

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 20th – February 26th, 2009**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro - With a near-record return of Columbia River spring chinook on the minds of many anglers, effort increased this week for those seeking an early reward. Angler effort resulted in a poor return on their investment however as no chinook were tallied in the creel check but a few steelhead did make it to the bank.

Early returning spring chinook are usually destined for the Willamette River and with the depressed prediction for this watershed, the peak for salmon on the Columbia is still many weeks away. The good news is that when a large return is predicted, like on the Columbia this year, better than average catch rates are typically witnessed in the early part of the season. Look for success rates to jump by mid-March.

The Willamette water temperature at the Falls is down to 40 degrees with winter steelhead counts dropping to single digits. Sturgeon fishing during the past week's retention period was slow to fair for most anglers. It's too early to expect much from spring chinook fishing although a few are being caught.

Fly anglers continue to take good-sized redbreasted trout from the McKenzie by drifting nymphs.

The Sandy River is getting plenty of attention from steelheaders but fishing here is slow. There are steelhead available to low water aficionados.

Clackamas steelheaders are giving the river a good deal of attention with nothing to show for their efforts. Like the Sandy, a stronger component of steelhead will likely show in another few weeks.

Mt Hood Pond, Creswell Pond, E. E. Wilson Pond and Junction City Pond are scheduled to be planted with trout.

Northwest – Steelheaders continue to be challenged by river conditions on the north coast. Summer low levels are calling for creative solutions but the key to success is being the first boat down the river. Fish are well concentrated but low water tactics and a stealthy approach are a must.

The lower Wilson, Trask and Nestucca Rivers are putting out a few fish for the first boats through using bobbers and jigs in the deeper pools. A rise in river levels is expected late into the weekend but it should provide great results for anglers in the early part of next week.

The Nehalem remains the best low water option on the north coast but like other streams, that also is getting too low to have high expectations. Fish will also hide in the riffles under these conditions, target them with light gear in 3 to 5 feet of water with a broken surface.

Tides are improving this weekend and although they will not hit the minus tide mark, they will be low enough to concentrate sturgeon in Tillamook and Nehalem Bays. Fishing has been more challenging in recent weeks but anglers remain hopeful.

Razor clam digging is often overlooked unless there is an actual minus tide. Diggers along Clatsop Beaches are likely to score a good dig in big set years like this one. Oftentimes, the set happens higher on the beach so you don't have to dig in the surf.

A building swell and high seas will likely keep offshore anglers at bay this weekend. Ocean crabbing remains challenging out of most ports but bottomfishing is good when the weather allows.

Scheduled to be planted for the first time this year are Alder Lake, Big Creek Reservoirs 1 & 2, Cleawox Lake, Dune Lake, Munsel Lake and Olalla Creek Reservoir.

Southwest – Anglers are reminded to avoid the use of diver and bait with so many wild fish in rivers now as this combination is frequently lethal as fish take the bait so deeply.

Steelheaders on the North Fork Umpqua have experienced an improvement in the number of hookups although most of the fish are wild, requiring release here. Springers are expected in three to four weeks, but runs have been down the last couple of years.

While the Coos and Coquille are on the downside of the run this year, natives are available for catch and release action.

The Rogue has been rising steadily since early last weekend. When it starts to drop, prospects are good for steelhead on the lower river and through the Grants Pass stretch. Galice has been the most productive for steelhead and anglers are hoping to catch the first springer of the year in the next week or two.

The Sixes rewarded anglers with a few winter steelhead following several inches of rain which put some water and color in the river.

The Chetco River rose to over 2,000 cfs at Brookings overnight February 11th and was 1,830 cfs on Tuesday this week and dropping slightly. While the winter steelhead run has probably passed its peak here, there are still fish to be caught. Some drift boaters have experienced multiple steelhead days recently. High seas and offshore winds are forecast to keep boaters off the ocean out of the Port of Brookings this weekend.

Lake Selmac is scheduled to be stocked with trout.

Eastern – Trollers made fair to good catches of rainbows and the occasional landlocked Chinook on Green Peter over the past weekend.

The Grande Ronde has picked up and is fishing well now for steelhead.

Pro Guide Rick Arnold (541-480-1570) reports that action on Lake Billy Chinook will heat up when the Metolius Arm opens March 1st.

