

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **March 27th – April 2nd, 2009**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Spring chinook anglers are showing up in force on the mainstem Columbia. Fishing was fairly poor given the large effort out over the weekend. Overall, catch rates are down from last year but it's way too early to call for an over-prediction of the spring run. Catches will likely pick up significantly this week through mid-April. We're entering peak season with green label herring taking the majority of the keepers. Davis Bar produced the best results last weekend.

Willamette River water temperature is up to 48 degrees with the visibility approaching three feet. About 1,800 winter steelhead have been counted but fewer than 200 summers have crossed the Falls thus far. Smelt, sand shrimp and squid are taking sturgeon. A few springers have come from Sellwood but it's been slow recently.

While a few March Browns are hatching on the McKenzie, they have not yet appeared in big numbers as expected. Fishing is good on nymphs, however.

Numbers of steelhead are still fairly low at the North Santiam but a few are being caught.

Steelheading on the Clackamas has continued to improve with both gear and fly anglers taking fish and a few limits over the past week.

A few steelhead are being hooked in the Oxbow stretch of the Sandy, but results were pretty good at Dodge Park recently. Steelhead are also being caught at Cedar Creek.

Scheduled to be stocked with trout this week are Huddleston Pond, St. Louis Ponds, Blue River Reservoir, Foster Reservoir, Timber Linn Lake and Waverly Lake.

Northwest – Boaters working the lower Columbia near Westport have reported challenging fishing. A few fish are coming from the Aldrich Point area but overall, catches have been light. The weekend creel check indicated a fish for about every 11 boats. The tides improve for bank anglers over the weekend.

Steelheaders finally saw what the potential for angling was on the Wilson on Monday. Action from Siskeyville downstream was excellent with some large fish to 21-pounds reported in the catches. Action slowed by Tuesday however but should be fair again by the weekend as flows are expected to stabilize after the mid-week rise.

The Trask also produced fair results as native fish begin to come on strong and well into April on this system.

The Nestucca River has also been producing fair catches with the upper reaches producing the best results in higher flows. Inexperienced boaters should not fish above 5½ Bridge unless they have floated that stretch before.

Sturgeon fishing may be an option again by the weekend although it's clear that the number of sturgeon present is only a fraction of what it was earlier this year.

Friday may be the best chance for offshore anglers to take advantage of friendly seas to catch

lingcod and bottomfish. Crabbing should also be fair given the little amount of effort in recent weeks. By the weekend, the swell is forecasted to build to 15 feet making bar crossings dangerous and seas inhospitable.

Coastal lakes remain well stocked with trout for anglers trying their luck over spring break.

Southwest – South coast rivers, swollen and off-color at this time last week, are dropping and clearing now.

Mild morning minus tides are forecast for the weekend.

A couple of springers were taken over the weekend, but as early as it is in the season, it makes more sense to target steelhead on the Umpqua River.

Steelheaders on the South Fork Coquille have been taking fresh fish over the past week in numbers that contradict the prediction for a slow season due to an earlier smolt loss.

Boats fishing off Port Orford have done well for a variety of bottomfish.

The lower Rogue picked up for spring chinook once the river dropped into shape and waters warmed following the last deluge.

Bait fishers have fared best on the Elk River recently, making some good catches of steelhead.

Steelheading on the Chetco is winding down with most of the fish being hooked now being spawned out. Anglers are heading North to the Rogue for a chance of hooking a fresh springer. When ocean conditions have allowed, bottomfishing out of the Port of Brookings has remained excellent.

Lower and Middle Empire Lake, Bradley Lake and Johnson Mill Pond are scheduled to be planted with trout.

Eastern – Blue-Winged Olive disappeared during sunny weather early this week on the Deschutes, but caddis were hatching in good numbers and trout responded to dry imitators.

Green Peter has been fair for kokanee recently but good for trout.

Lake Billy Chinook has been producing decent numbers of bull trout but they've been running small.

SW Washington – Steelheading remains slow on most district rivers. Cowlitz anglers checked in with 1 winter steelhead for every 5 bank anglers from Olequa downstream.

The Kalama remains one of the better bets for late winter fish but only a single wild fish was released for 7 bank anglers checked.

The North Fork of the Lewis yielded a spring chinook over the weekend. Mainstem Lewis anglers reported only 1 wild steelhead released for 23 boats.

