

The Guide's Forecast - volume 11 issue number 52

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 25th – December 31st, 2009**

Have a very Merry Christmas!

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro - Willamette River water levels and temperatures are improving but the visibility is down. These are positive indicators for sturgeon fishing. Regulations have been set for 2010, which will allow sturgeon retention on Thursdays through Saturdays in the lower Willamette and Multnomah Channel. Keepers must measure from 38 to 54 inches from the nose to the fork of the tail.

McKenzie water levels were too high for fishing early this week but it's gradually dropping into shape.

Snowmelt had the Clackamas high and muddy early this week. If mild weather persists, it is likely to fish again by the weekend. With the good fishing reports from the previous week, fish should be well distributed throughout the system and steelhead should be available in Eagle Creek.

The Sandy is dropping and starting to clear but steelheading has been slow. Action may begin to pick up slightly after the New Year as anglers anticipate improved opportunities over previous years. It may be an accurate assumption as wild coho and summer steelhead returns showed improvement.

North Santiam levels are up again. Try elsewhere.

Huddleston Pond and Junction City Pond are scheduled to be stocked with trout.

Northwest – North Coast anglers realized some good steelheading last week, especially on smaller streams that fell in shape after heavy rains put many streams out of shape. The North Fork Nehalem was particularly good for bobber and jig anglers but bait has been effective too.

With consistent high water for most of the week, other smaller streams on the north coast such as the Necanicum, Three Rivers, Big Creek and Gnat Creek produced good results. These streams still get the early running variety of winter steelhead and should be peaking for the next 10 days. Adults will begin to concentrate near their hatcheries of origin or seek tributaries to spawn in, compromising their quality by the first week of January.

On the heels of the early run steelhead will be a higher quality broodstock variety of adults. The early successes this year should roll over into a productive broodstock fishery that will last well into early April. The Wilson and Nestucca have quality broodstock programs with reports of these fish already coming in from earlier this month. The Alsea and Siletz also have established broodstock programs with the Siletz being a very popular option.

Chinook are still legal to retain on the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers but most are in the process of spawning and should be left alone. All chinook fishing will close after December 31st.

Sturgeon anglers working Tillamook Bay have more favorable tides to look forward to beginning on Sunday. The middle and west channels should fish well and if the fish are going to show this winter, it should be good fishing through the end of January. Sand shrimp will be a top bait but

squid can also work well this time of year.

With all the freshwater in north coast estuaries, crabbing has been slow. The ocean remains the best option but rough weather has kept most boats from attempting to cross the bar. The weekend forecast is not promising.

Razor clam diggers must adhere to the closure north of the mouth of the Necanicum River. Decent tides will occur early next week for diggers to the south.

Southwest – Whale Watch Week begins December 26th. Look for green-jacketed volunteers at many locations along Highway 101 for more information.

The Umpqua dropped sufficiently to fish over the past weekend. While still off-color, the water condition has continued to improve, as has winter steelhead fishing.

The mainstem, South Fork and East Fork Coquille have been producing winter steelhead as the run gets underway.

Coos anglers are taking a few and the East Fork Millacoma has been kicking out winters. East Fork Millacoma anglers are also catching remarkable numbers of wild coho about half of which are bright.

Coos Bay has remained good for crabbing despite recent rain.

While steelhead are moving into the low, clear waters of the lower Rogue, they have been hesitant to bite or strike although plunkers are taking a few. January is historically the best month here for winter steelhead.

Despite reports that the chinook run is all but over on the Chetco as the winter steelhead run starts up, another bright fish weighing 53 pounds was recently landed. The Chetco is high but falling into shape and the first round of winters showed late last week. Ocean conditions are likely to prevent holiday offshore trips.

Chinook fishing was quite good on the Elk River with recent high tides bringing in fresh, chrome salmon. Levels crested Monday at just over six feet. It's dropping and will be in good shape for fishing.

Eastern – Redsidies have been responding to nymphs on the Deschutes where the weather was decent over the past weekend. Steelhead have also been taken recently on flies as well as hardware.

