

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 13th – February 19th, 2009**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- The temperature of the lower Willamette at the Falls has improved, rising to 42 degrees as of February 9th. This has had a positive effect on fish movement with winter steelhead counts increasing from low single digits to mid-double digits. Water visibility is about five feet. Sturgeon fishing picked up for many last Saturday.

A flurry of spring chinook was taken at Oregon City and Sellwood Bridge last week. One boat reported landing 3 chinook. Although catches are relatively insignificant, what is noteworthy is the fact we're seeing any numbers of chinook being taken this early in the season. It may be an indication that the run has been under-predicted but it's still way too early to tell.

The Clackamas has been slow but should show some improvement with steelhead on the move. Steelheaders are spotting a few fish at Eagle Creek but hookups are rare.

Rain will improve prospects on the Sandy River which has been very slow with steelhead skittish in the low, clear and cold water. A warming trend by the weekend may improve catches in the lower stretch.

Pro guide Brandon Glass (503-260-8285) reports that the Sandy has a few fish in it. The catching is tough with the lack of rain and cold water conditions through out the river.

Steelheading is slow on the North Santiam although a couple of steelhead have shown in the catches.

McKenzie fly fishers are taking rainbows mid-day on nymphs.

West Salish Pond and Alton Baker Canal are scheduled to be planted with trout.

Northwest – River levels on the north coast are predicted to remain relatively stable into the weekend. After the large tides the area saw into mid-week, hatchery fish should be available on the lower stretches of the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers. The mainstem Nehalem has been producing fair catches of native fish with some breaking the 20 pound mark. Bobbers and jigs or worms are working the best in the low flows.

Catches of wild and broodstock hatchery fish should build in the coming weeks with a peak in the month of March. Give the recent ocean conditions, fish are likely to be large this season so don't jeopardize your success by compromising on your gear.

Sturgeon anglers continue to question where the estuary population has disappeared to. Quality tides yielded poor results over the weekend and crabbing was dismal despite high effort.

The weekend ocean outlook is for big seas. Bottomfishers and ocean crabbers should wait for better conditions despite favorable tides.

The best news of the week came from fish managers, predicting a huge return of hatchery coho to the lower Columbia River and coastal facilities this fall. Over one million fish are expected to return making for some of the best ocean and river fishing we've seen since 2001.

Southwest – Rivers on the south coast are low and clear. Stealthy steelheaders using long, light leaders are having the best success fishing the deepest runs with bait at first light. Rain in the coming week will improve conditions.

When ocean conditions have allowed boats to cross into the ocean, bottom fishing has yielded worthwhile catches of ling cod and rockfish. Rock and jetty fishing has also been rewarding. Forecasts indicate rough seas this weekend off the central and southern coast.

ODFW officials will meet on April 17th to discuss an increase in the bag limit for rockfish and ling cod. Angler's opinions are mixed, particularly if this decision includes a quota which could shorten the season.

The Umpqua mainstem is one of the only southwest rivers with enough flow to be fishable but steelheading has been only fair at best. In a recent steelhead derby, of the 113 fish landed only 10 were of hatchery origin.

Water levels on the Rogue River have continued to drop. Rain is needed to refresh winter steelheading here. Very few steelhead are being caught although there are still some half-pounders still available.

The Chetco River water level came up slightly last Friday but has been dropping since. Low, clear conditions has stalled steelheading.

Eastern – Bull trout and kokanee are being taken at Lake Billy Chinook. Anglers should be aware that the daily bag limit on kokanee is now five fish.

Due to a low run forecast this year, there will be no spring chinook season on the Deschutes.

The John Day River is a good color and typically, there is good steelhead fishing from Wall Creek down to Monument, on the North Fork, the last of February thru the middle of March.

Cooler weather has chilled effort and success in The Dalles Pool where in previous weeks, fair numbers of wild and a few hatchery fish were being taken by boat anglers. This fishery may heat up again when the weather does.

Pro guide Steve Fleming (888-624-9424) reports that the John Day has come up a little and should fish for steelhead the first week in March.

SW Washington – Although most rivers are in transition from early run steelhead to late run steelhead, there are still some fair options for good fishing. Recently, the upper canyon on the Kalama has had a few fish available and although the Lewis is still murky, it's low enough to have enough visibility to expect fair results.

