

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

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

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- With the onset of colder, wetter weather, angler motivation disappeared last weekend on the lower Columbia River. The weather front also chilled the bite although some fish were still caught between the 1-205 Bridge to Davis Bar, across from the mouth of the Willamette River. Weather conditions are forecasted to stabilize and action is likely to pick up as we near the peak season in the month of April.

Flow at Willamette Falls was up to 28,000 CFS as of Monday this week with the water temperature rising at 43 degrees. Trollers and plunkers have been catching the occasional springer. Sturgeon anglers have been catching a fair number of keepers although the bite is subtle. Sturgeon action seemed to have dropped off from previous weeks however.

Now that the first springer has been taken on the Clackamas, more should follow. Both the Clackamas and Sandy will be on the drop and as clarity improves, so will angling results. Steelheading should also pick up on these systems as late returning natives and broodstock hatchery fish begin to return to the system.

Pro guide Trevor Storlie (503-307-5602) reports that steelheading on the Sandy has been "semi slow" but it should improve with rain.

The McKenzie, out of shape early this week, should be worth a try by Thursday.

Fishing on the North Umpqua is slow. Plunkers working the lower South Santiam have had little to show for it.

Scheduled for trout stocking are Benson Lake, Bethany Pond, Blue Lake, Canby Pond, Commonwealth Lake, Dorman Pond, Cottage Grove Pond, Dexter Reservoir, E. E. Wilson Pond, Freeway Lake East, Junction City Pond, Roaring River Park Pond, Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake.

Northwest – Steelheaders went from ultra-low conditions to high water in short order over the weekend. Prior to the big water, a few fish were coming from some of the larger systems like the mainstem Nehalem, Nestucca and a few from the Wilson River.

Although broodstock collection is on par to meet hatchery needs, sport anglers are encouraged to continue to participate in the collection program into the month of April. Effort is likely to switch to metro area springers and egg-take goals may fall short if anglers re-focus their efforts inland.

Overall, it looks like a challenging steelhead season on the north coast but persistent anglers are finding consistent results. River conditions are likely to come back into shape by tomorrow and should fish well through the weekend. The Trask will also be a good wild fish option but the mainstem Nehalem is several days off from fishing well.

The Nestucca and Wilson Rivers will offer up a mix of wild and hatchery fish and fair action is expected into next week reports **pro guide Kent Anderson (503-550-6303)**. Bait casters using primarily eggs will fare best until water levels drop enough for fish to hold and fall to plugs. Smaller streams like the Necanicum are susceptible to windfall and may be hard to navigate with dangerous

barriers to passage.

Inclement weather kept anglers from plying the waters of Tillamook Bay for sturgeon this week and weekend tides weaken making for poor opportunity in the coming week. Crabbing is fair for those willing to work for their catch and favorable tides could further improve the catch this weekend. Tillamook Bay is the best bet but Netarts crabbers could see fair catches as well.

Jetty fishers should begin to see better numbers of lingcod near estuary entrances along the jetties. Jigs and herring oftentimes take fish as they near the spawning season. Check regulations for slot limits and species open for retention. The ocean fishery is shot for another weekend as ocean conditions will make for unsafe conditions.

Scheduled to be planted with trout are Alder Lake, Big Creek Reservoirs 1 & 2, Buck Lake, Cape Mears Lake, Carter Lake, Cleawox Lake, Coffenbury Lake, Cullaby Lake, Devil's Lake, Dune Lake, Eckman Lake, Elbow Lake, Georgia Lake, Hebo Lake, Lake Lytle and Loren's Pond are scheduled to be planted with trout.

Southwest – South coast streams have been in need of water the past few weeks but the storm front that hit over the weekend improved conditions. Fishing for steelhead and early spring chinook should be decent late this week as water levels drop.

Pro guide Bill Kremers (541 754 6411) reports excellent fishing out of Depoe Bay for rockfish and ling cod.

The first confirmed spring chinook was taken on the mainstem Umpqua on Saturday, March 14th. The North, South and mainstem Umpqua have since blown out due to heavy rain.

The Rogue River rose from four feet on Saturday, March 14th to over 10 feet at Agness as of Tuesday this week and was still rising. Some large springers had been caught prior to the deluge, but fishing will improve along with numbers in April and into early May. As the river starts to drop and clear, the upper section should deliver steelhead.