Although springers are beginning to pass Bonneville Dam, a viable Wind River and Drano Lake fishery is still several weeks away. The run prediction is not what one would think given the mainstem run size this year.

Columbia River Fishing Report – As expected, fishing on the opening day after the 3-day closure was quite good for Columbia River sport anglers working the river upstream of I-5. Boats were out in force on Wednesday morning, fishing near the I-5 Bridge but action was best near the Portco boat ramp in the morning. After anglers realized where the fish actually were, effort shifted upriver and fishing was pretty good for many. **Pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)** reported going 4 for 5 in the a.m. after learning of the upriver action from where he started at I-5. Other guides reported similar action with **pro guide Brandon Glass (503-260-8285)** going 7 for 7 on Wednesday with 4 of those 7 fish of hatchery origin.

Prior to the re-opener, fishing had been quite slow last weekend. Guides were reporting only seeing around a dozen fish for hordes of boats on the water from Davis Bar to Canby. Trollers have been dominating the water but there are a few anglers anchoring up and working plugs in the current. They are not faring as well as the herring trollers. Tides will change this weekend however and that could concentrate fish near the waters' edge where plug plunkers will have a better chance at scoring results.

Fishing at Bonneville is sub-par but that's to be expected given the fact we're still early in the run. The Bonneville fishery is due to pick up in the coming weeks as fish congregate in larger numbers before crossing the dam. Passage numbers are down from last year but it's too early in the run to call a mis-prediction. With only around 100 fish past Bonneville Dam, it's hardly a gauge on how the run is actually going to perform.

At this writing, the downriver fishery near Westport was only producing a few fish for a fair amount of effort. Effort will continue to climb but just because the run is headed towards peak season, doesn't mean this fishery will perform in the coming weeks. With a good prediction last year, fishing was only fair-at-best for experienced anglers working this lower river stretch. With the Willamette run down, Oregon side fisheries are less likely to produce results.

Anglers are sticking to using green label herring as they often produce the better catches as returning adults are more likely to encounter this size of bait fish before entering the Columbia on their spawning run. With the larger blue label herring, you may find yourself asking if the bait you're using is too large. You never have to ask yourself if green label herring is too small for these spring chinook; make sure it's in your arsenal.

Sturgeon fishers are still sticking to the Willamette for the best action. See the Willamette report for the most accurate information. The water is still too cold to expect good results in the mainstem for keeper sturgeon. There are a fair number of shakers coming from the stretch below the mouth of the Willamette. For anglers fishing above Bonneville Dam, although conservative quotas are still a ways away from being attained, those invested in fishing these waters will want to do so before we get too far into the spring. It won't be long before those quotas are reached in the Bonneville and The Dalles Pools.

The Guide's Forecast – Action is likely to remain good into the weekend for Columbia River spring Chinook anglers. Until the fish come into the river in greater numbers, the bite will be more localized so it's a bit of a crap shoot as to where to begin your day. Just above the I-5 Bridge on the Washington side is a good bet as well as the Portco boat ramp on the Washington side. Davis Bar will also be a favorite across from the mouth of the Willamette River. Again, keep in mind that the majority of the fish this year are destined for upriver Washington bound hatcheries and therefore, effort and likely catch will be greatest on the Washington side. That doesn't mean you should ignore the Oregon side. Even though it's likely that more fish will use the Washington side, with less boat traffic on the Oregon side, the angler per biter ratio can oftentimes favor diligent anglers working the south side of the river.

Regardless of where you fish, keep your baits close to the bottom. When we hit the minus tides this weekend, fish will be looking for the slower water closer to the bottom of the river and also along the river banks. When these fish aren't actively feeding, they counting calories so they'll go where the current isn't as intense. Green label herring will dominate this fishery but I had periods of time where blue label herring out-fished the smaller green label quite clearly. Running 6 rods off of my boat, I'll be trying both sizes and report back what I learned.

Although the lower river will be a more serene place to target these salmon, effort will be lighter and likely so will the catches. Probably one of the more productive areas will be Brookfield wing jetty but you'll be competing for salmon with the sea-lions present. Like the upper river, keep in mind that most of the fish are likely to travel the north side of the river.

