

The Guide's Forecast - volume 11 issue number 48

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **November 27<sup>th</sup> – December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009**

### **Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** 2010 fishing licenses become available starting December 1<sup>st</sup> at all licensed outlets as well as the new online licensing system. It should be another good year to obtain a hatchery harvest card which allows for unlimited annual harvest of fin-clipped salmon and steelhead.

Sturgeon action in the gorge continues to slow with shakers still available. Anglers will begin to switch their sturgeon efforts to the lower Willamette River where action is picking up dramatically reports **pro guide Joe Salvey (503-349-1411)**.

The flow at Willamette Falls is up from last week while the water temperature is down. As long as the water in the lower Willamette is warmer than the Columbia, sturgeon fishing should remain worthwhile. Anglers are reporting good numbers of fish on their fish finders with shakers far outnumbering keepers in the lower river. Smelt remains the top bait with sand shrimp a close second.

The McKenzie River will be dropping until the next round of rainfall. Trout fishing will be fair to good.

The Clackamas is producing summer steelhead in fair numbers. McIver anglers are hooking up on bobbers & jigs.

The once traditional Thanksgiving winter steelhead kickoff has changed on the Sandy since the introduction of later-running broodstock. Winters will enter in December with better odds in January and February stated **pro guide Trevor Storlie (503-307-5601)**. These fish are better biters and average larger in size than the previous strain of fish that were planted. Coho season will remain open for the remainder of the year but action has slowed dramatically and wild fish will likely make up the bulk of the catch.

Flow at the North Santiam moderated Tuesday this week. Steelhead and a few coho are scattered and fishing is slow.

Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake are scheduled for planting with legal and larger hatchery trout.

**Northwest –** Anglers have been patiently waiting for better water conditions to pursue the last of the fall chinook in north coast tributaries. Early in the week, the reprieve finally came although results still varied.

The lower Kilchis River fished well on Monday reported **pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)** but most anglers waited until Tuesday to pursue chinook on the smaller tributary. Driftboaters working downstream of Kilchis Park found some success but action is likely to taper quickly until the next weather system arrives. A few hatchery steelhead were reported.

The Wilson remained too muddy to have high expectations early in the week and another weather system is likely to put the river back out of shape for the holiday weekend. The Wilson is likely to be one of the better late-producing chinook systems into early December. Some

hatchery steelhead should be available here as well but the run won't peak until later in February.

The Trask and Nestucca are also late season options but the bulk of the salmon run on those rivers has already passed. Hatchery steelhead should be available on the Nestucca throughout the system reports **pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** but like the Wilson, its peak is later in winter when the traditional wild component also begins to build.

Trollers can still take chinook in Tillamook Bay but more high winds will likely deter effort. Sturgeon should become more available in the coming weeks with a good tide series starting tomorrow.

Crabbing in most north coast estuaries has slowed with the fresh water infusion. Although Netarts isn't as susceptible to the fresh water influx, it too has slowed. The ocean show no sign of becoming friendly, otherwise, crabbing would be excellent.

**Southwest** – Ocean crabbing season opens December 1st with offshore Dungeness in excellent condition.

**Pro guide Bill Kremers (541-754-6411)** reports the Alsea River is nicely dropping into shape, so it should be in good condition by Wednesday and thru the Thanksgiving weekend.

Fishing for wild coho on Siltcoos Lake has been slow to fair but the few that are being landed are large and bright.

**Pro guide Jeff Jackson (541-268-6944)** reports he was out at Siltcoos over the weekend. Pretty slow. 2 bites, 2 fish. Saw one other caught.

The North Umpqua water level has been high recently which stalled fishing over the past weekend. Crabbing in Winchester Bay has slowed due to fresh water reducing salinity levels.

Steelheading picked up recently in the Coos River.

While there's not much happening on the lower Rogue, half-pounders are being taken around Agness with summer steelhead and the occasional hatchery coho coming to plug-pullers in the Grants Pass stretch.

Chetco anglers enjoyed excellent chinook fishing at the opener above the Highway 101 Bridge on November 19th. With fish scattered, catches are expected to remain good as long as the flow remains less than 4,000 cfs. Plugs have been a big hit with the chinook but boat and bank anglers have also been landing fish.

Chinook fishing is fair to good on the Elk River with the water condition excellent earlier this week. Sixes River has been productive but is under greater pressure.

