

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **March 6<sup>th</sup> – March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** Effort is beginning to increase for spring chinook on the mainstem Columbia. Catches have improved in recent days with occasional salmon being taken from I-5 to Caterpillar Island. An approaching cold front could stall catches as river temperatures are at the 40 degree cusp as it is. A good tide series starting on the 6<sup>th</sup> should bring in more salmon.

Water temperature at the Falls remains in the low 40s. Just over 1,000 steelhead have been counted so far this season but daily numbers should start to increase soon. From March 1st to 15th, one fin-clipped chinook may be retained seven days a week. After the 15th, springer fishing is restricted to Thursdays through Saturdays. Springer action has been slow in muddy water but sturgeon fishing has been great, especially in the Portland Harbor. Expect crowds on the lower Willamette Saturday as there's a sturgeon derby scheduled.

**Pro Guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)** went 2 for 4 for spring Chinook fishing near Portland on March 4th.

Trout fishing is slow to fair but improving on the McKenzie with water levels average for this time of year.

As steelhead migration over the Falls picks up, so will catch-and-release action on the North Santiam for natives.

There are many trying for steelhead on the Clackamas but almost no one is getting so much as a bite.

Fishing has been slow on the Sandy where wind has been a problem.

Dexter Reservoir is scheduled to be planted with trout. Hagg Lake was stocked for the season opener.

**Northwest –** Despite ideal conditions, most weekend steelheaders went home empty handed over the weekend. The Wilson River, a favorite this time of year, fished well on Friday but dropped off dramatically by the weekend. The river has been very crowded with both boaters and bank fishers.

The Nestucca River booted out some quality fish prior to and through the weekend from 5½ Bridge to Farmer Creek. This river hasn't seen great returns the last few years but action could be improving this year.

Water levels are expected to remain favorable for most coastal systems into the weekend but you'll have to choose your favorite stretch based on water height. Higher stretches fish better in higher flows and fish are better distributed as well.

Most north coast streams from the Necanicum to the Nestucca will be fair options this weekend, especially with a good tide series starting on Friday. Smaller streams are likely to have navigational hazards however so be prepared for the worst. Colder temperatures will also make traveling more hazardous and put fish down until air temperatures begin to rise in the afternoons.

Sturgeon fishing showed signs of improvement on the last tide series but with a fair return of smelt into the Cowlitz, it's a good bet that the bulk of the fish are feeding in the Columbia or lower Willamette Rivers.

The weekend ocean forecast is calling for rough seas making offshore fishing a very poor option. Crabbing remains challenging in most north coast estuaries.

**Southwest** – With a break in precipitation, the South Fork Coquille is primed to deliver fine catches of winter steelhead.

Plunkers are picking up a few winter steelhead on the mainstem Umpqua. Most of the fish are wild, however.

While the Rogue River spring chinook run is predicted to be an improvement over last year, it still won't be the historical average. None have been caught as yet. A few winters are being taken on the upper Rogue along with half pounders.

Elk and Sixes steelheaders have had some fair days as these volatile rivers are going in and out of shape with storm fronts over the past week.

The Chetco River took another hit on March 2nd, pushing flows back to 10,000 cfs, but it was dropping during the day on March 3rd. Water conditions were decent over the weekend, providing catches of winter steelhead and good numbers of sea-run cutthroat trout. The ocean may lay down enough for nearshore bottom fishing this weekend.

Scheduled for trout planting this week are Bradley Lake, Middle and Lower Empire Lake, Johnson Mill Pond, Powers Pond, Saunders Lake, Reinhart Pond, Ben Irving Reservoir, Cooper Cr. Reservoir, Galesville Reservoir Loon Lake and Plat I Reservoir.

**Eastern** – The lower Deschutes has been slow to fair for reddsides with deep-drifted nymphs most effective.

Green Peter is fishing well for trout and landlocked chinook although kokanee fishing is very slow.