You can try Bonneville and if you do get in the right lane of migration, you can have a good day, even this early in the season. Be sure your familiar with anchoring techniques for this stretch of treacherous water using ample scope to secure your boat in the swift, deep flows. Anchor fishing with plugs will be the preferred method until the water warms when spinners will become popular as well. Backbouncers will take fish later on in April.

Sturgeon anglers stick to the Willamette River if you're serious about results. It's still too early for mainstem action on keepers.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Water temps dropped a degree to 47 as of March 26th. Over 1,800 winters and 200 summer steelhead have been counts at the Falls. Spring Chinook fishing has been slow to fair but sturgeon fishing has been worthwhile. Water in Multnomah Channel is in the high 40s with decent visibility.

The McKenzie level was peaking on Thursday this week after a small rise and has started to drop.

Catch-and-release fishing for native steelhead is slow to fair on the North Santiam.

The Guide's Forecast – Since bait has been most effective, when trolling herring for springers be sure to keep fresh bait in the water. The odds are long enough this early in the season. Fish herring on a long leader (seven feet with eight ounces of weight in 25 feet of water. For sturgeon, be sure have smelt available although squid, herring and sand shrimp are also getting bit. March Brown and Blue-Winged Olive hatches are creating ideal conditions for trout anglers on the Middle Fork of the Willamette.

It has been a nymph show at the McKenzie but hopefully a couple of sunny days this week will kick off a decent March Brown hatch that will have the fish looking up. If not, results have been very good on sub-surface offerings.

Some anglers are blanking while others are limiting at Hagg Lake.

While not listed on the trout stocking schedule, Huddleston Pond in Willamina will be stocked with 1,400 rainbow trout this week, including 400 trophy-class fish according to the ODFW website.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – The Clackamas has actually been worthwhile for steelhead over the past week. Jigs, bait, spinners and

plugs are all hooking fish at times. Eagle Creek has been slow.

Steelheading on the Sandy has remained slow to fair. The best stretch is from Dodge Park upstream.

North Coast Fishing Report – Steelheaders working the Wilson River on Monday had their dreams come true. They flat out knocked `em dead under ideal conditions with little boat traffic that day. Word got out quick and by Tuesday, a larger fleet was under pursuit but with such traffic, fishing success was just a fraction of what it was the day before. Although most guides averaged between 5 and 8 chances, one guide reportedly had high double digit opportunities in the Siskeyville to Sollie Smith float. Persistent rain kept river levels at a good stage and color remained excellent at mid-week.

The Nestucca also fished well early in the week with **pro guide Kent Anderson (503-550-6303)** reporting an 8-fish day with the Amato's (*Salmon-Trout-Steelheader* magazine). Look for a cover shot in an upcoming edition. Guides have been sidedrifting eggs in the higher flows as that is clearly the superior method under these conditions.

These 2 rivers are the best producers given their ample returns of hatchery and wild fish but the Trask River also has been producing consistent results for wild fish. Although a rare hatchery stray is encountered in this system, almost all of the fish caught here are of wild origin and must be released unharmed.

Other north coast river systems like the North Fork Nehalem, Necanicum and Kilchis are drawing little attention due to windfall and the lack of hatchery fish available. They will be poor options as flows continue to drop.

Rough seas are keeping ocean going vessels at bay and a minus tide series coupled with a bad ocean forecast is likely to do the same this weekend. Bay crabbing remains poor in Tillamook, Nehalem and Netarts estuaries.

The Guide's Forecast – Steelheaders should still have a good chance at a hatchery or wild fish on the Wilson or Nestucca in particular. Die-hard steelheaders will find conditions much more tolerable as the bulk of the fleet switches gears to target Willamette Valley spring Chinook. As flows drop, fish will begin to hold more in the defined water and first boat through will have some of the better opportunities to catch these fish well into the weekend.

Plugs may become more effective in the dropping flows with metallic plugs working best on sunny days and solid colors working on overcast days. Of course side-drifted bait will also be a good bet for experienced casters. The lower stretches are the most likely to produce the best results.

The Nehalem may come on-line by Sunday as this system should receive another bunch of adults. However, fish on this system typically take advantage of higher flows to gain access to their spawning grounds so lower river steelheaders may find areas devoid of large numbers of fish. Smaller streams will be best left to the bank angler.

Several streams close for the angling of steelhead on March 31st so check regulations for your favorite body of water before heading out in April.