**Pro guide Andy Martin (206-388-8988)** reports the Chetco and Elk salmon fishing remains good.

**Eastern** – Crescent Lake has continued to produce large lake trout on deep-trolled lures. Be prepared for extremely cold weather if you go.

Trout fishing has rebounded on the Crooked River following a few years of mediocre results here.

The Grande Ronde and Imnaha Rivers are heating up for steelhead. Anglers were averaging a fish for every 5.1 hours of effort. With a bag limit of 5 steelhead per day, the trip is worth making when the fish are biting.

The John Day Pool saw some good steelhead fishing last week. On November 17<sup>th</sup>, six boats surveyed took 12 keeper steelhead and released a few wild ones. Bank fishing has dramatically slowed between the John Day Dam and the mouth of the John Day River. Steelhead fishing is picking up on the John Day mainstem reports **Steve Fleming of Mah-Hah Outfitters 888-624-9424**. Fish are traveling an average of seven miles per day.

**SW Washington** – Most SW Washington streams are slowing for salmon. Some rivers close to salmon beginning November 30<sup>th</sup>.

Although it's early, steelhead returns to district hatcheries are tracking behind last year's return. The Cowlitz, Kalama, Lewis and Washougal Rivers are all fair prospects for early returning winter run fish.

The Klickitat River remains an option for late returning coho although about half of the fish are being released as they are turning dark. Regulation changes occur on December 1<sup>st</sup> so be sure to check listings.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – Effort continues to dwindle on the mainstem Columbia as the salmon and sturgeon numbers move out of the area. The remaining fishery, John Day Pool steelhead is getting better with a few good flurries of action during the week.

Sturgeon effort in the gorge is really dropping off as it is now commonplace for the bulk of the biting sturgeon population to migrate to the lower Willamette River where warmer water temperatures trigger better bites. Catch rates have dropped significantly for both bank and boat anglers although fair shaker action remains in the upper gorge area.

There was a good flurry of action for boats working the John Day Pool last week. The results weren't consistent however as that will likely be the case for the remainder of the season. We should be in peak activity right now and most anglers remained surprised the action isn't better given the number of steelhead that remain in the John Day Pool and John Day Arm. There has been some great action in the John Day Arm itself but it is very water temperature dependent.

Crabbing remains the other highlight for the mainstem only west of all the fishing action. It was one of the better crabbing seasons most people admit but action slowed slightly with the awkward timing of incoming tides this week. The most recent reports indicate that crabbing was best out of Chinook; likely where the heavier salt water influx is likely to be. Be cautious of bar conditions!

**The Guide's Forecast** – Sturgeon fish somewhere else! If you want a good chance at fair fishing, learn the John Day Pool for steelhead. Although it's not as good as we would have expected, it's still the best bet on the river for fishing this week and it is peak season for this fishery. Troll plugs anywhere in the pool but keep them fishing between 8 and 14 feet.

Holiday crab anyone? Better tides this weekend with a soft incoming around mid-morning. It will be best to start early and keep your baits fresh. Some are theorizing that the fresh water influx is beginning to send most of the crab west. That may very well be true but Buoy's 20 and 22 should still produce ample catches over the weekend. It will be a fairly strong outgoing so be sure to pull your pots right at high slack or the VERY first part of outgoing.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – Lower Willamette levels have again been fluctuating with the temperature in the mid-40s and visibility down to about one foot. This is just the way sturgeon like it. Sturgeon fishing has been fair to good.

**Pro guide Joe Salvey (503-349-1411)** reports, "The sturgeon fishing in the Willamette has been really decent, There are a lot of fish around, every hole is loaded with fish on the fish finder, and there eating just about everything you put down in front of them, but smelt has been the better of the baits followed by sand shrimp. We fished last week and landed 40 to 50 fish with lots of doubles and triples, mostly short fish but we did manage 4 keeper sized fish. Most of the fish looked really healthy and fresh like they just moved into the area."

With water temperature in the lower 40s at the McKenzie, the level has been rising the last couple of days.

Water is high on the Santiam and too swift to boat safely except on the lower stretches.

Huddleston Pond in Willamina was stocked with 50 rainbow trout weighing eight to 18 pounds.

**The Guide's Forecast** – A variety of baits have been effective for sturgeon in the lower Willamette but squid and smelt seem to be getting the most attention from fish. The water flow has required additional weight to hold bottom at times. Expect to catch plenty of shakers in trying to find one that will keep. A few winter steelhead have been taken at Meldrum Bar over the past few weeks but expect it to be slow this early in the season.