A few steelhead are also being taken on the North Fork of the Lewis at the hatchery by plunkers.

The first few late-run steelhead have arrived at the salmon hatchery on the Cowlitz River.

Smelt catches by commercial boats in the mainstem were non-existent keeping expectations low for the Saturday dipping season on the Cowlitz River.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Well, we finally got ourselves a springer season. Managers met on Wednesday to hash out differences and details on how the Columbia River run of spring chinook was going to get divvied up between sport and commercial fishers and how seasons would be crafted to spread the wealth amongst its users. Detailed in the press release is all the info:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 11, 2009

Fishery managers set spring chinook seasons

CLACKAMAS, OR – Fishery managers from Oregon and Washington set spring chinook salmon fishing seasons for March and April only for the Columbia and Willamette rivers today during a joint state hearing.

Several fisheries, including those in the Willamette River and in the Columbia River between Bonneville Dam and the river mouth, are currently open under permanent rules and will remain open through February. The seasons adopted today will take effect March 1.

On the Columbia below the Hayden Island powerlines (west towers), anglers will be able to fish 7 days a week from March 1-15 and three days a week (Thurs. - Sat.) from March 19-April 18.

From the Hayden Island powerlines (west towers) upstream to Bonneville Dam, the season will run 7 days a week from March 1-22, and four days a week (Wed. - Sat.) from March 25-April 22.

The daily bag limit for these areas will be two adipose fin-clipped salmon or steelhead, but only one may be a chinook. The mainstem Columbia will be open for retention of adipose fin-clipped steelhead and shad ONLY during days and seasons open for retention of adipose fin-clipped spring chinook.

The season for the area between Bonneville and McNary dams was set for March 16-April 30, with a bag limit of two adult adipose fin-clipped chinook or steelhead per day. Recognizing that chinook catches in this area are typically low through April, the two states intend to continue working together to set additional fishing time for this section of the river after April 30.

On the Willamette, ODFW modified the permanent season to allow retention of adipose-clipped chinook 7 days a week from March 1-15 and three days a week (Thurs. - Sat.) from March 19-April 30. These rules apply to the Willamette downstream from Willamette Falls, including Multnomah Channel and the lower Clackamas River downstream of the Highway 99 Bridge. The daily bag limit will be two adult adipose fin-clipped salmon or steelhead, but only one may be a chinook.

The Willamette River upstream of Willamette Falls and the Clackamas River upstream of the highway 99 bridge will remain open under permanent rules.

"Given the constraints we have, we are fortunate to be able to provide this opportunity," said Steve Williams deputy administrator of ODFW's fish division. "We have a high level of confidence that we will be able to meet the objectives of the season we've adopted."

The seasons are based on a forecast of 298,000 returning upriver spring chinook, and a combined estimated harvest of 17,300 fish in the sport fishery downstream of Bonneville Dam.

More than 90 people including sport and commercial fishermen showed up to listen and present testimony at the hearing, conducted at City Hall in Longview, Wash.

And you thought you were confused before? You may have to read and re-read the "fine print" but the one drastic difference in this year's season is that there is more time to pursue spring chinook downstream of the mouth of the Willamette River. It's still several weeks away before fishable numbers of salmon begin to show up on the mainstem Columbia but we were surprised with an early jump start last year and the run was much less than it is for this year.

The success of these fisheries is so dependent on water conditions. Anglers are learning to fish these areas more successfully each year as indicated by increasing catch rates. The way the snow pack is piling up (not quite like last year) the conditions are likely to be favorable and catches are going to be good. Along those lines, the below Willamette fishery is also dependent on good water conditions but turbidity plays a role in angler success. If we get April showers, it's likely to blow out the Willamette River and compromise angler success for most of the downstream fisheries. You can see why it's so important to get as much detail as possible in your weekly TGF newsletter. Stand by and get ready to fish!

There's not much else going on in the Columbia these days. Even the red-hot steelhead bite for boaters working The Dalles Pool has cooled off with the weather this week.

Sturgeon fishing remains poor in the mainstem and smelt have exited the river and are a wildcard for the rest of the season on the Cowlitz River.