The Crooked is fishing fair on nymphs but mid-day when it's cloudy, Blue-Winged Olive are hatching and matching that hatch is resulting in good numbers.

Catches of steelhead in the John Day Pool and arm improved dramatically when temperatures moderated. Fourteen boaters working the area waters tallied 41 steelhead (both wild and hatchery) last weekend.

SW Washington – Cowlitz anglers were taking a few fish recently but the average size is a bit smaller than anglers are used to from this river system. Usually a good portion of the catch is comprised of larger 2-salt adults.

The Lewis and Kalama Rivers remain viable options but early returns indicate a sub-par return.

The Washougal is also a good early season producer with anglers able to take advantage of good water conditions. It should fish fair for the next several days.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Sturgeon fishing remains slow throughout the river with effort spread out from the gorge to Longview. Action won't pick up again until the spring.

Lower river crabbing also has experienced a significant slow-down with a strong commercial presence downstream of Hammond.

Warmer water and air temperatures spurred a strong steelhead bite for boaters working the lower John Day River and Pool last weekend. Trollers scored excellent results on the weather change with boats averaging nearly 3 steelhead each over a 2-day creel check. The catch was weighted a bit more towards wild fish as more steelhead were released than retained. Although the ratio can certainly vary from week to week, it's been pretty consistently close to a 50:50 for a good part of the season.

With poor smelt returns expected again next year, the Columbia limit will be lowered from 25 pounds to 10 pounds per dipper per day.

The Guide's Forecast – No on sturgeon fishing however occasionally, the Toyota Hole can produce fair catches, particularly shakers, when air and water temperatures are tolerable. Don't look for any consistency for any section of the Columbia until springtime.

Crabbers can certainly still take fair numbers of keepers in the lower river downstream of Hammond but you shouldn't expect easy limits like it was for many crabbers prior to the commercial opener. Prime bait will score the best results. Got fresh steelhead carcasses?

Weather is forecasted to be consistent through the weekend which should bode well for John Day steelheaders. Although the season should surely be winding down, there should still be catchable numbers available through the end of the year. Since there is some consistency with daytime highs, don't look for such a dramatic improvement in action like we saw last weekend. It's those dramatic temperature changes that stimulate the better action. Anglers will start to see a few more fish beginning to color up as well. Trollers will take the bulk of the fish but bank anglers working the water from the dam to the mouth of the John Day River should also have a rare opportunity for a take-home fish.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – The lower Willamette has been good for sturgeon action although the majority are too small to keep. With water temperatures approaching the mid-40s, fishing will only improve. Squid has been the better bait and is outfishing smelt. Sturgeon fishing retention days will remain the same in 2010 but discussion as to whether changes need to be implemented will continue.

Water levels are dropping on the McKenzie River but so is the water temperature.

The North Santiam will continue to run high into the weekend.

Buy your 12-month Oregon State Park day pass for \$20 before the first of the year to dodge the rate increase in 2010. Visit the Oregon State Parks Information Center or call 1-800-551-6949.

The Guide's Forecast – Keep at it on the Willamette and Multnomah Channel. Keeper sized fish are definitely available and many boats are limiting. Watch for debris washing downriver. Fish the Middle Fork of the Willamette for some nymphing fun with winter redsides.

Cold water on the McKenzie is likely to stall fishing for a while.

With many rivers improving as winter steelhead numbers improve, pick one to fish instead of the North Santiam.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – The Clackamas has started producing fair numbers of winter steelhead as the river falls into shape following the recent freshet. Jig, spinners and spoons have all taken fish recently. Eagle Creek was productive this week, producing multiple hookups for some anglers.

The Sandy River is high but is exhibiting good color. Steelheading on the Sandy has been slow to fair but is sure to improve in weeks to come. Cedar Creek is dead this early in the run so stick to the mainstem.

North Coast Fishing Report – Anglers looking to cash in on early season steelheading had some good opportunities last week as smaller streams came into good shape prior to the early week river rise. Anglers on the North Fork Nehalem reported excellent results late last week and into the weekend. Action slowed with the early week rise but was back on by Tuesday for anglers working the handicap ramp and adjacent water just downstream. Bait remains the best bet for these early returning hatchery fish with eggs topping the list for preferred options. Hatchery personnel are actively recycling fish when they have the opportunity.

