

The Guide's Forecast - volume 11 issue number 4

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 23<sup>rd</sup> – January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

### **Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** The lower Willamette has warmed slightly and the visibility has improved. This bodes well for steelhead plunkers fishing below the mouth of the Clackamas River. About 20% of the boats trying have been landing keeper sturgeon but there are plenty of shakers.

Fishing has been slow on the Clackamas but there are a few winter steelhead scattered throughout the system. Sand shrimp has been most effective.

The Sandy River has been producing a few steelhead daily with only moderate pressure. Cedar Creek is a little more challenging to access following high water but has been putting out steelhead. The trio of Chris Vertopoulos, Robert Campbell and Nick Amato fished the Dodge Park to Oxbow Park stretch on Monday, landing 6 steelhead of which 3 were hatchery fish. This stretch is getting too low to safely drift however and should only be navigated by experienced boaters.

Eight to 15 pound brood stock rainbows have been planted at Sheridan Pond, Walter Wirth Lake, Walling Pond, Junction City Pond and Salish Pond.

**Northwest –** Steelheaders showed in force on north coast river systems over the long weekend. Conditions were ideal and although most anglers struggled for consistent results, several quality fish were taken.

The major producers for hatchery fish were the Wilson and to a lesser degree, the Nestucca River. Sidedrifting is the dominant technique employed now days making plug pulling a lost art. As flows drop, fish will become more territorial making plugs an effective tool but sidedrifters will still take the majority of fish but will have to shrink the size of their offerings and employ the use of fluorocarbon leader material for optimum results.

The Trask River put out fair numbers of wild fish with a few hatchery strays in the mix. An occasional chinook was hooked but those fortunate enough to land one had to release their fish as the season closed on January 1<sup>st</sup>.

Most smaller tributaries are too low for consistent results with little measurable precipitation in sight.

Unprecedented mild weather had interested sturgeon fishers plying the waters of Tillamook Bay. After stiff morning winds, water conditions were ideal for those willing to locate subtle channels in the middle bay. Keepers were falling to sand shrimp with an occasional oversize being hooked. Dave Hoelz of Bay City landed his first keeper sturgeon ever on Tuesday.

Bay crabbing is very poor but ocean conditions look favorable until the weekend when seas build from the Northwest. Bottomfishing has been very productive for boaters that have been able to get out.

**Southwest –** On January 16th, the International Pacific Halibut Commission set the quota for the 2009 season at 950,000 pounds off the Washington and Oregon coast which represents a

reduction of 22% over the 2008 quota. It may be a good idea to get your fish early in the season this year.

Mild tides should allow Dungeness to be taken in estuaries although inshore crabbing is only fair. Ocean crabbing may be a better option when safe conditions allow but it's clear that crab populations are down overall.

Lingcod fishing has been excellent for large specimens out of southwest ports. It should be noted that females obviously laden with eggs should be returned to ensure this fishery is sustainable. In addition to lings, a variety of rockfish, greenling and cabezon are being caught.

With the Umpqua at 7.7 at Elkton as of January 20th, it's still a plunking show here and a few steelhead are being taken daily but many are natives. Driftboating will be good when the river drops to six feet.

Winter steelhead action has slowed over the past week on the lower Rogue. A few fish continue to be caught but conditions are challenging. The Grants Pass stretch is in excellent shape but steelheading has been slow.

Chetco flow is down to 1,140 cfs as of Tuesday this week. Rain is needed to revive this productive winter steelhead fishery although fish continue to be taken by anglers using small baits on light leaders. Surf perch have been biting well off ocean beaches in the Brookings area.

**Eastern** – With the spawning season rapidly approaching, steelheading on the Deschutes is slow. Fishing for reddsides is fair mid-day.

Lake Billy Chinook has continued producing bull trout for anglers who can endure freezing temperatures all day long.

**SW Washington** – Storm damage in the form of slides are still effecting the mainstems of the Cowlitz and Lewis Rivers. Visibility will likely continue to hamper success for steelheaders on these systems. The East Fork of the Lewis however remains a viable option and should improve in the coming weeks.

The Kalama is running in prime shape and could fish well with another shot of fresh hatchery fish likely due.

The Washougal put out good numbers of hatchery steelhead last week but most are nearing the spawning stage making for poor tablefare. The action is good however as these post-spawn fish become quite aggressive on their way back to sea.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – Still not a lot to report on the Columbia River as sturgeon effort continues to be focused on the lower Willamette River and to a lesser degree, the Multnomah Channel.

There is very little effort taking place in the gorge but fishers upstream, in The Dalles and Bonneville Pools are taking a few keepers. The Dalles Pool showed the most promise with a creel check of four sublegal sturgeon released for 72 bank anglers; and nine legal white sturgeon kept, plus one legal, one oversize, and 69 sublegal sturgeon released for 13 boats.