The Guide's Forecast – Not much to forecast but get yourself prepared for the spring chinook season on the lower Columbia this year. It's a days-per-week fishery depending on what your favorite stretch is but you don't want be left unprepared because when they're running, you don't want to be doing boat maintenance or tying mooching rigs!

Don't bother with sturgeon fishing, salmon fishing or crabbing on the Columbia this week. Although weather conditions are improving, it'll be a waste of time until water temperatures warm up. A total of 5 spring chinook were reported from the sturgeon gillnet fleet last week with an average of 24 pounds each. These were likely Willamette fish as 5-year old Willamette fish are generally the first to show in the mainstem fishery.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Water temperature readings at Willamette Falls have held at 42 degrees for several days.

Sturgeon fishing was fairly good during the last retention period. The Toyota Hole was good for shakers but poor for sturgeon of keeper size. Remember, the season is now open 3 days a week – Thursday,

Friday and Saturday – and the new fork length standard for keepers is now in effect. Trollers are mounting a spring Chinook attack and while a few have been taken this week, it's still early and will be slow.

The decision was made Wednesday this week regarding the 2009 spring Chinook season. While the new regs go into effect on March 1st, anglers may continue to fish seven days a week until March 15th at which time springers may only be targeted Thursday, Friday and Saturday each week from March 19th until April 30th after which the Willamette will be closed. Two fish per day may be retained but only one may be a Chinook and it must be fin-clipped.

Bridge construction below Belinger at I-5 has created some hazards in the water on the McKenzie.

Drifters should stay to the river right as reports from boaters indicate that's the safe route.

Alton Baker Canal is scheduled to be planted with 2,000 eight to 10 inch trout while West Salish Pond 500 will receive foot-long rainbows.

Despite recent planting of legal-sized and larger trout, fishing at Walter Wirth Lake in Cascade Gateway Park has been slow.

The Guide's Forecast – Try St. Johns or Multnomah Channel for sturgeon and have fresh smelt in your bait arsenal along with good, fresh sand shrimp to improve your odds of taking a quality fish. If the bite is still light, hold your rod to detect the fish. Count on seeing a number of plunkers on the lower Willamette from the mouth of the Clackamas down to Meldrum Bar. This is slow fishing when it's at it's best but they do catch a few steelhead here and the counts at the Falls are an indication that they're on the move so are more likely to be in a biting mood. The middle Fork Willamette is quite wadable at the current low levels and is producing fair to good trout catches to fly anglers throwing nymphs.

The water is low and cold on the McKenzie River but fishing for reddsides has been fair to good. Blue Winged Olives have started hatching but the trout aren't keyed on them so stick with attractor nymphs mid-day for best results.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Lots of steelheaders are trying but most are striking out on the Clackamas. The river is very low now. Steelhead have been taken on Eagle Creek this week with the stretch below the hatchery most productive. For those who are successful, however, the hike out can be strenuous, especially for successful anglers who must also haul their catch.

Steelheading has been slow on the Sandy where anglers are battling low, clear water that is also very cold. Rain will improve conditions here as it would not only raise the levels but also serve to raise the water temperature.

Pro guide Brandon Glass (503-260-8285) reports, "Well the Sandy has a few fish in it. The catching is tough with the lack of rain and cold water conditions through out the river. People fishing Cedar Creek have reported slow action, but a few around. Dodge down has reported one day very slow then the next there's a few bitters and that's the same with the Oxbow drift. The lower river has a few fish swimming through a day, but like I said its tough with the low clear cold water conditions..... We need RAIN its on its way they say so cross your fingers."

North Coast Fishing Report – It's still a quiet week on the north coast for steelheaders. The one exception is the mainstem Nehalem where there is still enough water to stimulate migration and big enough holes to keep steelhead from being too intimidated by clear water. Reports of fair to good fishing along the lower portions of the river indicate that some fresh fish have moved into the system on the good tide series over the last weekend. One angler reported hooking a huge steelhead near the mouth of the Salmonberry River on a spoon. He also reported several other strikes that were light or short strikes which is quite common on cold water situations.