Steelheaders on the Imnaha are experiencing decent results and have even filled a few limits by drifting cured eggs.

**SW Washington** – The Cowlitz is typically a good option for large, late run steelhead but with cloudy water still an issue, catches are likely to be light even though the fish will be present. Smelt dippers did well again on last Saturday's opener but catches will most certainly drop off.

The Kalama River is putting out a few winter steelhead as a late run of hatchery fish as well as a few natives should be available.

District anglers will begin targeting lower Columbia River spring chinook in the Portland to Longview stretch as greater opportunity exists this year than last. Davis Bar across from the mouth of the Willamette River will be a favorite place to intercept upriver bound springers.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – Although not a total surprise, catches of spring chinook are on the rise in the Columbia River near Portland. Fair weather and the anticipation of a banner run has

people pretty excited to get out fishing. Although effort is far from intense, it will quickly gain momentum as catch rates increase.

And speaking of catch rates, **pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)** has been pursuing his first salmon of the season and has this to report: We were 2 for 4 today fishing near PDX (3/4/09). The fish were caught trolling Herring right near the bottom. The fish weighed 20 and 12 pounds."

Water temperatures were on the threshold for good fishing this week with little fluctuation between 39 and 40 degrees. A cold snap this week could bring water temperatures back below 39 degrees making willing biters much more scarce.

Sturgeon effort remains low with the highest effort between Portland and Longview. With fresh smelt much more available in recent weeks, anglers have been motivated (and rewarded) for their efforts. Although the Portland Harbor in the lower Willamette and the Multnomah Channel have been the better bets, action has picked up below and adjacent to the mouth of the Willamette. Weekend creel data indicated only 2 keepers for 47 boats with 49 short sturgeon released. As poor as that sounds, it's actually better than it has been in recent weeks.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Despite the cold front moving into the region, efforts will likely increase this week on the lower Columbia. Great tides are likely to bring in better numbers of fish but water temperatures will dictate success rates. The first spring chinook has crossed Bonneville Dam on March 2<sup>nd</sup>.

If the mainstem temperature begins to drop below 39 degrees, expect catches to slow as well as migration. A slower troll is recommended and if anglers have a good idea as to where to anchor, they may want to try and anchor fish with a plunked herring on the bottom or a Kwikfish in shallower water.

The minus tide series will keep migrating fish in the slower, shallower water or very close to the bottom where flows are not as intense. Also, anglers will likely want to target their efforts upstream of the mouth of the Willamette as the colored flows of the Willamette are likely to limit success rates. The most productive stretch is likely to be between the I-205 Bridge to the mouth of the Willamette.

Sturgeon anglers may still be able to find an occasional keeper in the mainstem but serious sturgeon anglers should focus their efforts in the Multnomah Channel or the Willamette itself. If you are going to fish the mainstem Columbia, focus your efforts near the mouth of the Willamette or the mouth of the Multnomah Channel.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – Willamette Falls water temperature was 42 degrees as of March 4th with the visibility improving to about two feet. Winter steelhead counts are improving as expected and summer steelhead are being counted as of March 1st although only 10 are on the board. Summers have most certainly been crossing uncounted for a while, however. Sturgeon fishing has produced a few keepers but if you go this coming Saturday, March 7th, expect plenty of company as there will be a sturgeon derby taking place then.

Water conditions are good and improving on the McKenzie and with the water temperature rising slightly, anglers should expect good results in the coming weekend.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Sturgeon fishing should be worthwhile during this week's Thursday through Saturday retention period. Herring, sand shrimp and fresh smelt (which are available locally for a short while) are all taking keepers. St. Johns and the nearby Toyota Hole have been productive. A

launch out of Cathedral Park will provide convenient access. Expect slow fishing for springers and you won't be disappointed. Troll herring or Kwikfish around Sellwood.