Chetco flows were over 9,000 CFS and dropping on March 17th. Whether or not there are steelhead to be taken after the river drops remains to be seen this late in the season.

Middle and Lower Empire Lakes, Emigrant Reservoir, Expo Pond, Lake Selmac, Lost Creek Reservoir, Willow Lake, Reinhart Pond, Ben Irving Reservoir, Cooper Cr. Reservoir, Galesville Reservoir, Herbert's Pond, Loon Lake, Marie Lake and Plat I Reservoir are scheduled for trout planting.

Eastern – A few caddis are hatching amidst the Blue-Winged Olives on the lower Deschutes where fishing is fair to good for reddsides.

John Day anglers are catching a few smallmouth bass but the fish are of quality size. Only a rare steelhead is being caught in the system.

Steve Fleming (888-624-9424) reports fair but improving results for smallmouth bass on the John Day River. Smallies are hitting crankbaits, spinnerbaits and scented soft plastics.

Lake Billy Chinook has been producing limits of kokanee on jigs.

SW Washington – The North Fork of the Lewis is finally starting to clear and offer up some late wild winter steelhead for the few anglers taking advantage reports **pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)**. Sidedrifted bait will work best but plugs seem especially effective in dropping

flows.

The Kalama fished fair before the precipitation and should produce natives and a rare late hatchery steelhead into late March.

The smelt season is effectively over and NOAA fisheries recently proposed listing this southern stock of smelt as threatened which will certainly justify future fishery restrictions.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Spring Chinook effort is picking up for mainstem fishers but most anglers fished hard with poor results this week. Guides blame the strong tide series that we're currently on and although catches have been sparse since the weekend, some anglers are fishing fairly consistently and many of the fish being caught are of quality size. Several fish in the 30-pound class were recently taken.

Some of the greatest effort continues to take place from the Portland Airport downstream to the mouth of the Willamette. Green label herring are the obvious bait of choice and anglers are sure to fish them close to the bottom, especially when flows are running hard. This is becoming a simple fishery for anglers to find reward with so expect a lot of company in the coming weeks.

Downriver fishers are not faring all that well with poor results being reported from the Clifton Channel area near Westport. Most theorize that since the bulk of the run due back to the river is upriver bound, fish won't be using the Oregon side of the river much in their migration route. Action off of Washington area wing-dams are following suit with this theory as the Brookfield jetty seems to be the most consistent in the lower river but sea-lions are nearly 100% effective at taking any fish that's hooked in this area. Anglers fishing these wing jetties are fishing Kwikfish on the outgoing tides. There are very few other consistent areas in the lower river at this time.

Sturgeon fishers are still focused on the lower Willamette although much of the effort is shifting over to salmon. The Columbia remains too cold for consistent results and will likely stay that way for several more weeks. Needless to say, the fresher the smelt you use for bait, the better your results will be.

Fair catches are still coming from the Bonneville and The Dalles Pools for sturgeon and quotas are likely to be met within the next few months or sooner.

The Guide's Forecast – With mediocre springer reports coming from the fleet this week, it's likely that fishing will get better this week for anglers putting in the time; after all, these are spring Chinook that we're talking about. At this point, it's really all about the water you're most confident in. Major effort will begin to form in the stretch from the I-205 Bridge to Davis and Frenchmen's Bar across from the mouth of the Willamette in coming weeks. Although there is a learning curve for every fishery, this one is pretty easy if you keep a few things in mind when targeting these fish in this area:

- 1) Keep your baits fishing very near to the bottom of the river. These fish will be bottom huggers as that is where the flows are the lightest so fish have to burn fewer calories to migrate upstream.
- 2) Use a slow action rod (I prefer the lengthy 11' Certified Pro series that Lamiglas puts out). These rods coupled with the more stretchy monofilament lines allow for the fish to take the bait without feeling much resistance on the other end. They're more apt to hold onto the bait longer, increasing your chances for keeping one hooked up.
- 3) Use herring. Green label is best but blue label can be quite productive on many days.

Although fish are beginning to pass Bonneville Dam, it's still early to expect great results. The action won't be far off however as this run, with the prediction as robust as it is, should begin to pick up in the coming weeks. This weeks poor catches will be reflected in the Bonneville area into this weekend but assuming action picks up around I-5, the Bonneville season should be well underway by the first week in April. Plugs and spinners fish best in this area.