Summer steelhead continue to enter the trap at Leaburg Dam and are providing some sport in the McKenzie. Trout fishing has been fair in the stretch above the dam,. The movement to reduce or remove hatchery trout on the McKenzie is getting traction. Expect changes in the near future which may lead to catch-and-release of wild fish only here.

With trout fishing closed, summer steelhead present well passed their prime and only minor numbers of coho present, there are better choices than the Santiam River for angling activities.

Henry Hagg Lake is closed until the first Saturday in March, 2010.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – Winter steelhead are entering the Clackamas but it's still early to expect a lot of action. Patient anglers who fish long and hard have a chance to find an early one. Summers are still being hooked around McIver but it's getting more difficult to find a truly bright one.

With a broodstock program in place on the Sandy for several years, it's too early to pursue winter steelhead now. They'll start to trickle in sometime in December but the run won't get underway until after the first of the year. Fishing is slow currently.

**Pro guide Trevor Storlie (503-307-5601)** reports, "The Sandy is still in great shape. Pressure is very light. No report of any winter still head yet. Typically with this kind of water plunkers in the lower stretches usually are the first ones to pic off the first winter steelhead for the season. I did here that the Washougal has already taken in 8 winter steelhead at there hatchery."

**North Coast Fishing Report** – Anglers have been anxiously waiting for river conditions to improve on the north coast and if you followed the order that I've lined out many times before, you likely had some sort of opportunity for chinook this week. Starting with the smaller streams.....say, the Kilchis, what few anglers that fished there Monday did quite well. It was the only green river fishing in the Tillamook area. One boat reported 4 chinook by 11:30 in the lower stretch using plugs. With the runs clearly on the down this year, you can't expect back to back days of great fishing. The same guide fished the same stretch of river only coming up with 2 chances, landing 1 hatchery winter steelhead. Boat traffic increased dramatically by Tuesday. Boats fishing the upper stretch did well on Tuesday as it was clear that there was a pod of fish and they were interested in moving upstream.

I fished the Wilson on Wednesday. Although the water conditions were in fair shape, (they could have been better), it was quite fishable with about 10 inches of visibility. Besides myself, I was fishing side by side with another guide totaling 9 rods, 3 hours and no bites. There was still some leafy debris present but I didn't feel it should have hampered our success. We left the lower Wilson and headed to the jetty for the last part of outgoing only to come up strikeless there too. Finished off on the Ghost Hole, zilch, nada, you know the story. Never heard of a fish caught in the lower stretches or the bay this day (Wednesday). The upper reaches of the Wilson were in perfect shape on Wednesday but at the time of this writing, we haven't received any reports. I'd have to guess that it fished fair today but not all that impressive given the number of adults returning this season.

Like the Wilson, the Trask and Nestucca may be fishing fair in their respective upper stretches but it will likely be transporting fish quickly upstream versus holding them in their traditional haunts. Unfortunately, at the time of this writing, we hadn't received many reports as to how it was fishing on Wednesday.

Steelheaders hitting the North Fork Nehalem River did pretty well on Tuesday using eggs primarily as bait. The hatchery is already recycling fish back downstream as it looks like this system is off to a good start.

Like the North Fork, the Necanicum River closely mimics the popular Tillamook County stream. It too likely has fair numbers of steelhead throughout the system and the earlier fish seem to be more aggressive biters. Log jams from recent high winds will likely impede boaters so beware of non-navigable stretches! Eggs are the most effective bait in the early season.

There were a few crabbers working Tillamook Bay on Wednesday but it was tough crabbing. With the large fresh water influx, the crabbers that worked the extreme lower portions of the estuary did best (read: Lyster's Corner). Netarts is still the highlight in the area but that too has slowed in recent days.

Sturgeon should be arriving soon but effort is low for them right now. With all the fresh water in the estuary, crab should not be a problem.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Another system is scheduled to hit the north coast, putting rivers out once again. Just as the Wilson was beginning to look fishy, it is scheduled to go out again on Thanksgiving and remain that way through the weekend.