The upstream pools become most popular this time of year and with very conservative yearly quotas, aren't likely to last much into spring.

Smelt are the key species utilizing the mainstem Columbia these days and commercial fishers have taken some decent catches of smelt in recent weeks. Reprinted from the WDF&W website, here is some important information for those keeping tabs on smelt.

Recent reports of test dipping on the Cowlitz do show a few smelt per dip and sturgeon fishing in the lower Cowlitz has picked up recently. Also feeding marine mammals were spotted working the lower stretches so fish are present. Temperatures are so critical in triggering returns that they are the real determinant in when the action begins. Biological indicators predict another low return however and the species is being considered for listing on the Endangered Species List.

#### Sport Seasons/Regulations:

Tributaries - Sport dipping is only allowed on the Cowlitz River, from 6 AM to 10 PM Saturdays through March 31st. The daily limit is 10 lbs per person per day. This is equivalent to ¼ of a 5-gallon bucket.

Mainstem Columbia River daily limit is 25 lbs per person per day and the fishery is open 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

#### Commercial Seasons:

Columbia River: 7-hour fishing periods on Mondays and Thursdays.

Cowlitz River: 6-hour fishing periods on Sunday and Wednesday nights.

Fishing Rule updates are also available by calling (360) 696-6211, then press \*1010

Here are some web sites that provide daily river data:

Cowlitz River water flow and levels: USGS Web site:

[http://waterdata.usgs.gov/wa/nwis/uv/?site\\_no=14243000&PARAMeter\\_cd=00060,00065](http://waterdata.usgs.gov/wa/nwis/uv/?site_no=14243000&PARAMeter_cd=00060,00065)

Columbia River estuary water temperature: CORIE Web site:

<http://www.ccalmr.ogi.edu/CORIE/network/woody/>

Steelheaders in The Dalles Pool reported some steelhead catches with the bulk of the catch of wild origin. The check over the weekend there was 6 steelhead (5 wild, 1 hatchery) for 5 boats working the area. Where else do you get a fish/boat average this time of year?

**The Guide's Forecast** – The best news we may get this week is how extensive our spring chinook season will be. Oregon fishery managers will meet later this week to discuss the Washington decision which was quite favorable to sport anglers. A decision may come as soon as the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Stay tuned!

It may be a good weekend to try your hand at smelt dipping on the Cowlitz. Pay close attention to Cowlitz River reports because when they are in, they likely won't stick around very long. If you are serious about harvesting smelt, you should be ready to dip when the season opens at 6:00 a.m. on Saturdays.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – Willamette water temperatures dropped to 40 degrees at the Falls and the visibility is approaching two feet. The river is now

open Thursday, Friday and Saturday and the new fork length standard for keepers is now in effect. Sturgeon fishing has shown some improvement and a few keeper sturgeon have been caught by bank anglers with best results coming on sand shrimp. Plunkers are trying their luck at Meldrum Bar but a steelhead or two per day is about normal here.

The Santiams have remain high since the last flooding rains.

**The Guide's Forecast** – The weather forecast for the coming weekend which called for rain has been amended and if accurate, means we'll get only sprinkles. While valley river aren't too low, precipitation would help to raise the temperatures which would improve fishing.

Sturgeon fishing should be worthwhile during this week's three day retention period. The lower Willamette has produced keepers near Multnomah Channel, Kelly Point, St. Johns and in Portland Harbor recently. While not cheap, fresh smelt should be available and could make the difference at this time of year. Given the cost, it may be worthwhile to make a trip to the Cowlitz which is open from 6 AM to 10 PM Saturdays for dipping.

The North and South Santiam river are expected to remain high for weeks. There are too few fish in the system for these systems to be of interest to anglers anyway.

Next week, brook trout brood stock will be released at Junction City Pond, E. E. Wilson Pond, and West Salish Pond. These fish average from 3/4 to 2 pounds. In addition to the big brook trout, e. e. Wilson Pond will receive 500 legal-sized rainbows. Be sure to pick up a pass at the parking lot; they're free. Last week, a combination of rainbow trout brood rainbows weighing from eight to 15 pounds, legal-sized trout and one to one an one-half pounders were planted at Walling and Walter Wirth ponds. Fishing has been slow to fair so there should be plenty of these fish still available in these Salem ponds.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – Clackamas River conditions have continued to improve. The water level and color are good and the water temperature is up into the lower 40s. The river is seeing more angler activity and while the action isn't hot, catches have improved. The level was about 12.5 at Estacada as of mid-day Thursday, January 21st. Below the 12 foot level, boaters will need to exercise caution as obstructions in the water will be come hazardous.