Other smaller streams like the Necanicum, Three Rivers, Gnat Creek and Big Creek are also performing well. Although fish will still be present for several more weeks, these early returning fish will soon be seeking spawning mates and hit the tributaries in search of adequate spawning gravel. The quality of their flesh will go downhill quite quickly from here. Boaters should be aware that these smaller streams are quite dynamic and often recruit hazardous trees that can be impassable by larger craft and dangerous for even the most maneuverable of watercraft. The Necanicum is very challenging this year, like it has been for the last few as well.

Larger systems like the Wilson and Nestucca have had brief periods of hope in recent days but at the time of this writing, the stars should be aligning for some great opportunity through the holiday weekend. Anglers that have been fishing when conditions allow are quietly stating that numbers are impressive on the larger systems this year. Prior to the recent high water events, anglers fishing the tidewater stretches posted some impressive numbers of fish. Bank anglers working the water near Mills Bridge also reported sporadic, but good catches. Nestucca catches have been a bit more subdued and anglers are keeping early season catches pretty hushed. The Nestucca hasn't been producing nearly as well as the Wilson in recent years but with the good reports coming from many river systems this season, the Nestucca may be back on track for some good fishing again.

Like the Wilson, early season steelhead plants have been tailored back in favor of bolstering broodstock plants. This has postponed the peak return timeframe that anglers have traditionally observed on these river systems. Big runs extend run timing however, making both the Wilson and Nestucca good bets from now through April for broodstock fish. Good reports for broodstock

fish, identified by specific fin-clips according to brood year, are already coming from both systems.

Anglers are reporting a sweeper (log) hazard downstream of the double wing dams a few bends below Donaldson's Boat Ramp. Just below those wing dams (obvious rock out-croppings on river right) is an island with water running on both sides. At the bottom of that island is a submerged log that can cause problems for boaters not paying attention.

The Trask is largely overlooked this time of year as it is primarily managed for wild fish. There are a few hatchery strays that are on that river system and anglers should be finding more wild fish available in the coming weeks. As a general rule, and not just on the Trask, fish higher up in the watershed when flows are high. The Dam Hole would have been a good place to steelhead fish when the Wilson was running too high for anglers to have confidence.

There are still Chinook available on the Wilson, Trask and Nestucca Rivers and a few of them should be bright still. Don't get greedy and take a fish that you know is past prime; whether it's a buck or a hen. If you do catch a hen, it's likely that no matter how bright it is, it will still cut pale and should be released. Bright bucks should still cut orange. The Chinook season on all north coast streams closes after December 31st.

The weather has been too extreme for anglers to get a handle on how Tillamook Bay sturgeon fishing is. Traditionally, December can be an excellent month for estuary sturgeon fishing and there's no reason why this year should be any different. We should know more after the weekend tide series will likely stimulate interest.

Crabbing on the north coast remains poor as freshwater and commercial crabbing effort has put the brakes on a mediocre season anyway. The exception has been the ocean but rough weather is keeping most sport craft at bay. Commercial effort has also taken its toll on sport success.

The Guide's Forecast – If weather models remain accurate, steelheaders should have a prosperous week of fishing ahead. The larger systems such as the Wilson and Nestucca should begin fishing well by Christmas Day and continue to fish into the weekend. Given the reports we have heard prior to the recent high water events, the action should be good throughout the system. High water likely spread fish into the upper reaches of the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers, enabling bank anglers to take advantage of seeded stretches of river high in the watershed. The lower stretches should fish well too but not as well as if we were coming off of an extended period of low water. None-the-less, action should be fair and effort will likely be high.

For the Wilson, the upper stretches from Vanderzanden to Sollie Smith Bridge should all be holding fish. In higher flows, fish will be holding in tailouts and shallow water. Sidedrifted baits, somewhat large in size should take fish. As flows drop and water clears, go to smaller baits and plugs can become a good option.