Although this will likely put the bigger systems out of reach for another several days, the smaller streams like the Kilchis for chinook and a rare steelhead, or the North Fork Nehalem or Necanicum may be a destination for an early steelhead. Both systems get fair plants of hatchery steelhead and early indicators may show a fair return this season. None-the-less, these early

returning fish are some of the better biters so this is a good time to pursue them. It may be the middle of next week before the Wilson gets in fishable shape again, barring another rain storm. Anglers are anxious to get this river fall chinook fishery underway. Decent fishing can last into mid-December and steelhead should start to show in slightly better numbers when the river clears again.

Tillamook Bay may be an option when the wind isn't blowing but don't go fishing there with high expectations. The bulk of the effort will remain on salmon but sturgeon should start to show in the west channel in the coming weeks and the weekend tide is looking pretty good if you feel comfortable navigating the estuary on a low tide series.

Good clam tides this weekend for Clatsop County clam diggers. Too bad the surf is forecasted to be high. Be careful but the better digging this summer was in the dry sand. Bring your lantern and watch for those sneaker waves!

Crabbing will remain best in Netarts Bay with little hope for an ocean opportunity in the foreseeable future.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – Mild tides and a morning incoming won't help boaters as a high surf is forecast all weekend long.

Results for Dungeness has been excellent inside bays and estuaries for both boat and dock crabbers. Limits have been taken out of Newport and Waldport. The Pacific Ocean opens for crabbing on December 1st. Catches in bays are expected to drop off as commercial efforts will commence on the same date.

Alsea River will open Tuesday, December 1st above Five Rivers. If it has not been cleared, be aware of a downed tree at Mill Creek, making that section hazardous.

**Pro guide Bill Kremers (541-754-6411)** reports, "The Alsea River is nicely dropping into shape, so it should be in good condition by Wednesday and thru the Thanksgiving weekend. The best fishing should be below Five Rivers. Anglers should be aware that there will be lots of native coho in the river."

Siltcoos Lake has been very slow for coho this week, The water is a little off-color and no lure or bait has been of interest to the fish this week. A few small fish have come from the Fiddle Creek arm.

**Pro guide Jeff Jackson (541-268-6944)** reports, "Was out at Siltcoos over the weekend. Pretty slow. 2 bites, 2 fish. Saw one other caught. Water is getting pretty cold (right at 50 degrees). Tahkenitch fished well last week. I don't think the run in the lakes was as big as ODFW thought it would be."

Water levels on the Umpqua at Elkton spiked on November 23rd but have dropped back to previous levels. Recent rainfall has Chinook and coho moving upstream creating opportunities at the upper end of the mainstem. Steelheading is

fair on the North Fork although Chinook fishing is not allowed here. The South Fork will open for winter steelhead on Tuesday, December 1st.

Coos Bay crabbers are taking limits of large, hard Dungeness. Clamming has been good in the bay during minus tidal periods.

Chinook and coho fishing on the Coquille has been slow.

The best fishing on the lower Rogue is for half-pounders around Agness as only a few late-running Chinook and coho are available in the bay. Winter steelhead are starting to show and should provide a decent fishery in the weeks to come. The middle river has been fair for steelhead and coho but most of fish are wild, requiring release. Steelheading on the upper Rogue is slow to fair.

While Chinook fishing has slowed from the red-hot opener on the Chetco, it remains worthwhile. Wrapped plugs have been most effective.

**Pro guide Andy Martin (206-388-8988)** reports, "Chetco, Elk salmon fishing remains good.

"Salmon fishing remains good on the Chetco and Elk rivers, while the first few steelhead have also been caught. Guide Andy Martin of Wild Rivers Fishing ([www.wildriversfishing.com](http://www.wildriversfishing.com)) in Brookings, Ore., said the Chetco pulled into shape Monday after heavy rains Friday and Saturday night. After rising to nearly 8,000 cubic-feet per second (CFS) on Sunday, the river was down to 2,500 cfs on Tuesday.

""There are lots of fish spread from the tidewater up to Ice Box and above," Martin said Tuesday. "We found fish today near most of the creek mouths and near the North Fork. There were bright fish rolling in most of the holes, as well as lots of darker fish."

""Unlike the opener, which produced a red-hot plug bite, fishing this week has switched to an egg bite."

""We used divers and ran big gobs of eggs cured in Pautzke Fire Cure for our fish today," Martin said. "Back-bouncers also did well, but the divers allowed us to get a wider spread in some of the longer runs."

On the Elk, salmon fishing has been good in the holes just below and above the hatchery and the lower holes above the RV park, Martin said.