Other area rivers remained too low to successfully float. The lower (tidewater) portions of the Wilson, Trask and Nestucca likely held fair numbers of fish but inclement weather and pass conditions kept most people at home. For anglers in the know, riding the tide with the last part of outgoing offering the best chances at "holed-up" steelhead should have resulted in fair catches using bobbers and worms or bait. I tried my luck in the bay backrolling plugs around Memaloose

on the large minus tide but we were greeted with a stiff north wind that chilled us to the bone. We only tried it for about an hour on Friday.

Effort for sturgeon is waning with the decrease in success rates. In years past, when the sturgeon fishing has slowed by this time of the winter, the action remained slow for the rest of the year. It seems unlikely that good sturgeon fishing will return anytime soon on Tillamook Bay. We also dropped crab pots on Saturday morning (along with a TON of other people) and got the results that we thought we would. It was poor crabbing with 6 pots fishing 2.5 hours during the peak tide only yielded us 5 keepers. The crabbing continues to challenge us.

I did get one report of fair crabbing on Netarts Bay however. One boat reported 33 keepers crabbing on the softer night tide but they were using 13 pots in pursuit of these crab. The crabs that we did catch were in good condition however and there are a LOT of little ones out there for a future crop.

The Guide's Forecast – River forecasts are much more encouraging for the upcoming week although the forecast is hinging on what the snow level does over the weekend. If forecasts are accurate, the Wilson and area rivers are supposed to rise to optimum levels and stay relatively stable for much of the week. Staging steelhead in many of the lower stretches of north coast rivers should begin to make their way upstream and provide some better fishing for boat and bank anglers. The river will still be relatively low so sneaky tactics will be necessary. You'll also still have to stick to the lower stretches of these rivers and fish are likely to migrate slowly since the river rise is forecasted to be slow also.

The Wilson and Nestucca Rivers should offer up the best opportunity for hatchery fish while the Nehalem, Trask and if the water gets higher, the Kilchis River will be good bets for wild fish. With only a modest rise in river levels forecasted, it likely won't be gangbuster fishing for a short period of time like when we experience a true rain freshet but the fishing should stay consistent for much of the weekend and early part of next week. Plugs should also be a viable option in the lower flows. Use solid colors like reds/whites/blacks in cloudy skies while metallics will produce the best results when the sun is shining. It should also be a good week for bank fishers.

Several district rivers that have earlier returns of hatchery steelhead are likely to start seeing larger portions of spawned out steelhead destined for the ocean again. These weeks can be full of these kelts which are really not fit for human consumption. It's anglers choice on whether you want to harvest these fish or not. Hatchery fish are for put and take but they should be utilized if harvested. At the very least, if you don't harvest one, maybe it will die and provide a food source for another organism or return as a quality adult the next year.

Poor tides for a poor sturgeon fishery. Don't bother fishing but crabbing could be a better option. Ocean crab are migratory and more adults could enter our north coast estuaries. Don't risk your life or limbs but crabbing closer to the mouths of these bays should produce the best results and it's a safer time to try this given the weaker tides.

A large surf will likely keep boats from crossing most estuary mouths. Bottomfishing will be a poor option this weekend.

Central & South Coast Reports – If talks by ODFW Commission members and Sport Advisory Committee on April 17th result in a change in bottom fish limits, anglers, who can currently keep up to six rockfish and two ling cod, may be able to retain eight and three respectively. While a rockfish limit of 10 has been mentioned, that large an increase is unlikely while the eight-fish

limit is probable. The other side of this coin is a quota for the season, which, if filled, would cut the bottom fish season short. Stay tuned.

The Siletz got only a tiny rise from the recent rain. Fishing here is extremely slow.

Rainfall had no influence on the Alsea. There are some steelhead around for those who know How (or prefer) to fish low, clear water.

Umpqua anglers have continued to enjoy fair water conditions and fair results for winter steelhead. The mainstem and lower sections of the North and South Umpqua are producing fish, the majority of which are wild which must be released here. Plugs have been most effective.

Steelheading at the Coquille River slowed when the water dropped and with the conditions unchanged, won't improve for the weekend without rainfall.

Coos bay boat and dock crabbers have been doing well recently although rain this week will likely shut down the effort for a while.