Pro guide Steve Fleming (888-624-9424) reports typical low snow year for the John Day River, the river has been slowly falling and is now around 600 CFS, and a typical "cold water green" color. Steelhead will be in the North Fork or headed for John Day, OR by mid March.

SW Washington – Commercial catches of smelt were available in limited quantities this week. Feeding birds and seals in the area indicate that another run of fish are in the Cowlitz River. Saturdays remain open for sport dipping between the hours of 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Steelheading remains challenging on district rivers but predicted rain should have a positive impact on several of the areas streams. More natives arrive this time of year when most anglers begin to focus their efforts on spring chinook, leaving these rivers only to the most dedicated steelheader.

The Cowlitz and North Fork Lewis remain cloudy but visibility is good enough to catch fish. Rain will likely turn it brown again however.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Angler effort for spring chinook is increasing on the mainstem Columbia although it really isn't warranted. There is a rare salmon being taken in this fishery but for serious anglers, there is likely a higher concentration of fish in the Willamette River near Oregon City or in the Multnomah Channel around Coon Island. Even in this fishery, you shouldn't come with high expectations.

Anglers were more likely to troll in the weak tides last week but tides are improving although water temperatures will likely be the driver for angler success. When temperatures are lower than 40 degrees, fishing will be challenging. The rare fish that is being caught however are of quality size. The first fish to return to the Willamette and Columbia systems are typically the larger 5-year old fish ranging in size from 18 to 35 pounds.

The commercial nets continue to take an occasional salmon in the targeted sturgeon fishery.

Sturgeon fishing remains poor in the mainstem Columbia but with folks noticing another flurry of bird and seal activity in the Cowlitz vicinity, sturgeon too are likely to key in on the returning smelt run. This should stimulate action in the area, particularly the lower Cowlitz. If anglers are able to get their hands on fresh smelt in the coming days, they will see great improvement in their sturgeon catches armed with fresh bait, especially if you are fishing the lower Willamette River.

The Guide's Forecast – Although anglers have improving late afternoon tides happening on the lower Columbia River this week, water temperatures and sheer run timing will keep catches in check. There may be some activity for boaters working the wing jetties on the lower river but what few adults that are in the system will be more motivated to slowly ascend the river instead of becoming motivated to feed in the frigid waters. Herring do seem to work best in these scenario's however. It's a little pre-mature to get too excited until the water warms to above 40 degrees and more ideally, better than 48 degrees for an early season start. Anglers should start to expect fair results by mid-March for this fishery.

Sturgeon fishing is still a bust as success for this fishery is largely dependent on water temperatures as well. There may be some brief flurries of activity underneath schools of smelt returning to the Cowlitz River however but fish have scattered far and wide in recent months due to a dwindling smelt run.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Willamette Falls was most recently reported to have risen one degree to 41. Very few spring Chinook catch reports have come in over the past week. Sturgeon fishing has been fair for keeper-sized fish. The ODFW reported 89 fish for 250 boats over the last retention period. 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.

Level and flow on the McKenzie has dropped steadily over the past week but the water temperature is up to 42 degrees.

The Guide's Forecast – Sturgeon fishing is worthwhile and persistence (and the right spot) will yield a keeper or two. While squid and sand shrimp will get some bites, nothing beats fresh smelt when it's available. The commercial nets were getting decent poundage this week so there should be some around, perhaps even at your local mega-mart. Springer hopefuls will be seen working the water around Sellwood. Slow fishing absolutely will not prevent many from trying but just getting out on the water is more fun than doing chores at home ... and 'way more fun than working.

The McKenzie has continued to deliver redsides despite low water conditions. While hookups have slowed a little, Possie Buggers and Prince Nymphs will take fish all day long. The trout are large, broad-shouldered and beautifully colored.

A couple of wild winter steelhead have been caught and released around Mehama on the North Santiam but with so few fish over the Falls, prospects of hooking one here is remote.

Mt Hood Pond received 500 foot-long rainbows and E. E. Wilson will receive 800 legal-sized brook trout. Creswell Pond and Junction City Pond will be planted with legal-sized rainbows. Salish Pond has thawed out although fishing here has been slow.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – The Clackamas has continued to drop on level and flow over the past week. Steelheading has gone from slow to slower. Hopefully, there be sufficient rainfall in the near future to turn it around. Eagle Creek is low, clear and slow.

