

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 27<sup>th</sup> – March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** Anglers are beginning to pick up an occasional keeper sturgeon near the mouth of the Willamette River but fresh smelt is a key bait if anglers want to get results. The Bonneville Pool is putting out a few keepers as well to both bank and boat anglers.

Incidental commercial catches of spring chinook are on the increase on the lower Columbia River while in pursuit of sturgeon. The average size of the salmon is shrinking to around 20 pounds possibly indicating the presence of the typically smaller upper Columbia bound stock.

Not much in the way of sport caught salmon this week reports **Pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)**. Better times are ahead!

Water temperatures of the lower Willamette are rising which should have a positive effect on fishing. Sturgeon fishing is fair to good when the fish can be found. Spring chinook fishing remains slow as is often the case after a brief flurry of activity witnessed a few weeks ago.

**Pro guide Bill Kremers (541-754-6411)** slow fishing for sturgeon around St. Johns but that it's the best of choices in the lower Willamette.

Fly anglers did very well for trout over the past weekend on the lower McKenzie.

Rain has improved the water temperature along with the winter steelhead bite on the Clackamas River. Bobber and jigs seems to be most effective here but rising river levels will likely shift effort to sidedrifting bait.

Steelheading has picked up and the Sandy as well with winters showing a preference for spinners. Fish will become much more distributed after the high water recedes. Varying techniques will take holding fish with bait a likely preference. Plunkers may do well in the lower river when flows stabilize.

The North Santiam is a good bet for solitude. There are very few anglers trying for very few steelhead in the river.

Scheduled for trout stocking this week are Henry Hagg Lake, St Louis Ponds, Alton Baker Canal, Cottage Grove Pond, Cottage Grove Reservoir, E. E. Wilson Pond, Junction City Pond, Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake.

**Northwest –** The first week of March is typically a good one for winter steelhead on the north coast. With the most significant precipitation in weeks, rivers have swelled and when the recede, steelhead fishing will be excellent.

Smaller streams like the Kilchis and North Fork Nehalem will produce early results in the higher flows but few quality hatchery fish will be present in these systems. Anglers wishing to take home a keeper will focus their efforts on the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers. Fish will be well distributed for both bank and boat anglers by the weekend.

Other rivers like the Trask will get good returns of wild fish this week with slightly lighter effort. Bait

will be the key to success in the higher flows and anglers should use brighter colors to find fish in the turbid waters.

The Nehalem River will be a poor choice for at least a week.

Sturgeon fishing on Tillamook Bay showed slight improvement later in last weeks tide series but will likely slow this week. Most anglers will focus their efforts on steelhead in these ideal conditions.

A series of fronts will keep the ocean unfishable through the weekend and even surf fishing will be dangerous for a while.

Alder Lake, Big Creek Reservoir 1 & 2, Buck Lake, Carter Lake, Cleawox Lake, Dune Lake, Elbow Lake, Georgia Lake, Lost Lake (Lane County), Munsel Lake, North Georgia Lake, Olalla Creek Reservoir, Perkins Lake, Siltcoos Lagoon and Thissel Pond are scheduled to be planted with trout.

**Southwest** – Rock and jetty fishing has been worthwhile on the south coast, yielding various species of rockfish, greenling and improving catches of ling cod.

Much of the southwest is getting rain, heavy at times, pushing some rivers out of shape. With no break in the long-range weather forecast, it may be a while before all but the smallest rivers are fishable.

Water levels have improved on the South Fork Coquille over the past week and steelhead catches picked up. The Coos system remains low and clear, however. Crabbing has been worthwhile out of Charleston as well as Bandon. When the seas have flattened, bottom fishers have done well out of Charleston.

While the lower Rogue received some fresh winter steelhead, the bite is slow due to low, cold and clear water. The river level rose over four feet at Agness this week with a passing storm. It fished well above Foster Bar before the rain and is expected to be good when the river starts to drop.

Sixes River steelheaders saw some action over the last week as the water level rose and achieved excellent color.

Chetco flows spiked to about 17,000 cfs overnight on February 23rd. Good catches of herring were being brought into the Port of Brooking prior to the deluge.

Cooper Creek Reservoir will be planted with trout late this week. Trout stocking will take place in most southwest locations in March.

**Eastern** – Redside trout fishing is fair on the lower Deschutes using caddis pupa and Blue-Winged Olive emergers.

Lake Billy Chinook has continued to provide fair to good fishing for nice-sized kokanee on the troll.

**Pro guide Steve Fleming (888-624-9424)** reports that steelhead have migrated far up the and that the low, clear water is too cold for smallmouth to start biting.

**SW Washington** – Smelt dippers did well on last Saturday's opener with numerous limits hitting the bank. The river will open again this Saturday but it's likely that catches will be down from the previous weekends high.