The Rogue River did not get a boost from the storm front which moved in to benefit rivers further south. As a consequence, it remains low, clear and slow for winter steelhead. On a bright note, rain is in the forecast through the While 75% of the fish present are wild, one unclipped fish may be retained per day up to five per year on the Rogue below Coles River Hatchery. Based on the counts so far at Gold Ray Dam which are about half of the average historical levels, the ODFW believes this to be a low run this year. The first spring Chinook of the year has yet to be taken and if conditions don't improve, it will be a while.

The Chetco received a decent amount of water from the recent freshet, pushing flows over 2,000 cfs and 3.7 feet at Brooking on the morning of Thursday, February 12th. Prospects for steelhead are good here but only when the water level is on the drop. This river fishes poorly if the level is rising. High wind and waves will keep boaters off the ocean this weekend denying them the opportunity for reliable limits of rockfish and ling cod. While surf fishing for perch off area beaches has remained very good, the rough ocean and strong wind has prevented this activity recently.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Lake Billy Chinook has been producing fair to good catches of decent sized brown trout along with a few large lake trout.

Pro guide Steve Fleming (888-624-9424) reports, "Still not fishing, but will start again February 20. Just came back from the Portland Show, and crossed the John Day River at Cottonwood Bridge. It looks very fishable, and has a cold-water green color. The river has come up to 900+ CFSm and is headed back down. This may signal one of the last big pods of steelhead that have been waiting. They travel an average of 7 miles per day when they start up, so this bunch would be at Kimberly (river mile 184) sometime around March 4 at the earliest. There is always some good steelhead fishing from Wall Creek down to Monument, on the North Fork, the last of February thru the middle of March. So this should hold true again this year. "It's called fishing not catching" (Oh, how I hate that phrase)."

Washington fishing reports:

February 4th – February 17th, 2009

North Puget Sound

Anglers are finding a few hatchery steelhead in some rivers, but the best bet in the region is the Puget Sound blackmouth fishery, which got a big boost with the opening of the San Juan Islands.

"**Blackmouth** fishing in the San Juan's got off to a smoking start," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "Over the last several years, the Islands have been a great place to go blackmouth fishing. And, at least early on, that seems to be the case again this year."

The fishery for resident chinook around the San Juan Islands opened Feb. 1 and, according to creel checks that day, anglers took advantage of a hot bite. At the Bellingham Ramp, 89 anglers were checked with 36 chinook while five anglers were checked with four chinook at Friday Harbor Marina. At the Washington Park boat launch, 110 anglers were checked with 44 chinook.

Anglers fishing in Marine Area 7 (San Juan Islands) 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. Thiesfeld reminds anglers that - unlike in previous years - selective gear rules apply through April 15 in the Marine Area 7 blackmouth fishery.

Elsewhere, the blackmouth fishery in Marine Area 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay) seems to have slowed after several weeks of decent fishing, Thiesfeld said. Anglers in Marine Area 8-1, as well as marine areas 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) and 9 (Admiralty Inlet), also can keep two hatchery chinook as part of their two-salmon daily limit.

"For whatever reason, the northern marine areas of Puget Sound seem to be the place to be for blackmouth fishing this year," Thiesfeld said. "Earlier this season it was Marine Area 8-1, and now it seems the San Juan's are where anglers are finding the best fishing for blackmouth."

On the rivers, there have been a few reports of anglers hooking some nice hatchery **steelhead**. But, overall, steelhead fishing has been slow, said Brett Barkdull, WDFW fish biologist. "Effort is way down," he said. "It seems that most anglers have been out on the Sound blackmouth fishing."

Angler effort could increase in the coming weeks, however. Portions of three rivers - the North Fork Stillaguamish, the Cascade and the North Fork Nooksack - recently re-opened for hatchery steelhead fishing.

Meanwhile, wild steelhead are starting to show up in the Skagit. Barkdull reminds anglers fishing the Skagit that they must release any wild steelhead they intercept.

Freshwater anglers looking for a change of pace might want to try fishing for cutthroat trout in Lake Washington. Anglers have had success in recent weeks hooking trout around the creek mouths. The daily limit is five trout, but rainbow trout measuring more than 20 inches and steelhead must be released.

For more information on the rules and regulations for Lake Washington, as well as other freshwater and saltwater fisheries, check WDFW's *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>).