Sandy steelheaders are taking the occasional steelhead but at least there are some nice, finclipped broodstocks available here for the barbecue. Plugs have been effective and there's still (barely) enough water for drift boats. The majority of those trying are blanking.

North Coast Fishing Report – There still isn't a lot happening on the north coast for steelhead. Guides and Anglers are having a hard time getting motivated in the summer-low water conditions as only the first boat through is getting any viable chance at a steelhead. Driftboaters (or I might refer to them as *drag*-boaters this week, were working the lower Wilson and taking a few fish. Both broodstock and wild fish are present and must be approached with caution if you hope to entice them into biting. In the low flows, it's been a bobber and jig show. These rivers are just too low and clear to expect great results.

The mainstem Nehalem is also a fair bet but it too is in need of a rain freshet. Being a bigger body of water, fish will not be as spooky as they may be in other watersheds but still, small offerings are a must under these conditions. Plugs may also be an effective tool in these conditions but they'll have to be fished in the deeper, slower slots to entice biters. Flame orange is an oddly productive plug under these conditions.

On the Nestucca, consistency is far from reality. **Pro guide Kent Anderson (503-550-6303)** reports, "Nestucca is low, clear, and cold. In much need of rain. A few scattered steelhead throughout the river but will improve with a good shot of rain. We fished Sunday landed 3 with a few other missed chances, Monday 2 bites and 2 landed fish, Tuesday not even a sniff."

Fortunately, rain is in the forecast and the results should be drastically changing. More on that in the Forecast section.....

On the sturgeon side of things, more easy reporting. Slow, slow, slow. The effort continues to be high for some reason but action is very slow on Tillamook Bay. Despite nice weather and favorable tides, no fish to speak of have been taken from this fishery. It's pretty clear that they have exited the estuary.

Ocean conditions are variable until the weekend when they will clearly be too big to navigate safely. It won't be a choice weekend for ocean crabbing or bottomfishing although fishing in particular is likely to be quite good when the seas calm.

The Guide's Forecast – With sturgeon fishing and bottomfishing on the ropes for this weekend, it will be a steelhead show for desperate anglers wanting to ply the waters of their favorite stream. Anglers will again be greeted with extremely low water conditions however making the lower stretches about the only chance for fresh fish.

The tides are ripening for fair action however and when the rains do come, Katy bar the door! These fish are desperate to make their spawning run as it has been a long time since they had water to travel in with confidence. That low water reprieve is currently expected to arrive early next week.

Until then, the tidewater sections of the Wilson, Nestucca and Trask Rivers will remain fair bets for fresh steelhead while the Nehalem may continue to put out a few fish from the Beaver Slide to Roy Creek. Bobber and jigs or pink worms will likely produce the best in the foggy water. The lower tides will be later in the afternoon and will produce the best when it gets closer to low slack. There should be a mix of fresh wild and broodstock fish available along with spawned out early returning steelhead on a few of these streams.

Diggers may want to take advantage of late afternoon tides to seek out razor clams or clams of other types in the estuaries this weekend. You don't need a minus tide for it to be productive digging. The surf will likely dictate diggers success along the Clatsop Beaches.

Central & South Coast Reports – Another rough weekend is forecast to torment would-be offshore boaters. Saturday holds some hope but those who'd like to launch would do well to check the conditions at the last possible moment as conditions can change rapidly.

Siletz anglers have managed to tempt a steelhead here and there but most of the fish present are wild.

Crabbing in Yaquina Bay is fair with those in a decent location taking something short of limits but plenty for a couple of dinners.

The Alsea is low and clear and forecast to rise very little with showers over the weekend. Fewer than 600 steelhead have returned to the hatchery. The few fish present are skittish and difficult to hook although, unlike most of the southwest rivers, the majority of those being caught are fin-clipped keepers.

Siuslaw anglers who know how to work low water conditions are taking steelhead but it is a challenge to present offerings to the fish without spooking them. Experts are taking limits.

