

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 1<sup>st</sup> – January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro** - With little current in the lower Willamette, sturgeon fishing slowed over the past weekend. It's difficult to keep a boat straight on the incoming tide. Sand shrimp and squid have been taking mostly shakers and the occasional keeper-sized fish.

The Multnomah Channel can be a good place to target sturgeon this time of year, especially towards the head of the channel.

The McKenzie is low and clear but the water temperature has been rising slightly. There are still steelhead available below Leaburg Dam.

Winter steelhead are being taken on the Clackamas with jigs being a top producer. Results will improve here into January but many of the early run fish may be entering their spawning phase.

The Sandy should be in great shape for steelheading this week and holds promise for winters. Scott Harden of Portland recently posted a 3-fish day with the largest being an 18-pound native, released to spawn in the wild. Low and clear early in the week, rain will improve the flow and color. Try spinners here.

Confusion surrounds the new aquatic invasive species permit. Check the department's home page for clarification: [www.dfw.state.or.us/](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/). Licenses and tags for the 2010 season can also be purchased here and anglers are reminded that they can't legally fish after today without their new paperwork.

**Northwest** – Steelheaders experienced good fishing on many north coast streams just after the most recent drop in river levels. Many anticipated great fishing for hatchery fish but reality pointed to more challenging fishing.

A good showing of wild steelhead were witnessed by north coast anglers but opportunities slowed when flows dropped and a strong east wind chilled the bite. The Wilson remained one of the better bets but anglers were forced to seek fish in the extreme lower portions of these systems once they dropped down to low levels. The most recent report from the Wilson was slow fishing, even downstream of Sollie Smith Bridge when historically, this can be a good week to pursue fish down there.

The Nestucca had fish available last week but has since slowed for even the most persistent angler. Wild fish were prevalent in the recent low water but anglers are waiting for slightly warmer weather and higher flows. The river should fish again early next week.

It's still a bit early for steelhead on the mainstem Nehalem and most other north coast rivers have to be too low before this river begins producing fish under ideal conditions. It should start producing well in late January.

Small stream anglers targeting steelhead on the North Fork Nehalem, Three Rivers and the Necanicum found challenging conditions in the low, clear and cold weather. These rivers should get a final shot of early run steelhead once systems swell again as predicted by mid-week.

Recycled steelhead should be available on the North Fork Nehalem and Three Rivers systems.

Sturgeon effort picked up with the favorable tides on Tillamook Bay last weekend. Although reports were spotty, this is peak season for these fish. Quality tides will still be available through the weekend but peak time is after dark essentially suspending all effort.

A large freshwater influx, high tides and rough seas will produce poorly for crabbers this weekend. It would be a wasted effort.

Despite great tides, razor clam digging north of the Necanicum River remains closed. Rough seas will likely limit success for diggers to the south.

**Southwest** – Minus tides will occur after dark this week creating opportunities for clam diggers with appropriate lighting to spot bivalves. A head-mounted lamp works well.

Umpqua anglers have had some good days for winters with the best yet to come. Currently it's fair on the mainstem.

East Fork Coquille was non-productive over the past weekend. Only a handful of fish were caught on the South Fork.

Steelheading on the Coos has been slow to fair. East Fork Millacoma is producing a few steelhead but remains thick with wild coho.

The water was low and clear on the lower Rogue early this week. Rain will improve conditions here.

Chetco steelheaders have been taking a few chromers on a variety of baits and lures. The Chetco was below optimum levels early this week but precipitation is in the forecast. Check the levels; it fishes best between 1,400 and 4,000 cfs. Results will improve as the winter steelhead run hit its prime in January. When boats have been able to cross the bar they found excellent results for rockfish and made good catches of ling cod and crab. Boaters should expect a rough ocean over the New Years weekend.

Fishing for winter steelhead has been worthwhile on the Elk River.

**Eastern – Pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688)** reports slow steelheading and very cold conditions on the Grande Ronde River. Rain will help to thaw the banks, break up ice jams and improve the fishing.

Deschutes anglers enjoyed fair to good steelheading in chilly conditions over the holiday weekend.