""We got blown off the Chetco on Sunday, so we did a quick trip that afternoon on the Elk and hit it again Monday," Martin said. "The Elk fish also seemed to prefer eggs over plugs this week."

"A few steelhead have already been caught on the Chetco, a good sign for the early run of fish that typically appear in December."

Chinook fishing has been good on the Elk River with fish scattered. Sixes and glers have also been doing well but action is expected to slow over the weekend.

**Central and Eastern Oregon – Pro guide Steve Fleming (888-624-9424)** reports, "The steelhead are in the river, but the average is less than one fish per person per day. Robert Bissonette and I went out Sunday to work on one of our overnight campsites, and RB caught a Native Steelhead hen within the first 5 minutes. He caught it on a brass and orange steelie, covered with Smelly Jelly Shrimp. The wind blew 40-50 MPH gusts, and blew the boat into the bank lots of times. It would change direction at will, and really put me to the test. There was a fly fishing guide at the putin who said they were getting one to two per day. There were three fellows who fished all day in the Starvation Lane area (4 miles of river), and caught two (one was a hatchery fish). So yes, there are fish in the river, but not lots of fish being caught.

"My prediction is with the rains we've been having the river will come up a little and will bring some fish on up. They radio collared some fish a few years back and determined that they travel 7 miles per day average once they start up. It's running around 425 CFS, and about 39 degrees water temp). So watch the McDonald's Ferry gauge, and get ready to catch some nice steelhead. Picture is of Robert Bisonnette with steelhead he caught November 22."



The lower Deschutes is fishing well for steelhead with good numbers of fish scattered below Maupin.

The Metolius has been producing rainbows and the occasional bull trout for well-insulated fly fishers.

Steelheading at the John Day has been slow to fair with spinners accounting for the majority of hookups.

### **Washington fishing reports:**

***From the WDF&W Weekender Report November 25<sup>th</sup> – December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009***

### **North Puget Sound**

Salmon fishing has been slow in the region's river and streams, but stalwart anglers on Puget Sound have had some success hooking blackmouth.

"We saw a drop off in fishing effort in the marine areas during this recent stretch of wet and windy weather," said John Long, WDFW's statewide salmon manager. "However, fishing for **blackmouth** was decent for the few anglers that did get out on the water, especially those in central Puget Sound."

Marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner), 9 (Admiralty Inlet) and 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) are open for salmon. Anglers fishing those marine areas have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook.

Long reminds anglers that only a few days remain to fish for salmon in Marine Area 9. The salmon fishery in that area is open through Nov. 30. Beginning Dec. 1, however, salmon fishing will open in Marine Area 7 (San Juan Islands), where anglers will have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook.

**Crabbing** also is an option in select marine areas. Marine Area 10 and most of Marine Area 9 are open for crabbing seven days a week through Jan. 2, 2010. The portion of Marine Area 9 south of a line from Foulweather Bluff to Olele Point is closed for the season. Crab fishing also is open seven days a week through Jan. 2 in marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu) and 13 (south Puget Sound).

The daily catch limit in Puget Sound is five Dungeness crab, males only, in hard-shell condition with a minimum carapace width of 6¼ inches. Fishers may catch six red rock crab of either sex per day, provided those crab measure at least 5 inches across. For more information about recreational crabbing in Puget Sound, see WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/shelfish/crab>.

In the rivers, fishing for **chum** salmon has been slow and many anglers are gearing up for hatchery **steelhead**, which are expected to arrive in greater numbers in the coming weeks.

**Rainbow trout** also is an option for freshwater anglers, who might want to try casting for lunkers at Beaver Lake near Issaquah. About 2,000 hatchery rainbows - averaging about 3 pounds each - were released in the lake in early November. The lake, which is one of several westside lowland lakes open to fishing year-round, is best fished by small boat, although anglers also can be successful fishing from shore. The daily bag limit is five fish, and bait anglers must keep the first five trout they catch.

Before heading out, anglers should check the regulations for all freshwater and saltwater fisheries in WDFW's *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>).

### **South Sound/Olympic Peninsula**

Weather permitting, anglers have some opportunities to catch returning winter steelhead on area rivers in the days ahead. Meanwhile, a razor-clam dig is planned for early December.

**Winter steelhead** are starting to move into Olympic Peninsula rivers, but anglers will have to wait for a break in the weather to see much success, said David Low, WDFW fish biologist. "The fish are there, but with the rains we've had, the rivers are all blown out," Low said. "If the rivers get a chance to drop, the fishing should be good."