Although a beautiful place to fish, the Westport/Cathlamet area likely won't be a big producer this year. It wasn't last year and if the Willamette is spewing mud, as is likely the case with the rain forecast in the coming weeks, fish won't be too responsive to taking the bait, so to speak. It is a peaceful place to target these fish however but metro anglers may want to consider sticking closer to home.

Sturgeon anglers will have several more weeks before they can expect better results in the Columbia mainstem. Besides that, most anglers will have salmon on the mind.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Life is good. The first day of spring is Friday, March 20th.

With the water temperature approaching the mid-forties at Willamette Falls, movement of wither steelhead has been minimal as the total has been 15 hundred something for over a week while just over 100 summer steelhead have been counted. Arguably, summers have been crossing prior to their being included in counts as of March 1st and additional steelhead vault the Falls as they have for generations prior to the construction of the fish ladder. As of March 16th, the visibility had dropped to less than one foot although catches were. Muddy water is not so good for springer results (although Wednesday this week catches were fair to good) but sturgeon like those conditions. In the creel check last week, about a third of the boats trying for sturgeon landed keeper-sized fish while about 190 boats targeting springers caught 24 fish. Remember to confine efforts for either or both to Thursdays through Saturdays.

Water level and flow are coming down as the water temp is rising. Prospects are good for fly anglers here this coming weekend.

Low numbers at the Falls means slow to fair fishing at the North Santiam. Hopefully this situation will improve in the coming months with a decent hatchery summer steelhead run.

The Guide's Forecast – Work the lower Willamette from the I-5 Bridge down to below St. Johns. Once fish are found, keep fresh smelt, squid or sand shrimp in the water and sort through shorts to score keepers. The Willamette water color remains poor at this writing mid-day Thursday, March 10th. If you must try, keep fishing herring and wrapped Kwikfish for springers. The waters too cold to break out the spinners or wobblers.

The March Brown hatch has started but there are no great numbers of bugs showing as yet. As a consequence, nymphs have been most effective this week. What hatches are occurring have been happening mid-day but it's been insufficient to get trout looking up.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Steelheading picked up mid-week on the Clackamas with some anglers experiencing multiple hookups and even a few limits have been taken, Anglers are seeing a fair number of bright steelhead in Eagle Creek and have been hooking up with a number of them. While returns have been less than spectacular, results here have been worthwhile recently.

Steelheading remains slow on the Sandy River.

Pro guide Trevor Storlie (503-307-5602) reports "The Sandy has been semi slow for steelhead over the week, mainly due to low water. It was about 1 fish per boat. Most fish were caught in the bigger deeper holes. This rain should make things a little more interesting over here."

Northwest Trout

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife will hold a "Learn to Take a Child Fishing" instructional seminar on April 11th from 9 AM to 2 PM at the Oregon 4-H Conference and Education Center, 5390 Four H Rd. in Salem. Participants must be registered by April 8th, no license is required and all fish will be released. The \$20 registration fee covers lunch. For more information, call (503) 947-6025.

ODFW says: "A free youth angling event will take place at Cottage Grove Pond on Saturday, March 21. ODFW angling instructors will be on hand to provide equipment to kids who need it as well as offering helpful fishing tips."

Cottage Grove Pond will be stocked this week with 1,750 legal-size trout for the event.

As of April 1st, Mt. Hood Pond will be limited to anglers 17 & under only.

North Coast Fishing Report – North Coast streams are only now beginning to come into fishable shape and we can only speculate that they will fish good as early as Thursday (3/19). Most anglers were a bit disappointed after the last rain freshet. There were plenty of boats pursuing these fish and although fishing was fair, we were all expecting better results. If we don't get a big push of steelhead on these dropping flows, it'll be clear that there won't be a strong run this year.

Some of the smaller streams like the Kilchis were fishing at mid-week but numbers have not been really strong on these smaller streams in recent years. The Necanicum reportedly has a massive log-jam blocking the river making it impossible to get a boat down according to unconfirmed reports. Several of these smaller streams will close to targeting steelhead beginning on April 1st. The Wilson, Nestucca and Trask will remain open for fin-clipped steelhead and springer season opens on April 1st on these streams. North coast rivers tend to be slower to clear but are expected to be fishable by the coming weekend.