Boat anglers on the North Umpqua are taking steelhead. Bank-bound fishers are taking a few but are not doing nearly as well as those in drift boats. The South Umpqua is also putting out fish but in either fork almost all catches are of wild fish which must be released here. Steelhead is slow to fair on the mainstem Umpqua. Prospects for sturgeon in Winchester Bay have improved and will only get better with rainfall.

Coos Bay is providing fair to good catches of Dungeness and is one of the better producers on the coast. Offshore boaters are taking crab but ocean catches are beginning to decline. Steelheading is slow on the Coos and Coquille river and will only improve with a freshet.

Skinny water on the Rogue has created a bonus fishery near Agness where anglers are catching good numbers of half-pounders. Adult winter steelhead are on the move through the Galice area and moving steelhead bite much better than those which are just holding in one place. Steelheaders in this stretch are hitting fish on various baits and lures but overall action is slow due to low, clear

water. That may change if a decent rain hits on Sunday as predicted. If precipitation falls as forecast, the last weekend of the month should be decent with fresh winter steelhead in the system and in all likelihood, the first spring Chinook of the season.

The volatile Elk and Sixes river which were putting out steelhead following rain last weekend, are again low, clear and slow.

With the water flow of the Chetco at Brookings below 1,600 cfs, steelheading has slowed. Steelheaders experienced some multiple-fish days following the peak at 2,500 cfs and as the river dropped. Many of the fish hooked had already spawned and were returning to the ocean. Spawned out downrunners are extremely aggressive, however, and will smack just about any offering. The river dropped below 1,600 cfs on Thursday this week which slowed catches. This river fishes best between 2,000 and 4,000 cfs. With the run winding down here, the last weekend of February may offer one of the last decent winter steelhead opportunities of the season as the river drops following the predicted storm front. Rock and jetty fishing has been good early in the day before wind and wave action picks up. Ling cod catches will continue to improve in the coming weeks. Surf perch catches have also been good over the past week.

Hopefully, the temperatures will rise slow because a stretch of unseasonably warm weather that melts the still substantial snowpack will blow out rivers.

The Emerald Bass Club bass tournament at Tenmile Lakes Saturday and Sunday, February 21st and 22nd. Appropriately-named the "Frostbite and Big Fish Tournament," the entry fee is \$150 per boat and cash prizes for the best catches will be awarded. For details go to *www.emeraldbassclub.com."

Catch the Sportsmen's & Outdoor Recreation Show at the Jackson County Fairgrounds on February 20th through the 22nd.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Crooked River Angler are making fair to catches of whitefish although trout fishing has been slow. Dress for warmth.

The Grande Ronde is producing some steelhead with a few hatchery fish in the mix. The water temperature is in the mid to high 30s.

Pro guide Steve Fleming (888-624-9424) reports "Typical low snow year for the John Day River, the river has been slowly falling and is now around 600 CFS, and a typical "cold water green" color. The sun during the day, falling river, high 20's and low 30's at night means the river will start coming alive for bass early. That last spike in water (couple of weeks ago) will probably bring one of the last pods of steelhead up, and except for some Steelie-come-lately they will be in the North Fork or headed for John Day, OR by mid March.

"Our first trip of the year is scheduled for next week end, February 21 and 22. Hopefully I'll be able to report on some steelhead and big smallmouth bass. The new "Centerpin technique" proved very successful for both last year at this time."

Pro Guide Rick Arnold (541-480-1570) reports from Lake Billy Chinook, "I did finally get out for the first time this winter."

"After finally getting settled into a new house we built this last Dec., I finally got on the water in Jan. With string of 50 degree days, we couldn't resist and hit LBC for bull trout and browns on a beautiful sun-filled day. Steve Kelly and I worked the upper end of the Crooked River Arm for browns to 20 in.

on trolled and ripped plugs. The bull trout fishing was a little tougher but we did land a couple of bulls with the better fish around 28 in. probably weighing in at 7-8 LB.

"Look for better action when the Metolius Arm opens on 3-1. Fish the area around Chinook Island for starters....look for bulls under kokes with downriggers later in the day."

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report February 18th – March 3rd, 2009

North Puget Sound

The steelhead fishery in the region is winding down, with a number of rivers and streams closing to sport fishing at the end of February. Meanwhile, the blackmouth season is in full swing out on Puget Sound, where anglers are hooking some nice salmon.