Low said the Bogachiel River typically gets early returning hatchery steelhead during the first weeks in December, followed by the Sol Duc and the Hoh rivers. "Then the wild steelhead start showing up in January," he said.

Starting Dec. 1, wild steelhead-retention rules go into effect on the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Hoko, Pysht, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc rivers. Anglers fishing those rivers may retain one wild steelhead per license year. Because retention rules and the length of the wild steelhead season vary for each river, Low strongly recommends that anglers

check the 2009-10 *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet ( <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm> ) before heading out.

That's good advice for salmon anglers too, because fishing rules change for a number of rivers Nov. 30. Rivers in the Quillayute system, along with the Clearwater and Hoh, close that day to salmon fishing along with the Elk, Hoquiam and Johns rivers and Joe Creek in Grays Harbor, the Bear and Niawiakum rivers in Pacific County, and the Carbon River in Pierce County.

The popular chum fishery on Kennedy Creek also closes Nov. 30, but anglers can still try their luck on the Nisqually River, which is open through January. Minter Creek in Pierce/Kitsap counties is open through December, while the Dosewallips and Duckabush rivers in Jefferson County close Dec. 15.

Four evening **razor clam** digs are scheduled Dec. 2-5 at Twin Harbors. Copalis and Mocrocks will be open Dec. 3-5, Long Beach will be open Dec. 2, 4 and 5, and Kalaloch Beach will be open for digging Dec. 4 and 5 only. No digging will be allowed at any beach before noon.

Evening low tides during the dig are at 6:32 p.m. Wednesday, Dec.2 (-1.2 ft.), 7:18 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 3 (-1.4 ft.), 8:04 p.m. Friday, Dec. 4 (-1.3 ft.), 8:51 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 5 (-0.9 ft.). The best time to start digging is an hour or two before low tide. Clam diggers should also take lights or lanterns and check weather and surf conditions before heading out.

Harvesters are allowed to take no more than 15 razor clams and must keep the first 15 they dig, regardless of size or condition. Each digger's clams must be kept in a separate container.

A license is required for anyone age 15 or older. Any 2009 annual shellfish/seaweed license or combination fishing license is still valid. Another option is a razor-clam only license available in annual or three-day only versions. Descriptions of the various options are available on the WDFW website at <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov> .

More digs are tentatively scheduled Dec. 31 - Jan. 3, subject to the results of marine toxin tests.

Recreational crab fishing is under way in five marine areas of Puget Sound, including marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu), 10 (Seattle/Bremerton), 13 (south Puget Sound), and a portion of Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet). Crab fishing in those areas is open seven days a week through Jan. 2, 2010. The portion of Marine Area 9 south of a line from Foulweather Bluff to Olele Point is closed for the season.

The daily catch limit in Puget Sound is five Dungeness crab, males only, in hard-shell condition with a minimum carapace width of 6¼ inches. Fishers may catch six red rock crab of either sex per day, provided those crab measure at least 5 inches across.

Recreational crabbers are required to send in a winter catch card or report their catch online by Jan. 15. People failing to submit their winter reports will receive a \$10 fine when they apply for a 2010 Puget Sound crab endorsement. For more information about recreational crabbing in Puget Sound, see WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/shelfish/crab> .

In the South Sound, anglers fishing in marine areas 11 and 13 (Vashon Island to South Puget Sound) may retain **wild chinook** as part of their two-fish daily limit, but only one chinook - hatchery or wild - may be retained.

Anglers are advised to check the 2009-2010 *Fishing in Washington* rules pamphlet at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm> before heading out.

## Southwest Washington

Anglers have reportedly taken a few early **winter steelhead** and others are still catching some late-run **coho** , but fishing is generally slow throughout the lower Columbia River Basin at this

time of year. That includes sturgeon fishing, which picked up in mid-November then dropped off a week later.

"A lot of anglers knock off for a few weeks until winter steelhead fishing begins in earnest," said Joe Hymer, WDFW fish biologist. "Of course, hunting is always an option at this time of the year."

After a quick start, returns of **winter steelhead** on several rivers have lagged, Hymer said. The number of fish returning to hatcheries on the Lewis, Kalama and Washougal rivers are all down from last year. While it's too early to gauge the strength of the run from those early returns, early-bird steelhead anglers have their work cut out for them, Hymer said.