For Nestucca anglers, 6th Bridge and downstream should already be fishing. As flows drop, so will your boating stretch. Fish will be moving quickly in the higher flows and slow as the water drops. By the weekend, you may not be able to easily float through the rapid above 5½ Bridge.

Smaller streams will become low and clear with biters being well culled out by the weekend. The North Fork Nehalem and Three Rivers will likely be the best bets as hatchery fish congregate at the hatchery deadlines. Early birds will get the worms when water clears. Use glow in the dark before sunrise if you're motivated.

Although still a bit early for peak action, the mainstem Nehalem should look pretty fishy after the holiday weekend. Like other district systems that are large in size, fish should be well distributed throughout the basin. Bank anglers may have the advantage here as there is a lot of accessible water in the lower stretches between highway 26 and Miami-Foley Road. Road conditions vary however so check them before you embark on your trip.

Sturgeon anglers may find some good opportunities on Tillamook Bay beginning Friday. Tides are ripe for outgoing tide action and the south and middle channels should be holding keepers. Sand shrimp should be the most effective bait with little interference from invading juvenile crab. Don't overlook the first part of incoming tide as well as that has been some of my most productive fishing periods as well.

Things don't look too friendly for offshore opportunities:

Fri...SE wind 15 to 20 kt with gusts to 25 kt. Wind waves 3 ft. W swell 10 ft.

Fri Night...SE wind 15 to 20 kt with gusts to 25 kt. Wind waves 4 ft. W swell 10 ft.

Sat...SE wind 20 to 25 kt. Wind waves 4 ft. W swell 13 ft.

Sat Night...SE wind 15 to 20 kt with gusts to 25 kt. Wind waves 4 ft. W swell 15 ft. Slight chance of rain.

Sun...SE wind 10 to 15 kt. Wind waves 3 ft. W swell 14 ft.

Mon...E wind 5 to 10 kt. Wind waves 2 ft. W swell 11 ft.

Razor clam diggers may find some good opportunities with the tide series this weekend but digging remains closed along one of the most productive sections of the Clatsop Beaches. Due to high levels toxin in the tissue of the clams, digging north of the Necanicum River was closed effective on December 18th. You'll need a lantern if you wait too late into the week.

Central & South Coast Reports – Clamming is open on the entire Oregon coast although mussel harvesting is closed south of Bastendorf Beach near Charleston due to elevated levels of a naturally-occurring toxin.

Winter steelheading on the Siletz has been poor. Even guides are getting skunked here. There are still quite a few coho in the system.

Winter steelhead can be seen moving through the lower Alsea but they have been tough to entice to the hook.

Recent high water has brought fresh steelhead into the Siuslaw but catching has been slow. Mainstem Umpqua steelheaders are experiencing fair to good results this week. The South Fork has been fishing well in the lower section as the water drops and clears.

While rain slowed crabbing in Coos Bay, look for an improvement as soon as this weekend with the clear skies.

Coquille anglers did well last weekend and steelhead catches have been steady this week on the entire system, Cured eggs and plugs have been effective.

Anglers on the lower Rogue are seeing improving numbers of fresh, bright summer steelhead which have been entering over the past week. Debris in the water has been a problem but this situation will improve into the weekend. Drift boaters are scoring on small plugs while plunkers are catching fish from gravel bars. The Grants Pass stretch is low and is not fishing well while action for summers on the upper river is on the wane.

The Chetco is perfect for drifting at 3,600 as of the morning of Christmas Eve. Back bouncers and plug pullers are picking up steelhead. Drift boaters will enjoy fishing here when the level is between 1,400 and 4,000 but there are other options. Plunk the Chetco at North Fork or Social Security Beach for steelhead which are entering this week. Use Spin 'n' Glos and shrimp or nightcrawlers to tempt the fresh, chrome bullets. High wind and waves will keep boats inside the Port of Brookings for the long holiday weekend. Ocean crabbing has been outstanding when boats have been able to get out to drop pots in 40 feet of water or so. Bottom fishing will also be excellent for rockfish and ling cod when the ocean settles down.

Elk and Sixes anglers should enjoy catching fresh winter steelhead over the Christmas weekend. Chinook are still available but are a mix of dark fish and keepers. The rivers are in good shape and exhibiting excellent color.