Pro guide Kent Anderson (503-550-6303) had this to report from the Nestucca River, "As I write this, the Nestucca is high and out of fish. Hopefully it'll be back in shape by the end of the week. Overall we have been seeing slow but steady fishing on the Nestucca. 2-3 steelhead most days with a few other opportunities. Fish have been very scattered throughout the river, fresh fish arriving daily but ideal water conditions for them to move up river quickly. Most fish have been caught side-drifting or drift fishing eggs but we had a couple days where the K11 & Tadpollies out fished the bait. Spent a couple days last week on the Trask as well and found similar success.

We'll have more updated reports in next weeks edition as boats head out on the water over the weekend.

Sturgeon effort remained low on Tillamook Bay, most likely due to the inclement weather we had there over the weekend. Although snow is certainly not unheard of in March in the coast range, fishing on the bay in an exposed boat really shows how motivated an angler is. Sometimes I wonder if we're really "fishing" with all our bait in the water.....

Ocean conditions have been too rough for safe bar passage but crabbers that worked Tillamook Bay late last week found success if they stuck to it. Netarts Bay wasn't crabbing as good.

The Guide's Forecast – No doubt, the Wilson and the Nestucca will have the most effort and best catches on the north coast this weekend. The rivers are forecasted to see a slight rise in river levels on Friday but should fish well into the weekend. Although opinions differ, many guides agree that mid-March should be a great time to target steelhead in these coastal systems. With the broodstock program on-line in the Wilson and Nestucca, action should be fair.

Sidedrifted or drift-fished bait will produce the best results in the higher flows so leave the subtle gear at home until flows drop more.

Smaller streams, especially the Kilchis and Trask River should also be strong options. The Nehalem will remain too high for measurable results.

Tides soften making crabbing a better option than sturgeon fishing. Bottomfishing should also be picking up around the jetties where both boat and bank anglers can take advantage of rockfish this time of year.

Central & South Coast Reports – Oregon spring whale watch week is March 21st through 28th this year and over 400 volunteers will be available at various locations along the coast to enlighten viewers and help them spot one or more of over 18,000 gray whales passing by the Oregon Coast as they head north to feeding grounds in the Arctic. Here's a map of "whale Watching Spoken Here" locations: http://blog.oregonlive.com/terryrichard/2009/03/WWSH_map.pdf

Crabbing is on the decline coast-wide, with ocean catches down and bay crabbing, marginal at best in the past few weeks, unproductive following precipitation recently.

Pro guide Bill Kremers (541 754 6411) reports that he "did have a bottom fishing out of Depoe last Friday. Fishing was excellent for ling cod. We caught them from about twelve inches all the way to forty-four inches. There were a few assorted bottom around, including a couple of nice vermilion. Then I fished with Steve Flemming on the on the John Day for a couple."

The Alsea is dropping rapidly following recent rainstorms and is destined to be low and clear once again by the weekend. Nearly 1,100 steelhead had been counted at the hatchery facility as of March 12th.

The North Umpqua was high and muddy early this week but is dropping and clearing. It should fish well late this week but conditions over the weekend will depend on how much precipitation falls on Saturday.

Crabbing is slow but sturgeon fishing has improved with the deluge earlier this week at Coos Bay and catches are expected to hold up for the remainder of March.

Steelheading on the Coquille is slow with the majority of fish present spawned out down-runners.

The lower Rogue should produce spring Chinook late this week but it remains to be seen what effect precipitation will have on the river over the weekend. Bait will be more effective than hardware until the water temperature warms into the 50s. The majority of springers returning to the Rogue are fin-clipped fish of hatchery origin. Steelhead catches are improving in the Grants Pass stretch and upper Rogue as these fish make their way upstream. Various soft plastic and hard lures are fooling winters.

The Elk and Sixes have been producing fair to good catches of steelhead recently. These rivers rise and fall rapidly so a call to the hatchery at 541-332-7025 will provide up-to-the-minute information on water conditions.

The level of the Chetco River has been dropping as expected and with flows moderating to 4,000 cfs or so on Thursday this week. Steelheading is winding down on the Chetco although there are a few late-running fish known locally as 'blue-backs' due to their unusual coloring. The steelhead are smaller, usually in the three to six pound range and signal the end of the run here. Wind and wave will once again conspire the weekend to prevent boaters from accessing the excellent bottom fishing offshore. out of the Port of Brookings although there may be an opportunity early mornings for a quick nearshore jaunt with Friday looking best.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Fishing has improved along with hatches on the lower Deschutes. Greater numbers of caddis are hatching and the Blue-Winged Olives remain abundant mid-day.