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

Midwinter is no time to stay home with a **razor clam** dig coming up and several **blackmouth** fisheries opening Feb. 14. Meanwhile, river anglers are looking forward to the return of wild steelhead.

As long as the weather cooperates, **razor-clam** diggers should do well during the Feb. 6-8 opener, said Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager. "There are plenty of clams and the low tides are early enough for folks to get out during daylight hours."

Twin Harbors, Copalis and Mocrocks will open Feb. 6-8, while Long Beach will open for digging Feb. 7-8 only. No digging is allowed before noon. Evening low tides during the dig are 3:55 p.m., Friday, Feb. 6 (-0.1 ft.), 4:50 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 7 (-0.4 ft.), 5:39 p.m., Sunday, Feb. 8 (-0.6 ft.).

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>. Kalaloch Beach remains closed but may open for a spring dig if the clam population grows to harvestable size, Ayres said.

Meanwhile, salmon anglers will have some new areas to cast a line starting Feb. 14. Fisheries for blackmouth salmon - resident chinook - will run through April 10 in marine areas 5 (Sekiu), 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 11 (Tacoma-Vashon) and 12 (Hood Canal) with a one-fish daily limit.

Anglers can kick off the season in competitive style by entering the Discovery Bay Salmon Derby, which takes place President's Day Weekend near Sequim. This the longest-running derby in the state and features \$10,000 in prizes, with a \$5,000 first prize for the largest salmon. Details are available at www.discobaysalmonderby.com

The derby starts at daylight Feb. 14, which means participants will be "fishing blind," in Marine Area 6, said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "The derby's the same day as the opener, so there's no time for any pre-fishing. That just makes it more challenging."

For other blackmouth fishing in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Thiesfeld suggests trolling the Coyote Bank, located about 13 miles north of the Washington coast between Port Angeles and the Dungeness Spit. "The strait produces some tasty blackmouth, but it's a good idea to keep your eye on the weather," Thiesfeld said.

Another derby will take place Feb. 28 through March 1 at Brinnon in northern Hood Canal. Anglers can call the Geoduck Restaurant at (360) 796-4430 for more information.

Thiesfeld reminds anglers that Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound) is now closed to salmon fishing and will reopen March 1.

On the freshwater, success was mixed for river anglers enjoying pleasant weather over Superbowl weekend. Creel checks conducted during the Jan. 30 - Feb. 1 weekend showed 127 anglers on the lower Hoh River with seven wild **steelhead** (six released) and 12 hatchery fish. Catch rates were better for those fishing above the Oxbow Campground, where 61 anglers caught 17 wild steelhead (all released) and 14 hatchery fish. Thirty-two anglers on the Sol Duc came up with 15 wild steelhead (12 released) and three hatchery fish, but effort and catch rates were low on the Bogachiel, where 20 anglers caught three wild steelhead (one released).

"The weather's been fair and the rivers are in good shape, but it's stacking up to be a slow year," said Mike Gross WDFW fish biologist. "Hopefully, the fishing will pick up once we make the transition from hatchery to wild steelhead, but we just can't tell yet."

The same holds true for Grays Harbor rivers, where weather and water conditions have been fair, but the results less than satisfactory, said Scott Barbour. "Anglers have been having some success on the upper Wynoochee above the mouth of Schaefer Creek, but it's been tough going for the average angler," he said.

Anglers may 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, anglers should check the *Fishing in Washington* rules pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>).

Southwest Washington

The lower Columbia River Basin can be hard on anglers in early February when nice weather beckons but good fishing can be hard to find. Sturgeon and smelt seasons are open, but fishing has been slow due in part to frigid water temperatures. Some late-run steelhead have begun to show up in the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers, but the bulk of the run usually doesn't arrive until later in the month.

So what's an angler itching to get outdoors to do?

Digging **razor clams** is one option. Evening digs have been approved Feb. 7-8 at Long Beach and Feb. 6-8 at Twin Harbors, Copalis and Mocrocks. As with previous openers, digging will be allowed only during the hours between noon and midnight. Evening low tides during the dig are 3:55 p.m., Friday, Feb. 6 (-0.1 ft.), 4:50 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 7 (-0.4 ft.), 5:39 p.m., Sunday, Feb. 8 (-0.6 ft.).