Flood waters damaged the fish ladder on Eagle Creek which has steelhead to keged up in large number below the hatchery. During the period the ladder was out of commission, anglers jammed the hole taking scores of steelies. While the ladder was fixed in short order, word got around and pressure was heavy even though the winters had passed upstream. Everything's back to normal now and fishing is slow fair on Eagle Creek.

The Sandy is producing steelhead now and again, but the fishing is spotty. Cedar Creek anglers are taking a few with best results at first light. Those fishing the mouth took a few over the past weekend but overall it's been slow. The Sandy usually fishes best when the freezing level is low as it will be in the coming weekend, although the water looks great now. High winds which have hampered efforts have moderated so prospects have improved.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – As predicted, anglers came out in droves as cabin fever had set in big time with recent water and weather conditions. Although NW district rivers likely didn't produce like most folks had hoped, it was fairly productive given the set of circumstances that

we've been dealt in recent years. Foremost, the phasing out of Alsea stock (early returning) steelhead to the basin streams doesn't give an angler much of a chance at a fish in the early season. This stock of fish has not produced favorable results over recent years as they seem to be somewhat unwilling to bite and don't keep their condition for a long period of time compared to the later returning, much improved broodstock fish we now see on the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers. These were the rivers to fish however and they did produce some nice fish over the last week.

The Wilson was in ideal shape over the weekend with coloration perfect on Monday. Flows were still high enough to float the stretches above Mills Bridge and we did a half day float that day just pulling plugs. We came up with no bites and only heard of a rare fish, mostly from bank anglers fishing downstream of Mills Bridge. I did get one report from a boat that fished on Tuesday downstream of Siskeyville and they reported hooking 6 steelhead and one bright chinook on that day. They were sidedrifting corkies and bait.

**Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** reported fair success on the Trask River over the weekend, taking one nice broodstock stray and 2 other steelhead using a variety of methods including bobber and "jiggyworm". He also stated the reports he got from other boats were not that positive.

Although the Nestucca has been slow to clear, success rates have been somewhat low. Like the Wilson and adjacent streams, early returning hatchery fish are being phased out and replaced with the heartier broodstock steelhead. The liberation points of these fish have also been manipulated in recent years with less emphasis on Three Rivers as a release point. Although more fish will be released at Three Rivers in the coming years, the mainstem Nestucca will be the place to fish when the river runs clear enough to produce.

Recent returns to the Nehalem hatchery have been good and recycling is going on currently and will likely continue in the coming weeks. Catches and effort have been light in recent days as flows drop and visibility is gin clear.

Sturgeon fishers in Tillamook Bay have been yielding good results lately. A great set of tides that are not minus tides, have given anglers good opportunity to pursue keeper sturgeon in the middle bay this week. Shakers, keepers and an occasional oversize fish have fallen to fresh sand shrimp in the south channel as well with the last 3 hours of outgoing tide producing the best results. The keepers are reported in excellent condition as they seem to be sifting through the sand bottom in pursuit of shrimp and invertebrates.

Bay crabbing sucks and the ocean bar was too big to cross over the weekend but has since calmed down for good bottomfishing and fair ocean crabbing early in the week.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Can you believe there are actually people that want the rain back to bring another batch of steelhead in? It's reality week on the north coast however and even if we did have a return to ideal conditions, steelheading isn't likely to pick back up again significantly until later in the early spring, when we see bigger numbers of wild fish and broodstock fish fill our rivers again. After such a prolonged period of unfishable river conditions, we've seen the best of the early season returns that we are going to. Besides, significant rain doesn't return to the rather unpredictable forecast until later in the month.

Steelheaders need to prepare for low, clear water conditions and mediocre fishing at best. Early returning hatchery fish will be spawning or spent this week and not so willing to bite. In just another week or two however, they will bite like piranhas but will make poor tablefare.

These river systems will have these poor quality fish available: Highway 30 streams like Big and Gnat Creek, the Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem, Wilson, a rare stray on the Trask, Kilchis, Nestucca and Three Rivers. These spent fish will make up the bulk of the catch in coming weeks.

With little rain in the forecast, it will be a poor week to have high expectations for steelhead this weekend. For those that do choose to pursue fish, pare down your bait size and driftbobber selection and go with more subtle colors. Plugs should also become more effective in the lower flows and as flows drop, bobbers and bait or jigs will produce the best results. The one factor on the side of steelheaders is there is a nice tide series to look forward to that may draw in some fresh fish to the lower stretches of the main district producers: The Wilson, Trask and Nestucca Rivers. The mainstem Nehalem River may also harbor a few native fish but like most other streams, it should produce better results in the early spring.

Sturgeon anglers have a good set of tides coming up but the peak catching period won't be until after dark so it's a poor option for the weekend angler.