Steelheaders will be glad to see river levels jump with the recent rainfall but some of the districts

favorites will likely remain cloudy due to mudslides upstream.

The Kalama will likely be the best bet when flows stabilize with the East Fork of the Lewis a possibility for fresh wild fish too.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – Anglers are getting amped up for spring Chinook. Creel checkers interviewed 60 boats and 78 bank anglers over the weekend and tallied no catch for all those anglers. The river remains cold and anglers are commenting they believe they are seeing fish on their finders, it's just impossible to get them to bite. There's not a lot you can do to stimulate a cold water bite but herring have proven themselves as the most likely candidate for the taking in the early part of these seasons. It's clear that anglers are highly anticipating the 2009 return and want to get their punch cards a workout before the days per week restrictions begin around mid-March.

**Pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)** was motivated for an early springer and took out Lamiglas' John Posey. They fished the mainstem Columbia and had this to report: "I fished John Posey and guys on Saturday and had no luck. We did see 1 springer caught and released along Sandy Island (Goble/Kalama) and I marked a couple. I also heard of 1 caught at I-5 or Davis? And 1 from Frenchman's Bar." Brandon went smelt dipping as well and had this to report from the Cowlitz, "Smelting was great Saturday on the Cowlitz at Camelot (near Lexington, WA). We got 6 limits in my friend's boat that afternoon in about 25 minutes! Some of my friends were banking it and got their limits too."

On the sturgeon side of things, action remains the hostage of water temperatures with some of the best action of the week coming from the Portland Harbor and the Multnomah Channel. Anglers armed with fresh smelt had great action including some quality keepers over the weekend. There were 4 sturgeon retained in the Portland to Longview stretch but that was for 50 boats!

Upriver, the Bonneville Pool is also putting out fair numbers of keepers. This is often the case this time of year as seven legal white sturgeon were kept, plus six legal and 46 sublegals were released for 48 bank anglers. Three legal white sturgeon were kept plus 30 sublegal sturgeon released for three boats. Quota's don't last long in this fishery so if this is a favorite spot for you, the upcoming weeks would be some of the better options.

**The Guide's Forecast** – With wacky weather in the forecast, anglers won't be nearly as motivated to try for an early spring Chinook this week. Water and air temperatures are forecasted to be more like normal this time of year and that won't help the bite either. It's best to prepare for better fishing ahead and stay home to get all the "honey-do's" done before the season actually gets underway.

If you have to go springer fishing, well, change your mind, it'll likely be a waste of time but bring your covered boat and heater because it's twice as cold on the river as it is on land, or at least it seems that way.

Sturgeon anglers working the mainstem will want to focus their efforts near the mouth of the Willamette. Serious sturgeon anglers will work the Willamette or Multnomah Channel and bypass the mainstem Columbia all together. Like our recommendation for salmon fishing, you had better be prepared for cold, damp weather.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – With the temperature at the Falls climbing into the low 40s, with steelhead are moving in greater number. This movement of native steelhead reflects hatchery steelhead behavior and makes it likely that better numbers are entering the Clackamas and moving upstream. As always, moving steelhead are easier to hook as they are

more likely to bite than steelhead that are just holding.

**Pro guide Bill Kremers (541-754-6411)** reports, "not much happening with sturgeon fishing by St. Johns the only thing going on. Lots of shakers, fresh smelt working the best. There are a few keepers around, so worth the trip. The good news is that the Alsea and Siletz rivers are both at 6 feet, something that has not happen since early January. The big question is, are there still fresh steelhead around. Hope to find out this weekend or first part of next week."

The McKenzie took a hit from rains this week and was still on the rise as of Thursday this week.

With fewer than 800 steelhead over the Falls and the North Santiam high from rain this week, it's not the most desirable destination choice.

Henry Hagg Lake, the jewel of Scoggin Valley, opens for the season on Saturday, March 7th. It has been planted this week with 18,000 legal-sized trout in anticipation of that opening.

**The Guide's Forecast** – If the rain has put some water and color in the lower river, it will improve sturgeon prospects but some keepers will be taken either way. Commercial smelt efforts are working Thursday and Friday this week and it appears there are fish in the Cowlitz and Columbia. Do-it-yourselfers will find it worth the drive to dip the Cowlitz in Washington State from 6 AM to 10 PM on Saturday. Fresh smelt are very effective bait at this time of year. Try the Sellwood area or upper Multnomah Channel. It's still early to be optimistic about spring Chinook but expect to see trollers working around the St. Johns Bridge regardless and they will take a few fish.

While nymphing has been producing decent catches on the McKenzie, wait for it to drop a little to give it a try.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – Rain hasn't had a huge impact on the Clackamas and water temperatures remain low. Steelheading will be slow until the water rises and warms.