"There are plenty of clams and the low tides are early enough for folks to dig during daylight hours," said Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager.

But fishing for **lake trout** may be the best bet for anglers who want to feel a fish tug on their line. At Kline Pond, for example, 47 bank anglers recently took home 91 catchable-size rainbows, plus a couple of broodstock rainbows weighing up to 5 pounds apiece. WDFW also stocked Kline Pond with 1,500 catchables Jan. 26, and Battleground Lake got 150 broodstock rainbows early this month. Spearfish Lake in Klickitat County got 30 broodstock lunkers along with 1,100 catchable-size rainbows, while Horseshoe Lake in Cowlitz County got 30 broodstock rainbows and 1,500 catchables.

"Those trout should offer up some really good fishing," said John Weinheimer, a WDFW fish biologist. "Fishing on year-round lakes really starts to improve throughout the region when the weather warms up like this." For a complete listing of weekly trout plants throughout the region, see WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly/>.

Smelt dipping also may improve as water temperatures increase, but there were few signs of success during the last Saturday in January, said Brad James, another WDFW fish biologist. For updates on the fishery, check the weekly smelt report on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/smelt/index.htm>.

The Cowlitz River is open to smelt dipping from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. each Saturday through March 28, with a daily catch limit of 10 pounds per person. All other tributaries to the Columbia River in Washington state are closed to smelt fishing until further notice.

This is also the time of year when thousands of anglers start to look forward to fishing for **spring chinook** salmon, which usually start to arrive in significant numbers in March. (The first springer of the year - a 28 pounder - was reportedly hooked and released Jan. 31 in the Willamette River.) According to a recent projection, nearly 300,000 spring chinook are expected to return to the river this year, which would make the run the third-highest on record.

However, fishing seasons have not yet been set for the fishery because of a disagreement between the fish and wildlife commissions of Washington and Oregon over a catch-sharing plan for recreational and commercial fisheries. The fishery is currently open downriver from the Interstate 5 Bridge under 2008-09 rules while the two commissions continue working to reach an agreement.

Eastern Washington

Ice fishing has slowed considerably at year-round and winter-season lakes that have good ice cover. Chris Donley, WDFW central district fish biologist in Spokane, said that the longer ice cover is maintained, the colder the water temperatures below. "Most fish are usually less active and harder to catch in lower water temperatures," he said. "For whatever reason, ice fishing seems to be best during early morning or late evening hours."

Catches include **rainbow trout** at Sprague Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line and at Hog Canyon Lake in southwest Spokane County; **yellow perch** and **crappie** at Eloika Lake in northern Spokane County; and **burbot** at Sullivan and Bead lakes in Pend Oreille County.

Recent warmer daytime temperatures may create some thawing and re-freezing of ice cover, so ice fishers should be careful. 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.

Fishing the open water of year-round Lake Roosevelt has been "hit-and-miss," according to Donley. Some net-pen-reared rainbow trout and kokanee continue to be caught throughout the Columbia River reservoir off Grand Coulee Dam by both boat and shore anglers. Walleye fishing is sporadic, with some big fish caught near the mouth of the Spokane River and in the upper reservoir near Kettle Falls.

Northcentral Washington

Bob Jateff, WDFW district fish biologist from Okanogan, reports **steelhead** fishing has been very slow in open waters on the Columbia River and its tributaries above Wells Dam.

"As the water temperature increases during February, fishing should improve on the mainstem Columbia, as well as in the tributary areas," Jateff said. "Anglers need to remember that selective gear rules are in effect for the Okanogan, Methow, and Similkameen rivers. The mainstem

Columbia above Wells Dam also requires selective gear, but bait is allowed. We encourage folks to retain the first two adipose fin-clipped hatchery-origin steelhead caught."

Jateff also reported that **yellow perch** fishing on Patterson Lake in the Winthrop area continues to be good at least for those anglers willing to show patience, since the fish have a tendency to turn on and off quickly. Average size being caught is seven to eight inches with some fish up to 11 inches. "A small panfish jig tipped with a mealworm and fished off the bottom works best," he said.

WDFW enforcement officers also report successful ice fishing for perch at Palmer Lake north of Loomis. Palmer also has **burbot** or freshwater ling cod and catches of that species are slowly picking up.