The ocean forecast over the weekend looks favorable for bottomfishers and those wishing to dunk crab pots in search of large keepers. Action on bottomfish should be excellent while ocean crabbing may disappoint those with higher expectations. None-the-less, it looks like it may be a good week to recreate on big blue but extreme caution is urged as the ocean is most dangerous this time of year.

Razor clams may also be a good option over the weekend along Clatsop Beaches.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – Fans of mussels rejoice. Harvesting has reopened coast-wide. Mussel gathering had been closed for the past three months due to elevated levels of paralytic shellfish poisoning toxins.

Cold water, low levels and clearing water visibility have combined to make this a tough week on central and southern Oregon streams and rivers. Rain will improve water temps which are currently in the high 30s but there's not a lot of precipitation in the latest weather forecasts.

When the surf is not too high, rock and jetty fishing can be some of the best of the year in January and February as ling cod come into the shallows to spawn.

Crab traps and nets are coming up full inside Yaquina Bay but the vast majority of these are too small to keep. Limits are possible but expect to do plenty of sorting and measure carefully.

Heavy pressure and poor results has been the rule on the Alsea. About 400 winter steelhead had returned to the hatchery as of January 20th.

Steelheaders are having little luck on the Siuslaw where it has been slow all season.

The mainstem and North Umpqua are slow for steelhead with the water low, clear and cold. Prospects are only a little better in the South Umpqua. A few sturgeon have been taken in Winchester Bay.

Crabbing has been worthwhile in Coos Bay recently with even dock-bound crabbers doing well. Tides this weekend will make mornings the best time to drop nets and traps on the incoming tide. Coquille steelheaders are have a tough time in low water. A few are being caught in deeper slots by

drifting bait on light leaders. A few anglers got into good numbers over the past weekend, however.

Low, clear water has stalled steelheading on the Rogue. The few that are being caught have fallen for cured eggs or plugs. Fishing is dismal on the lower Rogue, very slow on the Grants Pass stretch and not worthwhile at this time on the upper river.

The Elk and Sixes are too low to fish. A couple of Chinook were taken over the past weekend At the Elk River, however, but that fishery is about wrapped up.

Brookings anglers will be unable to take advantage of the excellent offshore bottomfishing this weekend if predictions for rough ocean conditions are accurate. If the surf is not too high, take advantage of good surf perch fishing in the area. With the Chetco running at less than 1,000 cfs, there aren't many opportunities for steelheading and drift boating is out of the question.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – Crooked River anglers are enduring cool weather to take the occasional rainbow but it's been mostly a whitefish show.

Lake Billy Chinook is a good bet for bull trout but bundle up 'cause it's wicked cold.

### **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/reqs/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 Year's 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 Scanawa, 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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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).

**Reader Email** - Subscriber Phillip wrote, "I have read your report for some time on the Lewis river and I find some conflicting info about it. Like this week is not going to be a good week at all unless the water clears, its still pretty brown, all the way up to the dam. So it would be pretty hard to fish at all. You might get lucky and put the hook in ones mouth, but the chances our slim to nun.

Bob Rees replied, "Thanks for your input. "I did some more checking around and the East Fork of the Lewis is fishing fair since last Friday. There was a slide on Canyon Creek that is keeping the mainstem dirty despite the fact that the water level is good. It may be like that for a while.

"The Washougal fished pretty good over the weekend, mostly for hatchery fish!

"Good luck in 2009 and thanks for being a subscriber!"

Write to the TGF staff:

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### **Random Links**

ODFW 2009 Winter Steelhead Forecast:

[http://www.dfw.state.or.us/RR/steelhead\\_forecast/docs/2009\\_steelhead\\_angling\\_forecast.pdf](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/RR/steelhead_forecast/docs/2009_steelhead_angling_forecast.pdf)

Steelhead fishing tips from the ODFW:

[http://www.dfw.state.or.us/RR/steelhead\\_forecast/docs/general\\_steelhead\\_fishing\\_tips.pdf](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/RR/steelhead_forecast/docs/general_steelhead_fishing_tips.pdf)

Steelhead catch rates:

[http://www.dfw.state.or.us/RR/steelhead\\_forecast/docs/steelhead\\_overview\\_and\\_catch\\_statistics.pdf](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/RR/steelhead_forecast/docs/steelhead_overview_and_catch_statistics.pdf)

### **Quote of the week:**

"It is pleasant to observe that the eldest and most democratic of all fraternities is that of the fishermen, wherein membership is shared by the veriest aboriginal and the most cultured of cosmopolites. These speak a kindred language and are never at loss to comprehend one another when the theme is fishing." - Ben Hur Lampman

**GOOD LUCK!**