"The San Juan Islands continue to be strong for **blackmouth** fishing," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "It's not as hot as it was a couple weeks ago, but anglers are still doing well throughout the islands."

Anglers participating in the recent Roche Harbor Salmon Derby took advantage of the good fishing. A total of 344 anglers landed 115 fish during the derby, which took place Feb. 5-7. Shannon Terrell finished first in the derby with an 18-pound, 6-ounce chinook. The Bellingham resident took home \$10,000, while Wayne Logsdon of Mount Vernon pocketed \$5,000 for his second-place 16.1-pound salmon. Bret Thurman of Orcas Island was awarded \$1,500 for his third-place fish, which weighed in at 15.15 pounds.

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, blackmouth fisheries in marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay) and 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) continue to be slow, Thiesfeld said. Anglers in those two areas, as well as Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet), also can keep two hatchery chinook as part of their two-salmon daily limit.

Time is running out for steelheaders in the region. A number of the region's rivers, including the Snohomish, Nooksack and Skykomish close to **steelhead** fishing at the end of the month.

Most areas of the Skagit River, however, remain open for the harvest of hatchery steelhead through March 15, said Brett Barkdull, WDFW fish biologist. Although the Skagit, from the Dalles Bridge at Concrete to the Cascade River, will be open to catch-and-release for all steelhead from March 16 through April 30.

Barkdull reminds steelheaders on the Skagit fishing from boats, sleds or any other floating device equipped with a gas or electric motor that it's illegal to fish while under power during the catch-and-release season that begins March 16.

Cutthroat trout fishing in Lake Washington is still an option. 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. Beginning March 1, trout must measure at least 12 inches in length to be retained.

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

Blackmouth fishing is off to a strong start in Hood Canal, while steelhead anglers are hoping for some rain on the northern peninsula. In the weeks ahead, a three-day razor clam dig is proposed for late March.

Anglers fishing for **blackmouth** salmon near Seabeck during President's Day weekend made a good choice for starting off the season, said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "The weather was great and folks on Hood Canal did well over the weekend," Thiesfeld said. A creel check of 53 boats showed an average of one fish for every two poles.

Fishing was considerably slower in the Strait of Juan de Fuca and southern Puget Sound. A creel check at John Wayne Marina showed 186 anglers with 21 blackmouth, while 303 anglers checked at Port Townsend Boat Haven caught 40 fish. At Point Defiance (Marine Area 11), the average was one fish for every 13 anglers.

The 33rd annual Discovery Bay Salmon Derby, held Feb. 14-6, proved successful for Tom Casey of Sequim who won the \$5,000 first prize for his 18.85-pound blackmouth salmon. Ninety-nine anglers submitted 102 fish during the state's longest-running derby.

Anglers should note that the Geoduck Salmon Derby, scheduled Feb. 28 through March 1 in Brinnon has been canceled.

Fisheries for blackmouth salmon 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. Thiesfeld reminds anglers that Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound) will reopen March 1.

On the freshwater, **steelhead** fishing has been slow and effort down on several north coast rivers, said Randy Copper, WDFW fish biologist. "We're still in the transition phase from hatchery to wild, but the main reason for the poor turnout is low and clear water, especially in the Bogachiel and Sol Duc," Cooper said.

Cooper said that during these conditions anglers tend to fish the Hoh River, where a Feb. 13-15 creel check showed that 200 anglers on the lower portion came up with 32 hatchery steelhead and 30 wild (eight released). During the same time period, 33 anglers fishing the Sol Duc caught three hatchery steelhead and 9 wild (two released).

"We should get a better idea of the steelhead run after the next good rainfall brings the fish in from the saltwater," Cooper said. He reminds anglers that retention of wild steelhead is currently limited to one fish per year on 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>).

Anglers looking ahead to **lingcod** season should note that the popular fishery opens March 14 along the coast at Ilwaco (Marine Area 1), Westport/Ocean Shores (Marine Area 2) and La Push (Marine Area 3).

Razor clam diggers are advised that a three-day dig has been tentatively scheduled on morning tides March 27-29, provided that marine toxin tests show the clams are safe to eat. Two digs are also tentatively scheduled on morning tides April 10-12 and April 25-27.