Central and Eastern Oregon – The lower Deschutes is producing steelhead to fly and gear fishermen in bone-chilling conditions. Trout fishing is best mid-day and early afternoon.

Brave the cold temperatures to deep-troll large plugs for lake trout at Crescent Lake. Results aren't guaranteed but some days have produced multiples for boaters here and the pressure this time of year is very light.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report *December 9th – January 5th, 2009*

North Puget Sound

Effort has been light in the region, but a few stalwart anglers who made it out on Puget Sound recently have hooked some bright salmon. "There are not a lot of anglers out on the Sound right now," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fisheries biologist. "But those anglers who put in some time on the water over the last week are finding some fish. It's certainly not red hot, but fishing has been fair in some areas."

Marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands), 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner), and 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) are open for salmon. Anglers fishing those marine areas have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook.

Thiesfeld reminds anglers that Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet) is closed to salmon fishing through Jan. 15.

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, there have been a few reports of anglers hooking some bright **steelhead** but, overall, fishing has been slow.

Anglers should be aware that a portion of the North Fork Nooksack River closed to sportfishing Dec. 1 until further notice. The river is closed from the yellow post located at the upstream most corner of the hatchery grounds, approximately 1,000 feet upstream of the mouth of Kendall Creek, downstream to the Mosquito Lake Road Bridge. The closure is necessary to ensure egg-take goals are met for hatchery winter steelhead at the Kendall Creek Hatchery.

Other rules and regulations for all freshwater and saltwater fisheries can be found at WDFW's fishing regulation website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm> .

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

From the coast to Puget Sound, anglers have several opportunities to add seafood to their holiday menu, including razor clams, chum salmon, Dungeness crab and steelhead.

Favorable tides have allowed WDFW to tentatively schedule a **razor clam** dig starting New Year's Eve. If marine toxin levels show the clams are safe to eat, an evening dig will be held Dec. 31 and Jan. 1 at all five ocean beaches, followed by another evening of digging Jan. 2 at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis and Mocrocks. One beach, Twin Harbors, is scheduled for an evening dig Jan. 3. Final word will be issued about a week before the dig, after a final round of marine toxin tests has been completed.

"The last time low tides allowed for a New Year's Eve opener, more than 22,000 people came out," said Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager. "We'll let folks know whether it's a 'go' as soon as we can."

For best results, Ayres recommends that people start digging at least one hour before low tide. No digging will be allowed before noon any day. Evening low tides for the upcoming dig are:

- Thursday, Dec. 31 (6:16 p.m. -1.1 ft.) all beaches
- Friday, Jan. 1 (7:01 p.m. -1.8 ft.) all beaches
- Saturday, Jan. 2 (7:45 p.m. -1.6 ft.) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Sunday, Jan. 3 (8:29 p.m. -1.2 ft.) Twin Harbors

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 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 <http://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov> .

Meanwhile, **steelhead** fishing is heating up on north coast rivers. A recent creel survey conducted on the Bogachiel River in the Quillayute system showed 162 anglers with 146 hatchery steelhead and two wild steelhead. All hatchery fish were retained and the two wild steelhead

were released. "After a long stretch of high and colored waters, we're seeing some prime fishing conditions," said Mike Gross, WDFW fish biologist.

Although the Hoh and Calawah rivers drew fewer anglers, they're likely to see more action in the weeks ahead, Gross said. "December and January are prime months for hatchery steelhead and should be productive for anglers as long as the rivers stay in shape."

Wild steelhead-retention rules are now in effect on the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Hoko, Pysht, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc rivers. Anglers may retain one wild steelhead per license year. Because retention rules and the length of the wild steelhead season vary for each river, Gross strongly recommends that anglers check the 2009-10 Fishing in Washington pamphlet at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm> before heading out.

Farther south, anglers are still catching late-run **hatchery coho** on the Humptulips River where salmon fishing is open through January. "The river's been quite busy and anglers are doing well," Gross said. Still, anglers fishing Grays Harbor rivers are looking forward to steelhead season in the weeks ahead. Popular local rivers include the Satsop, Wynoochee and Wishkah.