Crescent Lake has continued to provide trollers with large Mackinaw. Run large plugs on downriggers here and dress for frigid conditions.

**SW Washington** – District streams are still producing some catches of steelhead with the Cowlitz the primary target for the most serious anglers. Fish are beginning to reach the spawning stage but silver sided fish may still cut orange.

The Kalama and Lewis Rivers are also options but returns remain subdued and likely won't pick up again until later returning broodstock and wild fish enter later in the winter. Sub-par results are likely for this season given the relatively poor performance of the early run on these systems.

Check the WDF&W web site for clam digging opportunities over the New Year's weekend. Excellent tides should provide good opportunity for those willing to brave big surf.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – Columbia River sturgeon fishing and lower river crabbing remain poor. Check our archived reports if you still seek a reason why this is.....

Steelhead reports have been scarce but with a stiff east wind for several days last week, effort was likely low and catch even lower. A weather change should improve the situation. The season isn't over but it dramatically slows during cold weather periods.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Warmer weather in the lower elevations may improve the steelhead bite in the John Day Pool and Arm in the coming days. A tropical front is expected to reach the NW and bring warm air which should improve steelheading. Although the fish are beginning to show more color, there are fish available that would make adequate tablefare. Bucks especially can still provide good eats this time of year.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – How often? Once in a blue moon. The term 'Blue Moon' refers to that unusual occurrence of a second full moon in a single month. That rare event occurs tonight on New Year's Eve. The last time it happened was in 1982. A good omen? Let's hope so but we believe it's bad luck to be superstitious.

Lower Willamette temperature dropped over the past couple of days to 38 while steelhead crossing picked up at the Falls, topping the 500 mark. The flow is down but hopefully, rain on the way will serve to raise the level along with the water temperature.

The McKenzie is rising and won't be fishing well. Wait 'til it starts to drop but this reset may be the closing curtain on late summer steelheading here.

The flow of the North Santiam is forecast to nearly triple to 5,900 cfs with the rain that's falling. It won't be fishable this weekend. Spawning at the hatchery will occur on January 6th. Volunteers are needed for several hours. Call 503 897 3301 if you can lend a hand.

You'll need 2010 licenses and tags to fish starting Saturday. This reminder brought to you by the Department of Common Sense.

**ODFW sez:** "Attention anglers: Still have questions about the new Aquatic Species Prevention Permit required beginning Jan. 1 on all non-motorized drift boats, canoes, kayaks and inflatable pontoon boats 10 feet long or longer? Visit the Oregon Marine Board Website (<http://www.boatoregon.com/OSMB/programs/09LawsFAQs.shtml>) for a list of frequently asked questions. Permits go on sale Dec. 1 wherever ODFW licenses are sold and online."

**The Guide's Forecast** – Sturgeon love high, muddy water. They like it a little warmer than the current 38 degrees but rains should help in all regards. Keepers will be available in both the lower Willamette and Multnomah Channel although most fish will be too small to keep. Stay at it and, as always, move to find larger biters. A variety of bait should be in your arsenal and should include sand shrimp and squid. Sturgeon seem yet to key on smelt and with prospects this year, that's not a bad thing.

**ODFW says:** "Large brood trout were released this week in Junction City and Walter Wirth ponds. The fish are 4- and 5-year-old rainbow trout from ODFW's Roaring River hatchery and range in size from 8 to 18 pounds."

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – The Clackamas has decent numbers of steelhead scattered throughout. Eagle Creek has steelhead available now although numbers are fairly low this early in the run.

The Sandy produced fair winter steelheading this week but it remains to be seen what effect rainfall will have over the next couple of days. In any event, it will be one to hit as the level drop and will only improve through January and will peak in February.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – Steelheaders are still plying the waters with high hopes of coming home with holiday steel. The action remained spotty but persistent anglers could come up with some action if they worked the water well.

There were reports of fresh chinook last weekend with one boat reporting landing 2 and missing 2 other chances. On Monday, the same guide hooked 4 steelhead and landed 2 fish also. Other reports came in spotty with results mixed from day to day. Just prior to the snow storm, reports of slow fishing downstream of Sollie Smith Bridge were pretty much universal but the day before, anglers reported fair action.