**Pro Guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)** and Curt Anderson holding fresh Spring Chinook. We were 2 for 4 today fishing near PDX (3/4/09). The fish were caught trolling Herring right near the bottom. The fish weighed 20 and 12 pounds.



With the McKenzie dropping slightly through the weekend, nymphing should remain effective for reddsides here.

A few wild steelhead are being taken and released at the North Santiam, but better fishing is in the future especially if we get a decent summer run this year.

Hagg Lake March 7th 18,000 eight to 10 inch rainbows but there are sure to be some holdovers present from past season.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – Winter steelhead fishing has been very slow on the Clackamas but the few landed have been bright and good-sized. The first spring Chinook of the year was landed here on Thursday this week.

While water conditions have improved here along with catch rates, it's still slow to fair fishing for winter steelhead.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – Steelheaders were rather disappointed in the last week's results on the two primary hatchery steelhead streams- the Wilson and the Nestucca Rivers. Both rivers produced good results last Friday but by the weekend, catch rates had dropped and it didn't just have to do with the crowds although they were a likely factor.

Sidedrifters scored best in the higher flows late last week and flows remained high enough for most of the week to continue to employ this technique.

Plugs can be a great alternative when most of the other boats are sidedrifted or you are a late comer to the river in the morning. Typically, plugs work best in dropping flows.

The Kilchis and Trask Rivers were fair options over the weekend and did produce some fair results periodically. Most of the traffic gravitated to the "hatchery option" rivers however, and anglers felt pretty squeezed because of it.

Sturgeon anglers didn't have favorable tides to work with last week but improving tides start this weekend. Ocean effort was also low due to rough bar and ocean conditions. Crabbing remains fair at best in Tillamook and Netarts Bays. Persistence is critical if you want enough keepers to make a meal for your family.

**The Guide's Forecast** – We're clearly in the peak of the winter steelhead season although it's quickly becoming clear that we're going to have a down year from some of the high's we've seen in previous years. The Wilson and the Nestucca are far from consistent but remain the best options on the north coast for wild and hatchery fish.

Keep in mind that the broodstock program can use all the help possible in collecting broodstock fish so call the ODF&W office to register with the program (503-842-2741).

Smaller streams like the Kilchis, North Fork Nehalem, and Necanicum will remain options when other north coast favorites are on the high side but any hatchery fish around will be poor tablefare. Also keep in mind that these smaller streams are much more hydrologically dynamic, which is likely to produce more sleepers and sweepers that are navigational hazards to boaters.

If the weather isn't too inclement, sturgeon anglers may want to give Tillamook Bay a try over the weekend. Favorable tides begin on Friday and last well into next week. These same tides are likely to produce fair results for clam diggers in our coastal estuaries but razor diggers will likely have a high surf to contend with, which typically puts the feeders down.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – Steelheading on the Siletz has been slow to fair for a mix of bright and colored winters. There has been plenty of pressure on weekends.

Offshore bottom fishers and crabbers who can get out on Friday this week have the best chance for a trouble-free bar crossing out of Newport.

The Alsea will be a good bet for low-water fishing specialists this weekend. There will be decent numbers of steelhead present but the river level is dropping daily and is likely to be pretty clear. The hatchery reports just over 800 winters have returned.

Siuslaw steelheaders report slow to fair fishing over the past weekend in crowded conditions. Anglers remain optimistic about the upcoming weekend as the water level drops. Winters have been recycled here so there are a few more to be caught. Cutthroat trout fishing has been fair to good here.

The so-called Frostbite Follies, an annual bass fishing tournament, was held at Tenmile Lake over the past weekend resulting in less than spectacular but typical catches for warm-water fish in February. Only 38 bass were caught by 41 teams with 23 of those teams taking no fish. Only one team, Jim Rainey and Travis Glass, caught a five-fish limit to win over \$900 in addition to the \$350 prize for the largest bass of 6.12 pounds.