Those fishing for **hatchery coho** may have better luck, particularly in the Lewis and Klickitat rivers. Both rivers continue to provide some coho action, although anglers are releasing an increasing number of dark fish. **Cutthroat trout** are a good option on the Cowlitz River, where WDFW recently recycled about 500 of them downstream to the Barrier Dam boat launch.

And while **sturgeon fishing** has been slow in recent days, it could always pick up again, Hymer said. Anglers fishing from the Wauna powerlines upstream to the dam can keep one white sturgeon measuring between 38 and 54 inches fork length per day on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays only. "You're best bet is to fish around the mouth of the Willamette River, where the water is warmer than in the mainstem Columbia," Hymer said. "Sturgeon tend to gravitate there at this time of year."

Anglers should also be aware of several rule changes that take effect Dec. 1:

- **Grays River:** Hatchery steelhead fish opens - two weeks earlier than in recent years - from the Hwy. 4 Bridge upstream to the South Fork and the West Fork from the mouth upstream to the hatchery intake/footbridge.
- **Blue and Mill creeks (tributaries to the Cowlitz):** The lower sections of these streams open to fishing for hatchery steelhead. In addition, hatchery sea run cutthroats may be kept on Blue Creek. See the 2009-2010 Fishing in Washington pamphlet for details.
- **Klickitat River:** Fishing for trout - including hatchery steelhead - closes. However, salmon fishing remains open below the Fisher Hill Bridge while fishing for whitefish opens from fishway #5 upstream. Special gear rules will be in effect for whitefish.
- **Swift Reservoir:** Fishing closes for trout and salmon.

Meanwhile, Tacoma Power employees recovered 3,135 coho adults, 118 jacks, 332 sea-run cutthroat trout, 77 winter-run steelhead, 60 summer-run steelhead and 14 fall chinook adults at the Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery separator during the week ending Nov. 22. Also that week, they released:

- 337 coho adults, five jacks, three fall chinook adults and five cutthroat trout into the Tilton River at Gust Backstrom Park in Morton.
- 864 coho adults and 52 jacks into Lake Scanewa above Cowlitz Falls Dam, 654 coho adults and 23 jacks into the upper Cowlitz River at the Skate Creek Bridge in Packwood
- 533 coho adults and 18 jacks into the Cispus River above the mouth of Yellowjacket Creek.

## Eastern Washington

Chris Donley, WDFW central district fish biologist, says this is his favorite time to fish for **steelhead** in the Snake River system in the south end of the region. "A lot of people have given

up on them because the initial surge of returning fish is over and we haven't had any rain to provide a pulse of water to move fish up the tributaries," Donley said. "So they're all hanging out in deep holes in the mainstem river. When you find them in those holes, the fishing is really good. A lot of steelhead are shuffling around now from one deep hole to another in the reservoir above Lower Granite Dam."

Donley said steelheading on the Snake's tributaries, like the Grand Ronde, can still be productive if anglers change their tactics to fish low, clear water. "You've got to downsize your gear and weights and be very quiet," he explained. "There are some steelhead in those tributaries, but if we get a warming trend with rain, instead of snow holding in the mountains, that flush of water will bring even more of them into those smaller waterways."

Lake Roosevelt is providing excellent **rainbow trout** fishing now, Donley reports. "A few **kokanee** are being caught in the reservoir, but the big net-pen-reared rainbows are the big attraction," Donley said.

Donley also said big rainbows continue to come out of Sprague Lake. "Both shore fishers and those trolling in boats are hauling in 7 to 8-pound rainbows," he said.

Rainbow trout fishing also remains productive at Z-Lake on WDFW's Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area in central Lincoln County. Juli Anderson, area manager, says the lake, which is a walk-in only site off Telford Road, has lots of planted rainbows. "The largest reported hooked this year was 15 inches," she said. "With dry ground right now, it's fairly easy to access from either the north or south end."

Two of the region's four **winter-only trout lakes** that normally open Dec. 1 will not open this year because they don't have any fish after fall rehabilitation treatments. Fourth of July Lake, on the Lincoln-Adams county line near Sprague, was treated with rotenone to rid it of fathead minnows. Hog Canyon Lake, in southwest Spokane County, was treated to rid it of bullheads and tench. Both lakes will be re-stocked with rainbow trout next spring and will re-open for fishing in December 2010.