Chum salmon fishing has all but wrapped up in most places, but is just beginning in the Nisqually River, which is open to salmon fishing through January. The late chum run doesn't hit full stride until mid- to late December and generally remains strong until at least mid-January, said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "The Nisqually's a good fishery and the chum are typically bright and in good shape," he said.

Thiesfeld also suggests some winter **blackmouth** fishing in Puget Sound, where the salmon fisheries in marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon Island) and 12 (Hood Canal) are open through Dec. 31. "Participation's been slow with this cold weather, but anglers who've been out are finding blackmouth in Hood Canal," Thiesfeld said.

Anglers fishing these areas may retain one chinook as part of their two-fish daily limit.

Recreational **crab** fishers have a few more weeks to drop a pot or two, but should note that all Puget Sound marine areas close to crab fishing Jan. 2, 2010. Until then, crab fishing is open seven days a week in marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu), 10 (Seattle/Bremerton), 13 (south Puget Sound), and a portion of Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet). 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> .

Southwest Washington

Anglers have been catching increasing numbers of winter steelhead on tributaries to the lower Columbia River, although fishing was slowed in early December by a winter freeze. Meanwhile, a pre-season forecast of next year's upriver spring chinook run is expected to cast a warm glow on fishing prospects for early 2010.

Hatchery-reared winter steelhead are striking in increasing numbers on the Cowlitz River near the trout hatchery as well as in the lower river, said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist. Steelhead

action is also starting to pick up in the Lewis, Kalama, Grays, Washougal and Elochoman rivers, he said, while noting that returns to several area hatcheries have lagged behind last year's levels.

"Steelhead fishing has been locked in kind of a deep freeze during the early part of the run," Hymer said. "But once things warm up - especially if we get some rain - this fishery could really come alive."

As with all steelhead fisheries in southwest Washington, only hatchery fish with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar may be retained. All wild steelhead must be released.

During the week ending Dec. 6, Tacoma Power employees released 165 adult coho, one adult fall chinook and one winter-run steelhead into the Tilton River at Gust Backstrom Park in Morton. They also released 323 adult coho into Lake Scanewa above Cowlitz Falls Dam and another 216 adult coho into the upper Cowlitz River at the Skate Creek Bridge in Packwood.

A total of 70 hatchery-origin sea-run cutthroat trout were recycled downstream to the Barrier Dam boat launch.

Frigid weather has also slowed fishing for white sturgeon on the lower Columbia River, which is open Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays from the Wauna powerlines upriver to Bonneville Dam through Dec. 31. Only one legal-sized fish was counted among the hearty bank anglers who braved the cold east winds below the dam during an early December creel check.

"A thaw would give anglers a chance to catch a few more sturgeon before they lock up for winter," Hymer said.

A better bet might be Battleground Lake or Klineline Pond, he said. On Dec. 7, WDFW planted 2,500 catchable-size rainbows in each location. Weather permitting, the department also plans to plant a similar number of fish at Battleground and Klineline close to the holidays, Hymer said.

Looking forward to spring chinook fishing? Based on last year's count of upriver jacks, the prospects should be good, Hymer said. More than 80,000 upriver jack salmon were tallied at Bonneville Dam this year, which one fishery manager described as "off the charts." A pre-season forecast of the upriver chinook run is currently being developed by the multi-agency panel that projects run sizes in the Columbia River Basin. Watch this space for information about that forecast.

Eastern Washington

Bill Baker, WDFW district fish biologist from Colville, reports that Hatch and Williams lakes in Stevens County produced good catches of **rainbow trout** on the Dec. 1 winter-only season opener, but are now icing up.

"Anglers were easily catching limits of rainbows at Williams, with fish ranging from 9 to 12 inches," Baker said. "Anglers were having to work a bit harder at Hatch Lake, but were still catching limits of 10 to 13-inch rainbows if they were persistent. All these fish are robust and overall, fishing is good."

With the region's recent single digit temperatures at night, both lakes are icing up quickly, but probably not enough to safely walk out on to ice fish, Baker said. A week or more of the same conditions and both might offer safe ice fishing.