Steve Fleming (888-624-9424) reports from the John Day River, "We had last week off for my wife's business. Yesterday I took Bill Kremers [also a pro guide, ed.] out for the day and we boated two smallmouth bass on crankbaits. One was 19 1/2 inches. Today I took, Bill, Errol Claire (retired fish biologist), and Don Miller. They boated 9 smallmouth bass and one Hatchery Male Steelhead. The bass were nice size 13"-17". We boated them on crankbaits, spinnerbaits, and plastic grubs all covered with Smelly Jelly Craw/Anise. the river is rising a little with the heavy storms in the upper reaches, but is very fishable, and with the cold nights should calm back down by Thursday. The water was 41 this morning and warmed up to 44 by the mid day."

Jigging has been effective this week in taking five-fish limits of kokanee at Lake-Billy Chinook.

Spring Chinook season on Hood River opens April 15 from the mouth to Powerdale Dam (4.5 miles) for adipose fin-clipped Chinook salmon from April 15th through June 30th. A good return is forecast an dangles may keep two hatchery springers per day.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report *March 18-31, 2009*

North Puget Sound

The catch-and-release fishery for steelhead is under way on the Skagit River, but most anglers in the region are focused on the marine areas of Puget Sound, where blackmouth fisheries remain open.

Fishing continues to be decent for **blackmouth** - resident chinook - in Marine Area 7 (San Juan Islands), said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "From what I'm hearing, fishing is still solid around the San Juan Islands, especially for those anglers working the western and northern portions of the marine area," he said.

Recent creel samples show some of the best harvest numbers were seen at checks at ramps in those portions of Marine Area 7. For example, 34 anglers were checked with eight chinook March 6 at the Bellingham Ramp. Two days later, 14 anglers were checked with three chinook at the Bellingham Ramp while eight anglers were checked with three chinook at Friday Harbor Marina.

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 there have been recent reports of anglers hooking some nice-size blackmouth in Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet), but, overall, fisheries there and 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, anglers can still cast for **steelhead**. Most rivers in the region closed to steelhead fishing at the end of February, but portions of the Skagit River remain open for catch-and-release, said Brett Barkdull, WDFW fish biologist. Anglers fishing the Skagit River from the Dalles Bridge at Concrete to the Cascade River can catch-and-release steelhead 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.

The Sauk River also is open from the mouth of the river to the Darrington Bridge. Anglers can still keep two hatchery steelhead through April 30, but all wild steelhead must be released.

Looking forward to the **summer salmon fishing** season? There's still time to provide input on proposals for this year's fisheries. Four public meetings have been scheduled as fishery managers continue to develop the 2009 salmon seasons. Those meetings are scheduled for:

- March 19 - The final opportunity for anglers and others to provide input on Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor salmon seasons. The meeting is scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. in Room 172 of the Natural Resources Building, 1111 Washington St. S.E., Olympia.
- March 19 - Public discussion of potential recreational and commercial salmon fisheries statewide. The meeting is scheduled to begin at 6 p.m. at the Benton PUD, 2721 W. 10th Ave. Kennewick.
- March 30 - An opportunity for the public to comment on proposed ocean salmon fishing options adopted by the Pacific Fishery Management Council. The meeting is scheduled to begin at 7 p.m. at the Chateau Westport, 710 W. Hancock St., Westport.
- March 31 - The public will have an opportunity to discuss salmon fisheries that take place in coastal areas, Puget Sound and the Columbia River. That meeting is scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. at the Lynnwood Embassy Suites Hotel, 20610 44th Ave. W., Lynnwood.

The final fishing package for Washington's waters will be finalized in early April. More information about the salmon season-setting process can be found on WDFW's North of Falcon website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/northfalcon/>).

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

With lingcod and blackmouth fishing under way, spring chinook on the horizon and several proposed razor clam digs coming up, Washingtonians have plenty of good reasons to buy their 2009-10 fishing licenses before April 1.

On the ocean, recreational **lingcod** fishing is now under way in marine areas 1-3, while Marine Area 4 (Neah Bay) will open April 16. All four marine areas will be open seven days a week.

In Marine Area 2 (Westport/Ocean Shores), recreational fishing for bottomfish or lingcod is not allowed in waters deeper than 30 fathoms from March 14 through June 15. However, anglers

may retain sablefish and Pacific cod in these waters from May 1 through June 15. Retention of canary and yelloweye rockfish is prohibited in all areas.