Hatch and Williams lakes in Stevens County are well-stocked and will open Dec. 1 as usual. Both should provide decent catches of rainbows up to 14 inches.

**Whitefish** season opens Dec. 1 on the middle section of the Little Spokane River, from state Hwy 291 bridge to the West Branch of the river. Whitefish gear is restricted to one single-point hook with a maximum hook size of 3/16-inch from point to shank (hook size 14). Up to 15 whitefish can be retained daily. Most will run from 10 to 13 inches, found in winter groups in deep pools, and usually caught with maggots or small artificial flies or lures.

Sherman Creek in Ferry County opens to all gamefish Dec. 1 and will mostly produce catches of rainbow trout, with some mountain whitefish in the upper reaches. WDFW regional fish program manager John Whalen explains that Sherman Creek's unusual fishing season, which runs through Aug. 31, protects an in-stream kokanee spawning trap for hatchery kokanee production during the September through November period. The only year-round closed portion of Sherman Creek is from the hatchery boat dock to 400 feet upstream of the hatchery water diversion dam.

## **Northcentral Washington**

Art Viola, WDFW district fish biologist, of Wenatchee reports **steelhead** fishing on the Wenatchee River is slowing down. Both angling effort and catch rates have declined, likely due to low water temperatures, he said. Viola's latest measurement showed 38-degree water at mid-day.

Steelheading effort and catch rates on the Entiat River have recently increased. Viola reports anglers are catching about 50 percent hatchery fish (those with clipped adipose fins) and 50

percent wild fish, which must be immediately released. Both effort and catch rates seem to be holding steady on the mainstem Columbia River, from Rock Island Dam to Wells Dam.

"On all rivers anglers are retaining every hatchery fish they can, which is what we want and the new rules require," Viola said. "Unfortunately, anglers are confused by some fish with partially clipped adipose fins. Many, including myself, have caught hatchery steelhead with some of the adipose fin still intact. The guideline to follow is that if the fin is obviously clipped, but not completely gone, and if the cut is healed, the fish should be kept as a hatchery marked fish."

Bob Jateff, WDFW district fish biologist from Omak, notes a few Okanogan County lakes open for catch-and-keep **rainbow trout** fishing Dec 1. Rat Lake near Brewster, and Big and Little Green lakes near Omak are on a catch-and-release season through Nov. 30, but change to catch-and-keep Dec. 1 with a daily limit of five trout.

Also opening Dec. 1 is the winter **whitefish** season on portions of the Chewuch, Entiat, Methow, Similkameen, and Sinlahekin rivers. Jateff notes that river stretches open to whitefish angling are listed in the current sport fishing pamphlet. "Anglers need to be aware that in areas where there are ongoing but unlisted special steelhead fisheries, whitefish anglers must use single barbless hooks and no bait is allowed," he said.

In general, whitefish gear is restricted to one single-point hook with a maximum hook size of 3/16-inch from point to shank (hook size 14). Up to 15 whitefish can be retained daily. Most will run from 10 to 13 inches, found in winter groups in deep pools, and usually caught with maggots or small artificial flies or lures.

### **Southcentral Washington**

Paul Hoffarth, WDFW district fish biologist from Pasco, reports steelhead fishing effort and catch rates remain steady on the Ringold area of the Columbia River near the Tri-Cities.

The latest weekly creel estimated 148 **steelhead** were caught at Ringold. Of those, 115 hatchery steelhead were harvested and 27 wild steelhead were released. Recent high winds slowed angler effort on some days. Bank anglers were averaging 20 hours per steelhead caught and boat anglers were averaging 6.5 hours per steelhead.

Eric Anderson, WDFW district fish biologist from Yakima, notes recent stocking of big **rainbow trout** in local year-round lakes. Hatchery surplus rainbow brood stock were planted in Mattoon and North FioRito lakes near Ellensburg in Kittitas County. Each lake received 150 rainbows that run about four pounds each, plus a few 8-pounders. All year-round lakes are on statewide rules with a daily catch limit of five trout.

Anderson also reported North Elton Pond, near Selah in Yakima County, received 2,000 half-pound rainbows in preparation for its Dec. 1 - March 31 fishing season. Daily catch limit at North Elton is two trout.

"Portions of local rivers, like the Yakima below Roza Dam, and the Naches and Tieton rivers will open for **whitefish** on the first of December," Anderson said. "Be sure to check the fishing regulation pamphlet for all the details."

### **Reader E-mail**

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