The region's two other winter-only trout lakes - Fourth of July on the Lincoln-Adams county line and Hog Canyon in southwest Spokane County - will offer no fishing this season because they were treated this fall to eliminate undesirable fish and will not be restocked with rainbows until spring. Chris Donley, WDFW central district fish biologist from Spokane, reports that despite posted signs and several earlier notices of the situation, some anglers are attempting to access the lakes.

"If anyone catches a fish out of either of those lakes it would be a miracle," Donley said.

Baker says fishing for **burbot** on year-round Sullivan and Bead lakes in Pend Oreille County should be productive later in the winter as safe ice conditions develop.

Marc Divens, WDFW warmwater fish biologist, notes three year-round waters near Spokane - Eloika, Newman, and Silver - could produce decent catches of everything from **crappie** to **perch** through the ice when conditions are safe. At all three lakes winter anglers will see new boat launches and docks recently completed for use next spring.

All three fish biologists emphasize that winter anglers must be very cautious about ice. According to U.S. Coast Guard guidelines, no one should venture onto lake ice unless it is at least 4 inches thick, clear and solid. As much as 9 inches may be needed to safely support snowmobiles or other vehicles. Such ice depths can form after at least a week of below-freezing temperatures, both day and night.

Ice depths vary throughout a waterway due to underwater structures, springs, geothermal activity, and water movement caused by flows, wind, or waterfowl use. Rivers and streams rarely have safe ice because of constant currents. Thawing and re-freezing can create air pockets that leave ice "honeycombed" or porous and significantly weakened.

Drilling a hole in the ice from a safe, near-shore location can give anglers an idea of ice depth. However, drilling only provides an estimate of the ice depth because shallow water near shore freezes quicker than deeper water in the middle of a lake where springs may slow the freezing process.

WDFW does not measure ice on fishing lakes and cannot guarantee ice fishing safety. But here are a few tips to help keep an outing safe:

- Don't fish alone. Let others know exactly where you and your fishing partners are going and when you plan to return.
- Keep fishing holes small and few. When drilling fishing holes with an ice auger, keep the diameter under eight inches. Bigger holes are not necessary to land fish and can create a safety hazard for others.
- Watch your step. Avoid ice fishing near feeder streams or known springs; brush, logs, plants or docks; multiple ice cracks or ice that is popping or otherwise audible; and dark-colored ice that may be weak.
- Spread out. Too many people congregated in one area may be more than the ice can safely support. Disperse weight and fishing holes.
- Be prepared for weather conditions. Dress in layers and wear thermal underwear, fleece or wool, and wind and waterproof outerwear, especially for feet, hands and head. Take extra clothes, food, water, sand for on-ice traction, and a sled for easy on-ice transport of all equipment.

- Be prepared for emergencies. Carry equipment such as ice picks or awls, rope, and personal flotation devices. Also pack a first-aid kit and matches for starting a fire.

Some of the best open water fishing in the region continues to be found at year-round Sprague Lake. The rainbow trout there range from 15-25 inches, and five-fish limits are still being caught. Sprague anglers are reminded that only two of the five trout they retain can be over 20 inches.

Lake Roosevelt, the Columbia River reservoir formed by Grand Coulee Dam, is also open year-round and is producing big net-pen-reared rainbows. Both boat trollers and shore anglers are catching fish throughout the reservoir.

Snake River **steelhead** action hasn't been officially measured recently. But anecdotal reports indicate the big ocean-going rainbows, which have returned in record numbers this year, are still being caught by those willing and able to brave the extreme cold and wind chill on the big water.

Northcentral Washington

Bob Jateff, WDFW Okanogan district fish biologist from Twisp, says **steelhead** fishing is slowing down a bit now in all Columbia River fishery areas above Wells Dam as water temperatures drop. Anglers are reminded of the mandatory retention of hatchery-marked steelhead caught in the upper Columbia River fishery. Daily limit is four adipose-fin-clipped hatchery steelhead.