Tentative opening dates and morning low tides in March are:

- Friday, March 27 (7:49 a.m. 0.0 ft.) Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
- Saturday, March 28 (8:29 a.m. -0.4 ft.) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Sunday, March 29 (9:12 a.m. -0.6 ft.) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks

Southwest Washington

Smelt dippers could get their best chance of the season to scoop up some tasty eulachon from the Cowlitz River in the days ahead, while the number of anglers prospecting for early arriving **spring chinook** in the lower Columbia River continues to rise.

All signs were pointing to the presence of smelt in the Cowlitz, just three days ahead of the scheduled opening Saturday, Feb. 21, said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist. A commercial dipper landed 2,000 pounds in the lower river the previous Sunday, he said, noting that the seals and seabirds have been active, too.

"We could be seeing the main body of the run," Hymer said. "We don't know how long it will last, but the next week or two may be as good as it gets for smelt dipping this year."

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. The results of test fisheries are posted each Thursday on the WDFW website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/smelt/index.htm>). All other tributaries to the Columbia River in Washington state are closed to smelt fishing at this time.

Where there's smelt there's often **sturgeon** , so a good showing of smelt could also improve prospects for sturgeon fishing in the lower Columbia River Basin. Sturgeon fishing has been fairly slow both above and below Bonneville Dam in recent weeks, but an influx of smelt could invigorate the fishery downriver from the Cowlitz, Hymer said.

Late-run hatchery steelhead are already moving into the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers in greater numbers, with the highest catches reported at Blue Creek and below the Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery.

Meanwhile, the anticipation continues to build over the **spring chinook** fishery on the lower Columbia River, where about three dozen boats were spotted trolling for early arrivals on a recent weekend day. A few "springers" reportedly had been pulled from the Willamette River through mid-February, but the main action won't get under way until mid-March, said Cindy LeFleur, WDFW Columbia River policy coordinator.

"This is shaping up to be a very good year for spring chinook fishing in the Columbia River," LeFleur said. "The first fish have just begun to arrive, and we hope to see a lot more of them in the months ahead."

According to the pre-season forecast, nearly 300,000 upriver spring chinook are expected to enter the Columbia River this year, which would make this year's return the third highest since 1977. An additional 37,000 "springers" are also expected to return to the Willamette River, up from 27,000 last year.

Under initial seasons adopted by fishery managers from Washington and Oregon, anglers will be able to fish for spring chinook from the mouth of the Columbia River to Bonneville Dam through mid-April.

Below Hayden Island, the new season provides 30 days of spring chinook fishing in March and April, compared to just 12 days last year. During those two months, anglers also will have 39 days - up from 36 days last year - to catch and retain spring chinook from Hayden Island upriver to Bonneville Dam.

LeFleur noted that the fishery could extend beyond April, but that late-season regulations have not been set because of differences between the fish and wildlife commissions of Washington and Oregon over how to allocate the catch.

In March and April, Columbia River anglers will be able to fish for spring chinook salmon at the following locations and times:

- **West power lines on Hayden Island downstream to Buoy 10:** Seven days per week from March 1-15. Beginning March 16 through April 18, fishing will be limited to three days per week, Thursdays through Saturdays.
- **West power lines on Hayden Island to Bonneville Dam:** Seven days per week from March 1-22. Beginning March 23 through April 22, fishing will be limited to four days per week, Wednesday through Saturday.
- **Tower Island power lines above Bonneville Dam to McNary Dam:** Seven days per week from March 16 through April 30. The Washington and Oregon bank fishery will also be open from Bonneville Dam upstream to the Tower Island power lines.

Until March 1, spring chinook fishing is open under regulations described in the 2008-09 *Fishing in Washington* rule pamphlet. Anglers fishing for spring chinook salmon may also retain **shad** and **hatchery steelhead**, as outlined in the rule pamphlet.

Under a new rule approved by the Washington commission, anglers fishing below McNary Dam may retain two marked, hatchery-reared adult salmon or steelhead (or one of each) per day. However, only one adult chinook salmon may be retained per day downstream from Bonneville Dam. This will also be the case in Deep River, whenever the section of the Columbia River downstream from Hayden Island is open for salmon fishing.