High mid-week, the Umpqua is primed to drop into shape by the weekend and will be a desirable destination. The North Umpqua has been just chugging along, putting out fair to good numbers of fish, albeit mostly wild, but the South Umpqua will be the best bet as it's set to deliver some memorable winter steelhead memories.

Coos Bay has been the shining star for crabbing in the past weeks but numbers have dropped off even here and Dungeness catches have become slow.

Rain this week has boosted winter steelhead catches on the Rogue River. The lower stretch had a good number enter and fish were caught around Agness and below. Half-pounder catches have also picked up around Agness and spring Chinook have been spotted but not hooked. This weekend should deliver the first springer catches. The Grants Pass stretch has remained productive and winters move upstream. The upper Rogue has remained fairly skinny, however, and fishing is slow as a consequence.

The Elk and Sixes rivers had risen on Wednesday and Thursday this week but are forecast to drop through the weekend. With good water color and a decent water level, some nice winter steelhead should be taken from the Elk. Either bait or lures are effective here.

While the Chetco is dropping, it was still quite fishable on Thursday this week although a little murky with the flow 3,250 at Brookings. Catches this weekend will be a mix of fresh, bright, late-season steelhead and those which are running downriver after spawning. Saturday may be a possibility for an early morning launch out of the Port of Brookings for the excellent rockfish and ling cod fishing available nearshore. Surf perch are still being caught in good number but get out on the beach early for best results before the wind kicks up.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – Deschutes anglers are enjoying good results for trout with Blue-Winged Olives hatching now although best results are coming on nymphs and emergers.

Rain has the John Day high and muddy. When it drops and clears there will be steelhead available but how well they bite will depend on whether or not precipitation has increased the water temperature. Prior to the rainfall, it was too cold for decent steelheading.

According to a March 4th bulletin issued by the ODFW, Hood River will open for spring Chinook angling on April 15th and a good return is expected. Two finclipped adult springers may be kept and five jacks retained per day. Unmarked spring Chinook must be released.

**Washington fishing reports:  
From the WDF&W Weekender Report March 4 - 17, 2009**

## North Puget Sound

Anglers are having a tough time finding hatchery steelhead in the Skagit and Sauk rivers, where the run is now mostly made up of wild fish. But warmer weather and calm conditions have made for good blackmouth fishing in some areas of Puget Sound.

Fishing continues to be decent for **blackmouth** - resident chinook - in Marine Area 7 (San Juan Islands), said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "It's not as hot as it was in early February, but fishing is still pretty good around the San Juan Islands, especially for those anglers who get out on the water on weekdays when effort is low," he said.

Recent creel samples show anglers have been hooking blackmouth throughout the San Juan Islands, but the best harvest numbers were seen at checks at Friday Harbor. For example, 15 anglers were checked with seven chinook Feb. 28 at the Friday Harbor Marina, while 10 anglers were checked with four chinook the following day.

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 said anglers also have hooked some blackmouth in Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet), but 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. Anglers in those three areas also can keep two hatchery chinook as part of their two-salmon daily limit.

Meanwhile, casting for **steelhead** is still an option. Most rivers closed to steelhead fishing at the end of February, but the Skagit River and portions of the Sauk River remain open. "There have been a few hatchery steelhead caught on the Skagit River recently, but most anglers are catching and releasing wild fish," said Brett Barkdull, WDFW fish biologist.

Anglers fishing the Sauk River, from the mouth of the river to the Darrington Bridge, can keep two hatchery steelhead through April 30, while those fishing the Skagit River can keep two hatchery steelhead through March 15.

Most of the Skagit River will be closed to fishing after March 15. However, a portion of the Skagit - from the Dalles Bridge at Concrete to the Cascade River - will remain open to catch-and-release fishing 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.