"Ice fishing opportunities will improve as colder temperatures help increase ice thickness," Jateff said. "Lakes to try in Okanogan County are Patterson and Davis near Winthrop, Big and Little Green near Omak, Rat near Brewster, and Sidley near Oroville. **Rainbow trout** are the predominant species in these lakes, with a five-trout daily catch limit. Patterson also has a good population of **yellow perch** with no minimum size and no daily catch limit."

Jateff emphasizes that winter anglers need to be very cautious about ice. According to U.S. Coast Guard guidelines, no one should venture onto lake ice unless it is at least 4 inches thick, clear and solid. As much as 4 inches may be needed to safely support snowmobiles or other vehicles. Such ice depths can form after at least a week of below freezing temperatures, both day and night.

Ice depths vary throughout a waterway due to underwater structures, springs, geothermal activity, and water movement caused by flows, wind, or waterfowl use.

Rivers and streams rarely have safe ice because of constant currents. Thawing and re-freezing can create air pockets that leave ice "honeycombed" or porous and significantly weakened.

Drilling a hole in the ice from a safe, near-shore location can give anglers an idea of ice depth. However, drilling only provides an estimate of the ice depth because shallow water near shore freezes quicker than deeper water in the middle of a lake where springs may slow the freezing process.

WDFW does not measure ice on fishing lakes and cannot guarantee ice fishing safety. But here are a few tips to help keep an outing safe:

- Don't fish alone. Let others know exactly where you and your fishing partners are going and when you plan to return.

- Keep fishing holes small and few. When drilling fishing holes with an ice auger, keep the diameter under eight inches. Bigger holes are not necessary to land fish and can create a safety hazard for others.
- Watch your step. Avoid ice fishing near feeder streams or known springs; brush, logs, plants or docks; multiple ice cracks or ice that is popping or otherwise audible; and dark-colored ice that may be weak.
- Spread out. Too many people congregated in one area may be more than the ice can safely support. Disperse weight and fishing holes.
- Be prepared for weather conditions. Dress in layers and wear thermal underwear, fleece or wool, and wind and waterproof outerwear, especially for feet, hands and head. Take extra clothes, food, water, sand for on-ice traction, and a sled for easy on-ice transport of all equipment.
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Jateff also notes **whitefish** season opened Dec. 1 on selected areas of the Similkameen and Methow rivers. "Anglers need to be aware that in any area that is currently open to steelhead fishing, whitefish gear rules are not in effect, which means that anglers fishing for whitefish must abide by steelhead gear rules," Jateff said.

In areas where steelhead fisheries are not taking place (Similkameen above Enloe Dam and the Methow/Chewuch rivers above Winthrop), standard whitefish gear rules apply - one single point hook, maximum hook size 3/16 inch measured point to shank, and bait is allowed.

Southcentral Washington

The region's winter-only season **rainbow trout** water, North Elton Pond along Interstate 82 near Selah in Yakima County, is well-stocked with hatchery fish. Eric Anderson, WDFW district fish biologist, reminds anglers the daily catch limit at North Elton is two trout.

Anderson notes that winter anglers need to be very cautious about ice. According to U.S. Coast Guard guidelines, no one should venture onto lake ice unless it is at least 4 inches thick, clear and solid. As much as 9 inches may be needed to safely support snowmobiles or other vehicles. Such ice depths can form after at least a week of below freezing temperatures, both day and night.

Ice depths vary throughout a waterway due to underwater structures, springs, geothermal activity, and water movement caused by flows, wind, or waterfowl use.

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Anderson notes that winter **whitefish** action on the Yakima River's 3,500-foot stretch below Roza Dam will likely pick up as winter advances. Whitefish are also fair game now on sections of the Naches and Klickitat rivers. Check the fishing rules pamphlet for specific river stretch descriptions. 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 maggots or small artificial flies or lures.

TGF Inbox – Reader E-mail

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

Paddle and Power Boat Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Permit Rules Clarified:
<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/news/2009/december/122309.asp>

The R&B Lure Co. and Jacks Tackle Winter 2009-2010 Winter Steelhead Derby:
<http://www.ifish.net/board/showthread.php?t=281171>

GOOD LUCK!