The Sandy is off color but greenish (which is an improvement from earlier this week) and has produced a few steelhead in the last couple of days. The rain is a positive event, should bring some fresh fish in and will provide decent winter steelhead fishing as the freezing level drops. It's not in good shape at this time, however.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – It was another week of weak reports as anglers are just now finally getting the water conditions that they have been waiting for, for a long time now. Rivers swelled on Tuesday night and some boats got on the water under stable conditions all day Wednesday. The reports that we received however were not promising. One prominent angler fishing on the Wilson reported hooking just 2 fish and landing one for an all day effort on Wednesday, taking out at Sollie Smith Bridge on the Wilson River. The river was in ideal shape from Mills Bridge upstream and not at all too high or turbid in the downstream section. Anglers were wondering why better results weren't posted when in theory, steelhead should be marching upstream, full steam ahead in these conditions. It remains a mystery but rivers are again on the rise as of this writing so it'll be a few days before we get good reports again.

On the Nestucca River, **pro guide Kent Anderson (503-550-6303)** reported much of the same. He fished two skilled rods under great conditions on Wednesday never having a bite. He did a bit better the day before under low water conditions landing 2 fish for an all day effort in the clear water. The Nestucca was a bit more consistent in recent days and like other district rivers, anglers have high expectations of excellent fishing in the coming days if the water levels stabilize and remain fair in color.

The Nehalem continued to put out a few fish downstream of Spruce Run Park for bank anglers and boaters were not finding great results on the lower drifts as fish were not motivated to move under the current conditions. This river will not be an option in the coming weeks however as precipitation will take its toll on the quality conditions anglers have enjoyed here in recent weeks.

Sturgeon fishing and crabbing remain very poor along most coastal estuaries although crabbing did show some results on Tillamook Bay prior to the current high water. The ocean has not been an option for quite some time.

**The Guide's Forecast** – This is the rain freshet steelheaders have been waiting for. After a month long dry spell, district rivers are now getting a much needed surge which should trigger excellent numbers of steelhead to return to all north coast streams this week. Early March is a great kick-off time for wild fish and a good slug of hatchery broodstock fish on the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers.

Although early results this week were disappointing, it shouldn't be the gauge that predicts the wild fish season that oftentimes lasts through mid-April. Prioritize these rivers if you are targeting quality broodstock fish:

Wilson River- For driftboaters, fish upstream of Mills Bridge if the water level is above 4.5 foot. Bank anglers should find fish well distributed throughout their favorite lower river spots. Wild fish and broodstock fish should respond well to bank anglers in the higher reaches when water levels are also a bit on the high side. We encourage larger brighter baits and lures in high water conditions.

Nestucca River - Fish will also be well distributed throughout the system under the current flow situation. Boaters will want to focus their efforts from 5½ Bridge and downstream to Three Rivers. The lower the flows become, the lower you should concentrate your efforts.

For anglers looking to catch and release wild fish, these rivers will produce the best results in this order:

Kilchis River - This stream fishes best when the Wilson River is a day or two out from fishing. There isn't a lot of river to drift but the county park (Kilchis Park) downstream should produce results. Bank anglers have better access on the south side of the river.

North Fork Nehalem- Not a lot of access on this stream but wild fish and a rare remaining early winter run can be intercepted near the hatchery or the rare turnoff on Highway 53. Don't have high expectations for a bunch of fish on this system however. It's not likely to happen.

Trask River - The Dam Hole is an excellent high water bet and a rare hatchery stray is taken on this system. Driftboaters will score good results from Cedar Creek downstream but the higher the water is, the faster the fish will move upstream and that is likely already underway on this system given the rain has effected the river system for 3 days already by the time you read this newsletter. There is good bank access here.

Don't bother with crabbing, sturgeon fishing or ocean fishing this week. Too poor or too dangerous to make a day of it. It's a week of steelheading if you really want to get anything accomplished.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – Boaters won't be crossing the bar this weekend out of Newport and Depoe Bay of the forecast of high wind and waves is accurate for the coming weekend. When crossing has been possible, rockfish and ling cod limits have been taken out of Depoe Bay. Yaquina Bay crabbing has been slow to fair and slower than that at Waldport.

The level of the Siletz River is expected to peak overnight Thursday this week and start to drop on Friday.

Alsea River levels crested at just under 7.5 feet on the morning of February 26th and is expected to be dropping through the weekend. It better clear, though; it was very muddy mid-week.

The Siuslaw was high and muddy mid week but when it drops and clears it will be a good prospect for fresh winter steelhead which will be drawn in by the freshet.

Crabbing out of Florence is poor to slow.

The mainstem Umpqua was high and muddy on Thursday this week. Steelheaders can look forward to decent fishing this weekend, particularly on the North Fork, although most of the fish present are wild and have to be released here.