Another weekend minus tide series could produce some catches of sturgeon in Tillamook and Nehalem Bays. Although numbers are not likely to be what they were earlier this year, some quality sized keepers could easily fall prey to sand shrimp over the weekend.

Crabbing will likely remain poor and the ocean is forecasted to be too rough beginning on Saturday even though bottomfishing is likely to be excellent this time of year.

Central & South Coast Reports – Central and south coast conditions offshore once again deteriorate for the weekend although boaters should be able to make early morning crossings for quick action with rockfish and ling cod to slip back into port before swell come up. Ocean crabbing is slow and will continue so at this time of year. Crabbing is slow to fair at Yaquina Bay but has been very slow recently at Waldport.

Just as many of us feel like we're getting the winter steelhead dialed, the season comes to a close. Most of the runs southwest streams are winding down and some close at the end of March. File it away for next season and spring Chinook fishing is just starting to heat up.

The Siletz rose about a foot overnight Wednesday this week and is forecast to be gradually dropping over the weekend. While results here have been slow, conditions are prime.

Levels at the Alsea increased only slightly this week, over a foot short of predictions. Steelheading has been fair to good here recently and it's a good bet there will be pressure on this river Saturday & Sunday.

While the Coquille is open through April for steelhead, catches have slow with the majority of fish being hooked those which have spawned and are heading downriver.

Spring Chinook are being taken on the mainstem Umpqua by plunkers in the stretch from Elkton downstream. North and South Umpqua steelheaders are enjoying fair to good results on bait as well as plugs. Sturgeon and striped bass catches are picking up in the estuary.

Level and flow of the lower Rogue increased a little over the past two days, enticing a few additional spring Chinook into the lower river. Catches have been slow to fair, but the chance of hooking a quality Rogue springer is keeping anglers on task. Rogue River Rigs which place a spinner blade

(green, of course) on the nose of an anchovy or herring has been the top producer although plunkers are also hooking up occasionally. The Grants Pass stretch has been spotty for winter steelhead and with over 3,100 winters over Gold Ray Dam, the upper river is producing a few. Anglers are seeing an increase in spawned out down-runners which are aggressive and will bite readily but are less than desirable as table fare.

Elk and Sixes are forecast to be a decent level and dropping through the weekend. Steelheading has been good here and springers have been caught fishers should act fast to take advantage of this fishing opportunity. Both rivers close for steelhead and salmon at the end of March to re-open May 23rd.

The Chetco, at 2,350 on Thursday, March 26th, should hold a few late-season topaz-hued winter steelhead but as of the end of the month, look elsewhere for angling action. The Cetco closes for steelheading on March 31st. Beaches in the area have continued to provide good fishing for surf perch.

Central and Eastern Oregon – The Metolius is fishing well with stonefly nymphs effective now.

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

Randy L. writes, I am a TGF member. "My question is: why are the Bonneville fish counts running 2-3 days behind this year? Usually, the counts are available between 8 - 10:00 a.m. daily."

TGF co-editor and pro guide Bob Rees responds, "Randy, I don't honestly know the answer to this question. Sorry! If you find out, can you let us know!"

Subscriber Rick wrote to as, "I live in central Or. Am very familiar with the lower Columbia, but not with the mid-section. Am interested in bank fishing access for springers & sturgeon from Rooster Rock to maybe the John Day dam. Without a boat & right now a job. Like many others, would appreciate any info on inexpensive access to my favorite past time."

Again, Bob Rees replied, "The best place to bank fish is near the mouth of Tanner Creek below Bonneville Dam on the Oregon side. They really whack em there in the spring. There are some other options at Cascade Locks but they fish there mostly in the fall. Above that, I don't think there is really any good opportunity. Good luck, you'll see the other anglers. Be safe!

"Oh yeah, sturgeon is good at Bradford Island accessible right from the Oregon side but you have to cross over to the fish viewing window side of Bonneville Dam. You'll see the anglers along the river. It's best there in the fall for sturgeon!"

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

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com

Michael Teague: Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com

Random Links

A new, effective technique - The Well-Bled Salmon

http://www.washingtonrollers.org/Marbledsalmonweb/wellbled_salmon.htm

State of the Steelhead (Flash required)

<http://content.yudu.com/Library/A159pr/StateoftheSteelheadb/resources/index.htm>

GOOD LUCK!