkfin or redbait perch which are also, happily, the best eating of any of the perches.

"The other fish mentioned, rockfish and ling cod, will only be taken off rocks or jetties, a topic for a different discussion.

"That said, you don't need heavy tackle other than to handle the weight necessary to hold you bait in place. Some length is helpful, however, so anglers often use a steelhead rod for this purpose. I use a nine-foot rod with more backbone than required for a perch which, on a really good day, will weigh two or three pounds. The rod I use doubles as a Chinook bobber rod but will cast several ounces of lead.

"Keep in mind that surf perch will feed under the first breaker. Casting as far as you can is not necessary.

"At the end of the line, tie an overhand loop and put on the weight. A couple of snelled hooks are attached to the line at about 18 inches and again at 30 inches from the weight. Pinkfin have large mouths so I usually get a package of #2 snelled hooks.

"If possible, check out beaches at low tide. You'll want to look for depressions that, when covered as the tide comes in, will provide deeper water close to the beach from which you'll be casting. Alternately, look for spots where the surf breaks closer to shore as this signifies a deeper area.

"For bait, sand shrimp is absolutely the best. Unfortunately, it's also expensive (and you'll go through plenty because) and soft so it's easy to cast off. If there are sand (or mole) crabs on the beach you're fishing, those will do well for you. One example of such a beach is at Cape Lookout State Park. While this is North of the area of your inquiry, perch fishing can be quite good here. After a wave breaks, just stamp your foot on the water slick beach as it recedes and you'll see movement in a little mound. Scoop the critter up in your hand as they're only an inch or two under the surface of the wet sand.

"Other baits which are effective are clam necks, kelp worms, mussels and even nightcrawlers. If the perch are plentiful, small, curly-tailed plastic grubs in motor oil will draw strikes.

"Speaking of which, be ready to set the hook. When you're in them, they will hit the moment you're in the water. Tighten up slack quickly after a cast and be ready to hit 'em.

"Other places which deliver good catches of surf perch are Glen Eden Beach and Toledo, but virtually anywhere with a beach as described above will have the potential to hold fish. Just be there to fish the last two or three hours of incoming tide.

"That should cover the basics and be plenty of information to get you into some redtails.

"Be sure to send a fishing report after you go!"

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**

Pacific Northwest Sportsmen's Show on February 4th through the 8th at the EXPO Center:

<http://otshows.com/PNWSS/>

2009 ODFW Workshops:

[http://www.dfw.state.or.us/outdoor\\_skills/workshops.asp](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/outdoor_skills/workshops.asp)

"Calling fishing a hobby is like calling brain surgery a job." - Paul Schullery

**GOOD LUCK!**