Low clear water plagued many anglers, especially those bank anglers wanting to work the smaller streams like the North Fork Nehalem and Three Rivers. Fish were certainly present but not very willing to bite in the cold, low and clear water. Even though the North Fork has experienced a great season, it has been slow lately in the low water conditions. The hatchery has handled over 550 steelhead to date.

Most recently, wild fish seem to be making up the bulk of the catch although some hatchery fish have certainly been available. The best fishing clearly took place just after the last high water, prior to the Christmas holiday.

The Trask was a fair option even though the bulk of the steelhead return later in the winter on this system. In higher water, the Dam Hole is a great place to bank fish but recent high water events have reshaped that drift. It's much rockier now reports **Buzz Ramsey**, making it much more challenging to fish. Because it's most often managed for wild fish, it gets far less traffic than the Wilson or Nestucca Rivers.

The Nestucca River did fish fairly well prior to Christmas but has since slowed with a large component of the run being wild fish. As the winter wears on, more broodstock fish should become available. **Pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** reported landing 3 native steelhead early in the week but he had to work for those fish. Like most river systems in low water conditions, the lower stretches of the river will fish the best as fish won't be moving upstream too fast until flows spike.

Anglers were targeting sturgeon in Tillamook Bay on the recent minus tide series. Low slack has since slipped past sunset so effort has waned. Catches weren't over the top by any means but some quality fish were taken in recent days. Sand shrimp is the bait of choice this time of year. The West Channel is where the bulk of the effort has been.

Crabbing has been challenging. With the cold weather and commercial effort, catches are slow in

most coastal estuaries. The ocean remains off-limits to most sportcraft due to rough weather. Netarts Bay is one of the best options but it is only producing mediocre results.

Razor clam digging remains closed north of the mouth of the Necanicum River until further notice. Good digging should occur after sunset when the surf isn't too rough to put the clams down and out of feeding mode.

**The Guide's Forecast** – As the winter wears on, steelheaders get more anxious in January. Both later returning "early run" steelhead are still available although their quality is quickly going downhill. Many of these early run fish will seek smaller tributaries to spawn in over the next several days, especially when water heights again swell. Also available are the broodstock variety which is still several weeks from peaking. Broodstock fish have been reported since early in the season but look to late February and early March for best results. The Wilson and Nestucca have these unique varieties available.

Rivers are forecasted to swell considerably although at the time of this writing (11:00 p.m. on 12/30), the rains were yet to hit. We're supposed to really get underway about daybreak on the 31<sup>st</sup> with a steady rise. It's likely to put most major north coast river systems on hold at least through the New Year's weekend. In other words, the Wilson, Nestucca, Trask and especially the Nehalem are WAY out for a while.

The North Fork Nehalem, Necanicum, Three Rivers and to a much lesser degree, the Kilchis should see another shot of action when the larger systems are too big to fish. The North Fork Nehalem will offer up the best opportunity as fish slow and congregate near the hatchery this time of year. It's clearly a good year for returns.

Steelheaders are likely to see spent fish hit the banks on these river systems but they are willing biters. It's up to you as to whether or not you keep them. They do a disservice when they spawn in the wild but you don't want to waste a fish either if you harvest it, only to find it cuts too pale. Bucks always seem to cut better than the hens do. Anglers will encounter bright hens that are also spent. It can be hard to tell the difference between a fresh run and spent fish this time of year. Look for the sunken belly on a hen. If they are not MINT bright and girthy, they're likely spawned out.

Sturgeon fishing opportunities have slipped away into the night. The next good possibility for fishing is around the 9<sup>th</sup> of January. Fishing should be improving.

Don't bother crabbing but clamming might be good although rough seas will likely put feeding clams well below the sand surface making them difficult to find.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – Temporary regulation for Chinook end January 1st. Check the 2010 regs for the latest.

Although the 2010 fishing regulations indicate a six rockfish bag limit, that is incorrect. The bag limit will remain seven fish per day. Coolness.