In all areas, anglers are required to release any chinook salmon not clearly marked as a hatchery-reared fish, since a portion of the wild upriver spring chinook run is protected under the federal Endangered Species Act. Unmarked steelhead must also be released. Hatchery fish can be identified by a clipped adipose fin with a healed scar.

While the spring chinook run builds, some anglers have been catching **trout in year-round** lakes around the region. At Kline Pond, 93 bank anglers reeled in 86 rainbows on a recent

day. The pond was planted with 2,000 half-pounders Feb. 9. Elsewhere, Fort Borst Park Pond in Chehalis received 3,000 catchable-size rainbows, Silver Lake in Castle Rock got 2,100 and Battleground Lake got 2,000.

Eastern Washington

The end of ice fishing for **rainbow** and **brown trout** and **yellow perch** at Waitts Lake in southern Stevens County is usually followed by new angling opportunities March 1. But WDFW central district fish biologist Chris Donley of Spokane says most if not all of the fisheries opening March 1 in the district will likely be iced up just enough to be inaccessible.

"They won't necessarily be safe for ice fishing," Donley explained. "Weather forecasts indicate more above-freezing days with below-freezing nights, so lake surfaces may be thawing and re-freezing. Productive fishing will likely be delayed until there's more open water."

Three lakes are opening for the first time this year on March 1 - Downs Lake in southwest Spokane County with **bass, crappie, perch** and **rainbow trout** ; Liberty Lake east of Spokane with brown and rainbow trout, bass, and perch; and Medical Lake near the town of the same name with brown and rainbow trout.

Also opening March 1: Amber Lake in southwest Spokane County for catch-and-release of **rainbow** and **cutthroat trout** ; Coffeepot Lake in Lincoln County for rainbows, **yellow perch** and **black crappie** under selective gear rules; North Silver Lake in southwest Spokane County for rainbows under selective gear rules and a requirement to release adipose-fin-clipped fish; and Deer Lake in southern Stevens County for **lake trout** .

In the south end of the region where winter is fading faster, most of the seven impoundments off the Tucannon River on WDFW's Wooten Wildlife Area in Columbia County that open to fishing March 1 are - or soon will be - stocked with hatchery rainbow trout and ready for action. That's the short-term good news, says WDFW southeast district fish biologist Glen Mendel.

"We've had to reduce stocking some of these man-made lakes because they're losing depth and volume and need to be re-dredged," Mendel explained. "Some have dam maintenance issues, too. We've been working with our wildlife area citizen advisory group to address these problems and hope to draft some proposals for long-term maintenance action."

Meanwhile, starting March 1 anglers can ply the waters of Beaver, Big Four, Blue, Deer, Rainbow, Spring and Watson lakes for "catchable-size" (about one-third pound) and "jumbo" (about one-half pound) trout from the Tucannon Fish Hatchery. The total number of trout allotted in several plants throughout the 10-month-long season by lake are: Beaver, 500 catchables; Big Four, 2,000 catchables and 300 jumbos; Blue, 23,300 catchables and 400 jumbos; Deer, 3,300 catchables and 25 jumbos; Rainbow, 15,000 catchables and 300 jumbos; Spring, 11,000 catchables and 300 jumbos; Watson, 20,000 catchables and 300 jumbos. Specific stocking numbers by the week are available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly/>.

Fishhook Pond in Walla Walla County and Pampa Pond in Whitman County also open on March 1 for stocked rainbow fishing.

Three year-round-open small impoundments off the Snake River near the bottom of Alpowa Grade west of Clarkston in Asotin County - Golf Course, Silcott and West Evans ponds - were recently stocked with one-third-pound rainbow trout from Lyons Ferry Hatchery, and WDFW enforcement officers report fishing activity is picking up.

Orchard Pond, a year-round impoundment off the Snake River in Columbia County, recently received over a thousand catchable size rainbows and 25 jumbos from the Lyons Ferry Hatchery.

Snake River system **steelhead** action is picking up as tributaries receive a shot of water from snowpack melt. WDFW enforcement officers recently patrolling the Snake report steelheaders doing well in the Lower Granite dam area and on the upper river near Clarkston. Most boats coming off the river at Swallow's Nest averaged two steelhead.