For more information on the rules and regulations for the Skagit River, 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 going strong from Port Angeles to Hood Canal, while steelhead anglers on the northern peninsula are waiting for an influx of wild fish. On the coast, the lingcod season is set to open and a three-day razor clam dig is proposed later this month

The **blackmouth** bite is on in Hood Canal and the Strait of Juan de Fuca, where the average catch rate over the Feb. 28 weekend was one fish for every two anglers. "That's pretty darned good blackmouth fishing, considering some years when one in ten anglers gets a fish," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist.

The weekend creel check at Misery Point near Seabeck showed 27 anglers with 11 fish, while 111 anglers checked at Ediz Hook off Port Angeles caught 49 blackmouth.

Fishing was considerably slower farther south, where a creel check of 24 anglers between Point Defiance and the Narrows Bridge revealed one fish. "Marine Area 11 is definitely slow, but scattered reports from the March 1 opener near Olympia showed some success," Thiesfeld said.

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), and April 30 in Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound). The daily limit is one fish per angler.

Dozens of **steelhead** anglers were fishing the Wynoochee River in Grays Harbor over the Feb. 28 weekend, but success was marginal, said David Low, WDFW fish biologist. The same was true for the Satsop, where anglers came up with virtually nothing. "We had an early run of hatchery fish, but overall the season's not been very productive," Low said. Record low flows this winter on the Olympic Peninsula combined with possibly lower run returns for the year may be contributing to the problem, he said.

Wild steelhead are beginning to replace hatchery fish in north coast rivers, but recent effort and catch dropped off due to rain and snow melt over the Feb, 28 weekend, said Randy Cooper, WDFW fish biologist. "Fishing conditions should improve with the river levels dropping and water visibility clearing," he said.

On the Hoh River, a Feb. 27 to March 1 creel check showed that 124 anglers on the lower portion caught four hatchery and 29 wild steelhead adults (22 released) while 75 anglers were checked in the upper Hoh with one hatchery and six wild adult steelhead (all released). During the same time period, 28 anglers fishing the Sol Duc caught three hatchery and 11 wild (10 released) while 51 anglers on the Bogachiel caught seven hatchery and six wild steelhead adults (four released). Ten anglers were checked on the Calawah River with nine wild steelhead adults released. Anglers continue to catch a few hatchery and wild steelhead jacks, Cooper said.

Cooper 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 at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

As spring approaches, anglers can look forward to the opening of **lingcod** season, which gets under way March 14 in marine areas 1-3, south of Cape Alava. The minimum size for lingcod in these areas is 22 inches, with a daily limit of two fish per angler. In Marine Area 2 (Westport/Ocean Shores), recreational fishing for rockfish or lingcod is not allowed in waters deeper than 30 fathoms from March 15 through June 15. Additional information about the lingcod fishery and other bottom fish is available on the WDFW Fishing Hotline (360) 902-2500 or online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm/>.

Meanwhile in Thurston County, a catch-and-release **trout** fishery is now open on Munn Lake, where 1,000 one-pound rainbows were planted March 1. "We wanted to offer anglers another late-winter fishing opportunity," said Larry Phillips, WDFW fish biologist. Phillips reminds anglers to use single, barbless hooks and release all fish. Fish retention will be allowed when the lowland lake trout season starts on April 25.

An early spring, three-day **razor clam** dig has been tentatively scheduled on morning tides March 27-29, provided 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**

Anglers eager to catch **spring chinook salmon** are reeling in an increasing number of early arrivals in the lower Columbia River, while others are catching **sturgeon** upriver to The Dalles Pool. **Smelt** dipping is also still an option on the Cowlitz River from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. each Saturday through March 28.

Although the bulk of the spring chinook run isn't expected for several weeks, fishery managers counted 142 boats and 239 bank anglers downriver from the I-5 Bridge during the last day in February.

"This is shakedown time for the spring chinook fishery," said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist. "It's a good time to get your boat and gear in order and pick your spots before the crowds arrive. Catching fish is a bonus at this point in the fishery."