The minimum size for lingcod in marine areas 1-3 is 22 inches, while the minimum size in Marine Area 4 is 24 inches. Additional information about the lingcod fishery and other bottomfish is available on the WDFW Fishing Hotline (360) 902-2500 or online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

Meanwhile, angler turnout and success were low for **blackmouth** fishing over the March 14 weekend in Hood Canal and south Puget Sound, where blustery weather likely kept anglers off the water, said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. A better choice was the Strait of Juan de Fuca, where a creel check showed 84 anglers caught 29 salmon off Ediz Hook near Port Angeles. "So far this season, the strait has been the best area to find blackmouth and it could pay to make the trip," Thiesfeld said.

Blackmouth fishing wraps up April 10 in marine areas 5 (Sekiu), 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 11 (Tacoma-Vashon) and 12 (Hood Canal). April 30 is the last day for blackmouth fishing in Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound). The daily limit is one fish per angler.

On the freshwater, anglers should note that the Chehalis River and its tributaries are now closed to all fishing, with the exception of fishing for **white sturgeon** on the mainstem downstream of Porter Bridge. The fishery was scheduled to remain open into April, but early data indicate returns of hatchery and wild **steelhead** are below pre-season projections and may not meet escapement goals, said Kirt Hughes, WDFW regional fish program manager.

"The Chehalis River system has been under-escaped for two years. We had to close the basin to reduce the impact on these fish," Hughes said. Rivers affected include the Newaukum, Cloquallum Creek, Satsop, Skookumchuck, Wishkah and Wynoochee, and their tributaries. Additional information is available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

As an alternative, anglers can try their luck on several north coast rivers, where the steelhead fishery is "cooking along," said Mike Gross, WDFW fish biologist. With wild steelhead making up most of the catch, anglers checked on the Bogachiel and Sol Duc rivers over the March 14 weekend averaged one fish for every two rods, while the average on the upper and lower Hoh River was one fish for every three rods. Five anglers on the Calawah River caught three wild steelhead (one released).

The retention fishery for steelhead closes at the end of the day April 15 on the Hoh River, but will remain open on the Quillayute River system through April 30.

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>.

Meanwhile in Thurston County, a catch-and-release **trout** fishery is underway on Munn Lake, where 1,000 one-pound rainbows were planted March 1. Anglers must use single, barbless hooks and release all fish. Fish retention will be allowed when the lowland lake trout season starts on April 25.

Anglers may want to put their rods aside and grab a shovel for a three-day **razor clam** dig tentatively scheduled March 27-29, provided marine toxin tests show the clams are safe to eat. Two digs are also tentatively scheduled April 10-12 and April 25-27. All digs will be held on morning tides.

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

April 1 marks the beginning of a new license year, so diggers must purchase an applicable 2009-10 fishing license. Anyone age 15 or older must have a license to dig razor clams. Licenses can be purchased at <http://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov>, by telephone (866) 246-9453, or in person at more than 600 license vendors throughout the state. A list of vendors is available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/lic/vendors/vendors.htm>. Updates on the razor clam season are available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/shelfish/razorclm/season.htm>.

For those interested in the upcoming **summer salmon fishing** season, three public meetings will take place the end of March as fishery managers continue to develop the 2009 salmon season. Those meetings are scheduled for:

- March 19 - The final opportunity to provide input on the Grays Harbor and Willapa Bay salmon seasons. The meeting is scheduled from 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Room 172 of the Natural Resources Building, 1111 Washington St. S.E., Olympia.
- March 30 - A hearing of proposed ocean salmon fishing options adopted by the Pacific Fishery Management Council. The meeting is scheduled to begin at 7 p.m. at Chateau Westport, 710 Hancock Street, Westport.
- March 31 - An opportunity to discuss salmon fisheries developed for Puget Sound and Columbia River area sport and commercial fisheries. The meeting is scheduled from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Embassy Suites Hotel, 20610 44th Ave. West, Lynnwood.

Southwest Washington

The **spring chinook** fishery has been growing in fits and starts on the lower Columbia River, drawing an increasing number of anglers hoping they picked the right day and area to try their luck. On some days, one in two boats has been catching fish on various parts of the river, then the bite suddenly drops off, said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist.

"It's time to get serious," Hymer said. "The catch should start smoothing out pretty soon, and increase day by day. Now is when the fishing starts getting good."