WDFW enforcement officers also report **sturgeon** fishing activity in the Central Ferry area of the Snake River is beginning to increase, although catching is slow. The sturgeon daily catch limit is one fish of minimum size 48 inches, maximum size 60 inches.

Anglers can gear up and learn about fishing opportunities at the second annual Great Western Sportfishing Show, March 6-8, at the Spokane Convention Center. For more information see <http://www.greatwesternsportfishingshow.com/Home.html>.

Northcentral Washington

Many Columbia Basin lakes open to **rainbow trout** fishing March 1 but persistent wintery conditions will likely delay angling action.

"Even with forecasts of warmer daytime temperatures, there's a good chance most Columbia Basin lakes will still be iced up for the opener," said Jeff Korth, WDFW regional fish program manager. "At this point, the one exception is the north end of Martha Lake, which is already open and should provide good fishing right from the start of the season."

Korth predicts that because ice on most other lakes won't be thick enough for safe fishing, angling will be delayed.

"But that just means there likely won't be an opening day crowd and fishing will start more gradually and last longer through the season," Korth said.

Besides Martha Lake, near the town of George in Grant County, other Columbia Basin lakes opening March 1 on WDFW's Quincy Wildlife Area include Burke and Quincy lakes, southwest of the town of Quincy; Upper, Lower and West Caliche lakes, southwest of George; Dusty Lake, a selective gear rule fishery south of Quincy; and the small "walk-in" lakes - Cascade, Cliff, Crystal, Cup, Dot, George and Spring.

Lenice and Nunnally lakes, on WDFW's Crab Creek Wildlife Area just east of Beverly in southwest Grant County, open under selective gear rules March 1, but won't receive triploid rainbow plants until April. Much smaller Merry Lake in the same area also opens March 1.

Lake Lenore, north of the town of Soap Lake in Grant County, opens for catch-and-release trout fishing March 1. Because of its location in a north-south canyon, Korth says Lenore will almost surely still be iced up for the opener this year. Two to four-pound **Lahontan cutthroat trout** will be caught and released there by April.

Southcentral Washington

WDFW district fish biologist Eric Anderson reports the start of major **rainbow trout** stocking efforts this month in many of the region's year-round open lakes. "Most catchable-size trout will

be larger this year because we have changed our production at Naches Hatchery to be more efficient," Anderson said. "We're growing fish at 2.5 fish per pound compared to our past production of three fish per pound, so we'll be stocking fewer fish, but they will be larger."

Some of the first waters to receive fish this month include these in Kittitas County: North Fio Rito Lake - 3,000 catchables, 700 "jumbos" (about one-half-pound trout); South Fio Rito Lake - 1,500 catchables; Mattoon Lake - 3,600 catchables, 400 jumbos; and McCabe Pond - 500 catchables.

All details of all trout stocking in the region are available both at the Yakima regional office (1701 S. 24th Ave.) or on WDFW's southcentral regional webpage at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/regions/reg3/index.htm>.

Inbox

Good buddy and very avid anglers **Fernando C.** wrote about his weekend experience on the Clackamas, "The time has come its Sunday and rain is here....! Yeah!

"I went fishing this Friday and the water was at 41-42°F clear and low not too far from the mouth of the Clackamas. I was fishing between High Rocks and McLaughlin Bridge. I intended to change things up a bit this time so I rigged up a diver with easy eggs and fished that for approximately 30 minutes in different holes. So, then I rigged up a plug and waded in knee high to set it up in an absolute sweet hole. This time I was lucky..! The fish took the plug as I was letting out some line and unable to set the hook properly and lost my fish few seconds from that time. A valuable lesson to learn, but it made my weekend. It was awesome!"

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

Write to the TGF staff:

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Michael Teague: Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com

Random Links

Smelt info from the WDFW:

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/smelt/index.htm>

Beautiful fish photos:

<http://www.fisheyeguyphotography.com/index.asp>

"Releasing a fish is an act of faith, the same as planting a tree. It requires faith that the seed will take, and that our own progeny will want and will deserve and will in their turn protect and pass on the things - the walnut trees and the wild rivers and the wild fish - that we preserve and pass on to them." - Dave Hughes

GOOD LUCK!