Rainbow trout are being caught through the ice at a number of lakes in Okanogan County, Jateff noted. Rat Lake near Brewster, Big Green Lake near Omak, Sidley Lake near Oroville, and Davis Lake near Winthrop are all producing catches of rainbow trout in the 10- to 13-inch range, plus some larger fish. Powerbait in a variety of colors works well in all of these waters, Jateff said.

The annual **Northwest Ice Fishing Festival** will be held Saturday, Feb. 14, at Sidley Lake, sponsored by Oroville Chamber and hosted by Molson Grange. Although food, music and dog-sledding is available, the festival's key event is a fishing tournament from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., with registration at the Molson Grange Hall or office on the lake. Cost to enter is \$20 for adults, \$10 for kids 14 and under, with prizes awarded. All proceeds go to maintaining the Hwy. 97 Visitors Center at the U.S. - Canada border. For more information contact Robin Stice at (509) 485-4002.

Fishing for big net-pen-reared rainbows at Rufus Woods Lake - the Columbia River reservoir off Chief Joseph Dam on the Okanogan-Douglas county line, has recently slowed, perhaps because of frigid conditions. Although citations continue to be written by WDFW enforcement officers for exceeding limits or fishing without a license, compliance with the rules is improving.

Southcentral Washington

Eric Anderson, WDFW district fish biologist from Yakima, reports that year-round Myron Lake in Yakima was recently stocked with more than 100 5- to 8-pound **rainbow trout**. Anderson reminds anglers that Myron's daily catch limit is one trout and selective gear rules are in effect. Most of the region's year-round lowland lakes have a thin layer of ice cover, notes Jim Cummins, WDFW fish biologist from Yakima. "With few, if any, exceptions, the ice is very likely unsafe for fishing," Cummins said. "Conditions may change rapidly, but Fio Rito and I-82 Ponds 4 and 6 have some open water and could produce rainbow trout for those who want to fish from shore. A few other lakes may have some open water, too."

Cummins speculated the best fishing now is probably for **whitefish** in those sections of the Naches, Yakima and other rivers in the region that are open through February or March. Whitefish anglers should check the *Fishing in Washington* rules pamphlet for specific river stretch descriptions at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

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 will run from 10 to 13 inches, found in winter groups in deep pools, and usually caught on maggots or small artificial flies or lures.

Fishers and other outdoor recreationists can collect information and gear at the 20th annual **Central Washington Sportsmen Show** at the Yakima SunDome, Feb.13 -15. The show

includes guides, outfitters and lodges from all over the Northwest; the latest in fishing gear, boats, motors and accessories; the region's only officially scored horn and antler competition; and informative seminars presented by outdoor professionals. For more information on show hours and fees, see <http://www.shuylrproductions.com/cwss.php>.

Good buddy (and good fisherman) Fernando C. reports from the Clackamas, "Allow me to keep updated on my last trip. I want to assure you the water level are awesome but unfortunately too dang cold. Holding temperature at about 37-38°F and that is the biggest bummer dude! I fish the mouth of Eagle creek and Clackamas with every great effort. I plan on taking this weekend off to do the sportsman's show."

No question from subscriber Bernie M. but it's always nice to get positive feedback. He wrote via the Contact Form at the TGF website, "I have lived in Central Oregon for over ten years and TGF has to be the best fishing report for our area, even Sportsman's Warehouse reports! Keep up the great work guys."

The Inbox

Reader Richard R. wrote to report, "I went sturgeon fishing on Sat 2-7-09 on the lower Willamette. It was a beautiful day - but I had no luck.

"Boats around me were catching shakers and I even saw two keepers landed. I tried frozen smelt, and even had some squid. Just not my day - but the river was loaded with wishful fishermen. As a new subscriber, I wanted to let you know of my successes or just having a nice day fishing."

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

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com

Michael Teague: Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com

Random Links

The Rod Builder's Library:

http://rodbuilding_tutorials.webs.com/

Self Help Rod Building Articles:

<http://www.rod-crafting.com/resource/articles/custom-rod-shop.html>

Quote of the Week

"Salmon are crazy fish, and once they get into a man's blood he's never quite the same."
-Lee Wulff

GOOD LUCK!