Hymer sees a high likelihood of both good fishing and large crowds this year, when nearly 300,000 upriver spring chinook are expected to return to the Columbia River. That would make this year's run the largest since 2001, and the third largest since 1977. An additional 37,000 springers are expected to return to the Willamette River, up from

27,000 last year. The first spring chinook of the season to cross Bonneville Dam was counted March 3.

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-to-late April. The fishery could extend beyond April, but 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.
- **Bonneville Dam to McNary Dam:** Seven days per week from March 16 through April 30. The Washington and Oregon bank only fishery will also be open from Bonneville Dam upstream to the Tower Island power lines located about six miles below The Dalles Dam.

Wind River and Drano Lake will also open for spring chinook fishing March 16 under the same rules as last year (two marked hatchery salmon or steelhead, or one of each; minimum size for salmon is 12 inches).

Under a new rule approved by the Washington commission, anglers fishing the mainstem Columbia River below McNary Dam may also retain two marked, hatchery-reared adult salmon or steelhead (or one of each) per day. However, only one hatchery adult chinook salmon may be retained per day downstream from Bonneville Dam.

A daily limit of one hatchery adult chinook is also in effect on the Kalama and Lewis rivers, where hatchery returns are expected to be relatively low. One hatchery adult chinook will also be the daily limit on 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 or steelhead that have an intact adipose fin. For best results, Hymer recommends sinking a flatfish or herring plug fairly deep - 20 to 30 feet - and resisting the urge to set the hook too quickly. "The fish are fairly lethargic in the current cold-water conditions," he said. "My advice is fish deep, and give the fish time to grab your lure or bait." Low flows may be problematic for bank anglers, he said.

Anglers fishing for spring chinook salmon may also retain **hatchery steelhead** and **shad**, as outlined in the recently adopted rules. Fishing for late-run hatchery steelhead is still decent on the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers, Hymer said.

The best **smelt** dipping may be over for the year on the Cowlitz River, but the fishery will remain open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. each Saturday through March 28. Hymer cautions dippers to observe season rules, noting that nearly a dozen people recently received citations for fishing outside of those hours. The daily catch limit per person is 10 pounds of smelt, which equates to about one-quarter of a five-gallon bucket. Only dipnets may be used.

The results of smelt 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.

As most anglers know, smelt make for great **sturgeon** bait. Despite cold water conditions, sturgeon fishing has been picking up on the lower Cowlitz and Willamette rivers as well as the Bonneville Pool and The Dalles Pool. Anglers are reminded that new "fork-length" size limits are now in effect for sturgeon fisheries throughout the region. See <http://wdfw.wa.gov/do/newreal/release.php?id=dec2308a> for more information.

While the spring chinook run builds, some anglers have been catching **trout** in year-round lakes around the region. Klineline Pond was recently stocked with 1,000 catchable-size rainbows, after receiving several thousand half-pounders last month. Lacamas Lake also got 4,000 catchables in recent days.

## **Eastern Washington**

The March 1 fishing season opened with lots of **rainbow trout** catches from the well-stocked Tucannon River impoundments on WDFW's Wooten Wildlife Area in Columbia County in southeast Washington.

Just before the opener, the seven man-made lakes received "catchables" (fish weighing about one-third of a pound) and "jumbos" (fish weighing about one-half pound) from the Tucannon and Lyons Ferry fish hatcheries. Beaver was stocked with 513 catchables; Big Four received 2,025 catchables and 300 jumbos; Blue was stocked with 150 jumbos; Deer received 702 catchables and 25 jumbos; Rainbow received 100 jumbos; Spring was stocked with 2,025 catchables and 100 jumbos; and Watson received 3,002 catchables and 100 jumbos. Additional stocking information is available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly/>.

Walla Walla County's Fishhook Pond also was stocked with catchable-size rainbows before the March 1 opener. Fishhook Park doesn't open until April, but anglers can access the lake by parking outside Fishhook Park and walking south of the railroad right-of-way on U.S. Army Corps of Engineers property (between the railroad tracks and the orchard).