An aerial survey conducted March 12 found 340 boats on the lower river - more than double the count two weeks earlier. Most of those boats, along with 258 bank anglers, were concentrated around Vancouver, although the fishery has begun to stretch downriver to Cathlamet, Hymer said.

Nearly 300,000 upriver spring chinook are expected to return to the Columbia River this year, which would make the annual run the largest since 2001. An additional 37,000 springers also are expected to return to the Willamette River, up from 27,000 last year.

Through April 18, salmon fishing is open three days a week (Thursday through Saturday) downstream from the west power lines on Hayden Island to Buoy 10. From the power lines upstream to Bonneville Dam, the fishery is open seven days per week through March 22, before switching to a Wednesday-through-Saturday schedule through April 22.

Below Bonneville Dam the daily salmonid bag limit is six fin-clipped fish, no more than two adult salmon or steelhead or one of each. No more than one may be an adult chinook. Wild chinook and wild steelhead must be released.

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.

Since March 16, salmon fishing has also been open seven days a week from Bonneville Dam to McNary Dam, where anglers may retain two marked, hatchery-reared adult salmon or steelhead (or one of each) per day. The same daily limit is in effect for the bank-only fishery from Bonneville Dam upstream to the Tower Island power lines and on the Wind River and Drano Lake, which also opened March 16.

Hymer said it will be awhile before the bite picks up above Bonneville Dam, where fish counters had tallied only 26 springers as of March 16.

Hymer recommends that anglers fishing for spring chinook sink a flatfish or cut plug herring fairly deep - 20 to 30 feet - and resist 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."

Hymer reminds mainstem Columbia anglers that **shad** and fin-clipped **steelhead** may be retained only on days open to fishing for adipose fin-clipped chinook.

While spring chinook are the main attraction in the Columbia River Basin right now, anglers do have other options, Hymer said. **Walleye** fishing is picking up from Bonneville to McNary Dam, and anglers are still catching some late-run hatchery **steelhead** on the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers.

On the other hand, the **smelt** fishery has wrapped up on the Cowlitz, and sturgeon fishing has been slow below Bonneville Dam.

Trout anglers should know that Battle Ground Lake was recently stocked with 2,000 half-pound rainbows March 9. Kline Pond got 1,000 half-pounders the same day.

Hunting: The spring wild turkey season will run April 15 through May 31 throughout the state. The general season follows a special hunt April 4-5 for youths under 16 years of age. For more information, a *Wild Turkey Spring Season* brochure is available at WDFW regional offices and on the department's website: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/game/water/turkey/index.htm> .

Eastern Washington

Snake River **steelhead** fishing is in its final weeks, with the hatchery fish retention season closing March 31. Later next month a fishery for **hatchery spring chinook salmon** will open near Little Goose Dam.

The forecasted run of chinook looks like that fishery might be expanded this year below Ice Harbor and Lower Granite dams, said WDFW southeast district fish biologist Glen Mendel of Dayton. Anglers should watch for rule change announcements in early April.

Meanwhile, more year-round, winter-only and March-opening lakes in the region's central district are free of ice or opening up with increasing temperatures and winds. WDFW central district fish

biologist Chris Donley of Spokane reminds anglers these are the last weeks to fish the two winter season trout waters just west of Spokane. Hog Canyon Lake, northeast of Sprague off the I-90 Fishtrap exit, has open water and is still providing catches of 12-13-inch and 9-11-inch **rainbow trout**. Fourth of July Lake, on the Lincoln-Adams county line, still had some ice at last report and has bigger but far fewer rainbows. Both waters close March 31.

Donley also reports that March-opening Liberty Lake, near the Washington-Idaho border, is providing open water catches of **yellow perch** and one to two big **brown trout** per angler. Downs Lake, in southwest Spokane County, also has open water with lots of winter-carryover rainbow trout in the 15-to-16-inch range and a few perch. Downs will be receiving 2,500 eight to ten-inch **tiger trout** in the next week or so. Coffeepot Lake in Lincoln County and Amber Lake in southwest Spokane County were still somewhat icy at least report, but Donley says those fisheries should turn on soon with continued warmer, windy weather.