Crabbing in Coos Bay tanked with the recent rainfall raising salinity levels and chasing the sea spiders out to the ocean. An upside of the freshet is an expected improvement in sturgeon fishing in the bay.

Coquille steelheaders should find some winter action this weekend as the river drops back into shape following rain this week.

The Rogue River is expected the crest overnight on Thursday this week and be falling for the weekend, creating ideal conditions in the Grants Pass stretch. The murky water of the lower Rogue may clear sufficiently to fish late in the weekend and that first springer of the year will be taken very soon. Catches of half-pounders are expected to be good around Agness when the water visibility improves. Winter steelhead have started entering the upper river and a few have been caught this week.

Chetco River flow was still over 12,000 cfs on Thursday, February 26th, but it tends to drop quickly and may be fishable as early as Saturday. Offshore forecasts for the weekend indicate an ocean too rough for boats to spend a day at sea although they may be able to launch at first light to enjoy a few productive hours of nearshore angling before the wind starts to blow. When conditions have permitted, offshore boaters have made stellar catches of large rockfish and ling cod. Ocean crabbing has been yielding fair hauls of large, hard Dungeness which are full of meat. Brookings harbor has been brimming with herring. Take you youngsters out to jig up a couple of buckets full. They're great bait for rockfish, ling cod, sturgeon and salmon. Pretty tasty when pickled Scandinavian style, too! Surf perch fishing has been good in the area when gargantuan waves aren't hammering beaches.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – With the water level up on the middle Deschutes, fishing has fallen off. It's expected to pick up once the water drops.

The challenging Metolius River fishes well at this time of year. Mid-day is most productive with Blue Wing Olives hatching now.

Write the Grande Ronde off your list for this weekend. It was over 4,000 cfs as of the morning of February 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Pro guide Steve Fleming (888-624-9424)** reports, "The trip that was scheduled for Sunday was rescheduled. It was freezing rain here in Fossil at 5:15 AM, with the weather forecast for 36 degrees, 40% chance of rain/snow and windy. Not a nice day, and the clients made the right choice, rebook.

"I talked to Touche Clark, and he said there were a lot of steelhead below the John Day River Dam two weeks ago. Those fish are now gone and headed up river, with some going up the John Day River, and some on up the Columbia. Based on best guesses, and normal travel a good number of those fish will be above Clarno by Wednesday of this week. They will be strung out, and more will be coming through there (Clarno) in the next couple of weeks. A week from Wednesday (4th) there will be some showing up in the Service Creek area, and the Wednesday (11th) after that they will be up in the North Fork of the John Day River. This is a fairly typical year,

"There was a rumor that the Corp of Engineers was working on the John Day Dam fish ladder and steelhead could not get up, but that was wrong they were working on the Juvenile return tubes, not the upstream ladder (took most of the day to run the rumor down).

"The river is running a little lower than usual, but is in good shape, color, and there will be some good fishing in the next few weeks for the steelhead, and some big smallmouth bass."

A few walleye are being taken below the John Day Dam despite the water being a little on the cool side.

### **Washington fishing reports:**

**From the WDF&W Weekender Report February 18<sup>th</sup> – March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 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>.

### **Reader Email**

Reader Mary C. wrote to pro guide Bob Rees to ask, "Could you mention the gill net schedule for the lower Columbia or else give a place to locate this information. Not sure what the Commission decided for these rascals."

Bob replied, "They are most easily found on this website under the "Joint State Action Notices" column. We also frequently list them in our archived reports that is available if you are paid subscriber to The Guide's Forecast.

"Thanks and good luck this year!"

Reader Doug L. wrote to TGF co-editor Michael Teague last week to ask, "Is there anyone selling smelt?"

Michael replied, "Commercial nets made fair hauls this week so there may be fresh at your local grocer. If not, try Asian markets and, as a last resort, fairly freshly frozen (is that's not an oxymoron) at sporting goods store where you will pay top dollar.

"Alternately, you can buy Alaskan smelt at Winco which will work if used in conjunction with scent. I like Sturgeon Feast myself.

"Good luck and shoot me a report when you return."

Doug wrote again this week to report, "Thank you. my local store got in 50 lbs an hour ago. would sell me 10 lbs for 4.99 each. good smelt (all sizes), it packaged up to 9 per bag and I got 15 bags."

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

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: bree@pacifier.com  
Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com  
Michael Teague: Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com

### **Random Links**

New SAFE for Salmon website:

<http://www.safeforsalmon.com/>

Jeff "Marathon Man" Kolodzinski catches 1,628 fish in two days:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RF1JCVA7qbY>

"I guess you have to remember that those who don't fish often see those of us who do as harmlessly strange an sort of amusing. When you think about it, that might be a fair assessment." John Gierach

**GOOD LUCK!**