Lakes that opened March 1 further north in the region saw little or no action because they are still thawing out and partially iced over.

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

Also open is 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**.

Anglers can gear up and learn about fishing 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>.

Anglers, hunters, and wildlife viewers alike will enjoy the "outdoors indoors" at the Inland Northwest Wildlife Council's 49th annual Bighorn Outdoor Adventure Show, March 19-22, at the Spokane Fair and Expo Center. The event features vendors, guides and non-profit exhibitors, as well as activities for children, including a fishing pond, shooting gallery, and archery range. For more information on hours and admission fees, see <http://www.wildlifecouncil.com/bighornsubsite/default.htm>.

### **Northcentral Washington**

Anglers who braved a cold drizzle on March 1 in the Columbia Basin had near limits of **rainbow trout** from a few of the lakes that opened to fishing that day, said Jeff Korth, WDFW regional fish program manager. "Despite the weather, water temperatures under 40 degrees, and lake conditions that varied from almost total ice cover to open water, we still managed to pull off a pretty good opener where we expected to," Korth said.

Martha and Upper Caliche lakes on WDFW's Quincy Wildlife Area near the town of George in Grant County produced an average of nearly five trout per angler within an hour on opening day. The trout mostly ran 13-15 inches, with a few 18-20-inch carryovers from Martha. Upper Caliche is completely ice-free and Martha Lake is mostly ice-free.

Lenice and Nunnally lakes on WDFW's Crab Creek Wildlife Area just east of Beverly in Grant County are both completely ice-free. No checks were made at Nunnally on opening day, but anglers at Lenice averaged 3.6 trout per angler of mostly 17-21-inch rainbow, **brown**, and **tiger trout** within three to four hours. Both Lenice and Nunnally are under selective gear rules with a daily catch limit of one fish, so most fish were released.

Dusty Lake, on the Quincy Wildlife Area, is about two-thirds ice free and anglers on the opener averaged two, 14- to 20-inch rainbow trout each. Dusty is also under selective gear rules with a daily catch limit of one fish, so half of the fishing there was catch-and-release.

Lake Lenore, two miles north of the town of Soap Lake on the west side of Hwy. 17, was 90 percent ice-covered on the opener so no checks were made. A catch-and-release fishery for the first two months of the season and under selective gear rules, Lenore offers two- to seven-pound **Lahontan cutthroat trout** .

Burke Lake on the Quincy Wildlife Area was mostly ice-covered on the opener so anglers who attempted it averaged less than one 12- to 14-inch rainbow trout each. Korth notes when it opens up more, the carryover rainbows of 17-20 inches in size will likely make up about 40 percent of the catch.

Quincy Lake, also on the Quincy Wildlife Area, was un-fishable on the opener with complete ice cover. Korth reports the lake received 4,000 catchable-size (usually one-third pound) rainbows last fall.

"Things will improve on all these lakes quickly with a little more warm weather," Korth said. "Where ice conditions minimized participation on the opener, good fishing should persist through April. Catch rates should pick up at all lakes as weather and temperature stabilizes."

In the north end of the region, Bob Jateff, WDFW Okanogan district fish biologist, reports **steelhead** fishing is starting to pick up a bit on the Methow River as warmer weather starts to melt ice and make access easier.

"Both fly and lure or jig fishermen on the Methow are reporting fair fishing for steelhead six to eight pounds," Jateff said. "Everyone needs to remember to retain hatchery adipose-fin-clipped steelhead to allow a higher percentage of natural-origin fish on the spawning grounds." Selective gear rules-no bait-are in effect for the Methow.

Jateff also reported the Okanogan and Similkameen rivers are just starting to thaw out and should provide fair steelhead fishing during the month of March. "There are several public access points to these rivers within the towns of Omak, Okanogan, and Tonasket. They're both under the same no-bait selective gear rules as the Methow."