Year-round Sprague Lake is virtually ice-free and anglers have been launching boats at the WDFW's southwest side access. Donley had no current report on catches at Sprague, but expects the rainbows are continuing to hit. Rock Lake in Whitman County, also open year-round and ice-free now, is providing catches of brown and rainbow trout, especially for boat anglers casting plugs towards the shoreline. Donley notes if windy conditions make Rock Lake too turbid, catch rates could drop.

Kokanee and rainbow trout fishing at Lake Roosevelt is picking up as spring advances.

Anglers and others 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. Hundreds of exhibitors provide information, gear, guiding services, and more for fish and wildlife recreation of all kinds. Children's activities include 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

Steelhead fishing is starting to pick up in the Okanogan, Methow, and Similkameen rivers, according to Bob Jateff, WDFW Okanogan district fish biologist from Twisp.

"Anglers fishing these waters can expect catch rates of one steelhead for every eight hours of fishing time," Jateff said. "The smaller fish are 3-5 pounds, with a good number of larger ones up to 10 pounds"

Jateff reminds steelheaders that two sections of the Okanogan River closed March 15 - from 100 feet below the Highway 155 Bridge to the mouth of Omak Creek, and the 100 feet below the mouth of Bonaparte Creek.

The rest of the upper Columbia River area steelhead fishery is scheduled to close March 31, but some waters, like the Methow River, could close early if wild fish impacts are reached before then. Anglers should check the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>, or call the fishing hotline at (360) 902-2500 for the latest rule changes.

"Steelhead in the mainstem Methow are also starting to spawn now, so I advise anglers to be careful when wading around active redds," Jateff said. "And remember that selective gear rules, with no bait allowed, are in effect for the duration of the steelhead fishery in this area."

Jeff Korth, WDFW north central regional fish program manager, reports the ice is gone at all Columbia Basin fisheries that opened March 1 or are open year-round.

"Quincy Lake was not even fishable until recently and it's full of nice fat rainbow trout," Korth said. "Burke Lake is slated for another stocking of 4,500 half pounders from Trout Lodge this week. The Seep Lakes south of Potholes Reservoir are ice-free and ready for anglers, like Corral, Blythe, Canal, Windmill, Heart and other smaller waters. Some of these are year-round waters, but some like Herman, Lyle and Teal open April 1. Be sure to check the rules pamphlet for which ones are open now."

Korth also reported excellent fishing at some of the Basin's "quality fisheries" that are under selective gear rules and one-fish daily catch limits. Year-round Beda Lake, just south of the Winchester Wasteway, is "fantastic," with anglers catching and releasing more than 10 rainbows per trip on the average. Lenice and Nunnally lakes, on [WDFW's Lower Crab Creek Wildlife Area](#) just east of Beverly, are "good to very good, depending on the weather," Korth said, with anglers catching five to eight fish per trip. Lake Lenore, near the town of Soap Lake, opened to catch-and-release fishing March 1 and is "still slow but warming up."

Southcentral Washington

Eric Anderson, WDFW district fish biologist from Yakima, reports many of the region's year-round waters are being stocked again this week and next with **rainbow trout** from department fish hatcheries.

The popular Interstate-82 Ponds #1, 2 and 3 in Yakima County are the latest to receive more fish. Anderson said trout stocking occurs just about every two weeks somewhere in the region. "As the weather continues to warm we will extend fish stocking to the higher elevation lakes, but right now we are still stocking the lower elevation waters," Anderson said.

Anglers can check the fish stocking schedules on the WDFW website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/reports_plants.html.

TGF Inbox

Subscriber 'Lloyd' wrote to ask, "I was just wondering when the ponds at the Trojan Plant will be stocked and is there a way to find out how many fish and what size fish are going to be planted?"

"Keep up the good work! I find your fishing forecasts to be extremely helpful. Thank you for doing a great job and providing a valuable service."

Pro guide and TGF co-editor Bob Rees responded, "Go to the below link from the ODF&W home page and you will find the week when trout will be planted in Trojan Ponds. The date listed are Monday's but you have to keep in mind that the trout will be stocked any day that week. Good luck and get after 'em! Thanks for being a subscriber!"

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/trout_stocking_schedules/2009/willamette/north_willamette.asp

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

ODFW's outdoor skills workshops:

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/outdoor_skills/workshops.asp

NOAA's Experimental BookletChart: <http://ocsdata.ncd.noaa.gov/bookletchart/>

Quote of the week

"I don't know exactly what fly-fishing teaches us, but I think it's something we need to know." -
John Gierach

GOOD LUCK!