Jateff noted that ice fishing in the Okanogan is still ongoing with catches of **yellow perch** reported in Patterson Lake, and **rainbow trout** in Rat, Big Green, Sidley, and Davis lakes. "Heavier than normal ice cover should extend the ice fishing season this year, but anglers should exercise extreme caution during the month of March when warmer air temperatures start to affect ice thickness and safety," he said.

## **Southcentral Washington**

Paul Hoffarth, WDFW district fish biologist from Pasco, notes that catches should pick up this month and next in the Ringold **steelhead** fishery - that portion of the Columbia River from Hwy. 395 Bridge at Pasco to the Old Hanford townsite wooden powerline towers.

"Last year at this time bank anglers were averaging one steelhead for every three hours of fishing," he said.

The fishery is open for both bank and boat anglers through the month of March for catch-and-release, except up to two hatchery-marked steelhead may be retained. From April 1-15 the fishery is restricted to the eastern shoreline adjacent to the Ringold Springs Fish Hatchery and for bank fishing only. See *Fishing in Washington* rules pamphlet at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

Hoffarth reported an estimated 167 steelhead were caught in the Ringold fishery in February, based on WDFW staff sampling of 27 percent of total angler effort (155 anglers interviewed.) Overall effort was estimated at 2,168 angler hours, with bank anglers averaging 20 hours of fishing per fish and boat anglers averaging 10 hours.

Hoffarth noted that overall this season, anglers have caught 3,286 steelhead with 1,954 retained. Catch, harvest, and angler effort have been higher in the 2008-09 fishery than in the previous four years.

**Rainbow trout** fishing has been productive at year-round lakes in the Tri-Cities area, thanks to substantial hatchery stocking. Columbia Park Pond in Benton County just received 2,025 one-third pound rainbows from the Naches Fish Hatchery and Dalton Lake in Franklin County recently received 7,931 one-third-pound rainbows and 50 near one-pound rainbows from the Lyons Ferry Fish Hatchery. Both will be stocked routinely throughout the spring months. Columbia Park Pond is open only to anglers under 15 years of age and adults with a disability license.

Kittitas and Yakima county year-round waters also just received more rainbow trout from the Naches Fish Hatchery. Fio Rito Lake North received 3,010 one-third pounders ("catchables") and 700 near one-pounders ("jumbos"); Mattoon Lake received 1,120 catchables and 396 jumbos; Granger Pond, 611 catchables; I-82 Ponds #4 and #6, 2,509 catchables each; Myron Lake, 507 catchables and 500 jumbos; Rotary Lake, 2,509 catchables; and Sarge Hubbard Pond, 299 catchables and 100 jumbos. Watch for weekly hatchery stocking updates at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly/>.

## Reader Email

Reader Steve S. wrote to TGF via the Contact Form at our website, "I would really like to see more information about surf fishing on the Lincoln and Lane County beaches, what is the best current bait, locations, what is being caught, salmon, steelhead, sturgeon and dungeoness are all

great, but how about some action on the surf perch, rock fish, lingcod, and more being caught off of the rocks surf fishing or sandy beaches, is this possible?"

His question was forwarded to TGF co-editor Michael Teague for reply because he enjoys surf fishing and has done it for a few decades.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A short while later, we heard from Steve again after he allied some of the suggestions above, "IT'S GREAT, unbelievable how "simple", once you're in the know, I have an oceanfront home, here for five years, never caught a perch, now it's really fun!!

"Thank you, Thank you!! Again."

Also from our TGF website, this brief question from subscriber Doug L., "Is there anyone selling smelt?"

"Thank You"

Michael again 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 pa 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."

Once again a success story as Doug wrote again, "Thank you..my local store got in 50 lb's an hour ago..would sell me 10 lb. 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:

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### **Random Links**

Rogue River Float Guide:

<http://www.blm.gov/or/resources/recreation/rogue/files/FloatGuide04.pdf>

**GOOD LUCK!**