Whale Watch Week continues through January 1st all along the Oregon coast. If you're close enough to see the ocean, you're near a location where green-jacketed volunteers will help you spot giant, migrating mammals. More information here: <http://www.whalespoken.org/>

In addition to extreme low tides occurring after dark Friday and Saturday, the first two days of 2010, we'll get the highest tides of the year, reaching over the 10 foot mark. In combination with

20+foot waves on Friday, this calls for caution and may be at cause for some flooding in some places along the coast.

That low, clear water which has plagued anglers fishing southwest rivers is a thing of the last decade as heavy rain

pummels the region through much of the coming weekend. Rivers are predicted to crest Saturday afternoon although most will be slow to recover as showers continue. As the rivers start to drop, plunkers will be the first to reap the benefits of fresh winter steelhead which will enter with the freshet. Spin-N-Glow are the weapon of choice, often tipped with a little shrimp or prawn and made further appealing to steelhead by the addition of scent. If the water is ripping, fish close to the bank. Gravel bars and inside turns are often most productive.

Here's a look at what to expect as the next storm front moves through.

Siletz Levels are supposed to crest at a little over 10 feet at Siletz on January 1st.

Newport Boaters will be fishing the bay this coming weekend as wind and wave will prevent ocean launches. Crabbing has been slow at Yaquina and the flush of fresh water from storms will only make things worse until the salinity level returns to normal.

The Alsea is forecast to rise from the current 4.5 level to nearly 11 feet by mid-New Year's Day. Predictions indicate

it will drop thereafter but if accurate, this one is unlikely to fish over the holiday weekend. It has been fair to good and will fish well when it recovers from the rainstorm.

The mainstem Umpqua has been kicking out a mix of wild and hatchery winter steelhead along with the occasional Chinook. The low, clear water here will be cured for sure by this week's storm. The run should be underway when the river recovers from the freshet.

Coos and Coquille river have been fishing well for winter steelhead and are expected to be even better when they drop and clear following this week's storm front.

Steelhead has been fair this week on the lower Rogue but is expected to improve following the freshet resulting from rain this week. Summer steelhead continue to be caught in the Grants Pass stretch.

With the Chetco up to 3,000 cfs and exhibiting excellent color, steelheading has been decent. Anglers are hooking smallish winter with most in the six to eight pound range on cured roe. Wild fish are outnumbering those of hatchery origin but almost everyone trying is getting some action. A greater number of fin-clipped winter steelhead will show in the coming weeks. Surf topping 20 feet on Friday will moderate a little through the weekend but probably not enough to allow for offshore launches out of the Port of Brookings.

Chinook are still in the mix on the Elk and Sixes river as the winter steelhead run gets underway here. It's getting more challenging to find a bright fall salmon amongst those which are turning dark bit there are still a few keepers around. These small rivers will recover from a deluge well before larger ocean tributaries.

**Central and Eastern Oregon – Pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688)** reports this week from the Grande Ronde River, "Happy New Year!"

"It's been cold up here in the northeast corner during December. Things got icy about Dec. 10 and had hung on, with periods of fishable water, but not floatable. The state creel catch rate has been decent - mostly single digit, but for not many anglers and not a lot of fish - to hand, there's a ton in the river.

"The weather outlook this week is for some low-elevation rain, which will clear out the ice jams and might wash away a lot of the shore ice. It's amazing, some of the banks of ice on shore are more than 5 feet high next to the water.

"Hope your fishing is good."

### **Washington fishing reports:**

**From the WDF&W Weekender Report *December 9<sup>th</sup> – January 5<sup>th</sup>, 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 preseason 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.
- 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.

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.

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.

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- 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.

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.

### **Reader E-mail**

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

Write to the TGF staff:

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Doug Rees: [doug@TheGuidesForecast.com](mailto:doug@TheGuidesForecast.com)

Michael Teague: [Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com](mailto:Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com)

### **Random Links**

Fishing Reel Schematics are available at this commercial website:

<http://www.mikesreelrepair.com/>

Technical Fishing Bulletins:

<http://www.luhrjensen.com/techbulletins.cfm>

**GOOD LUCK!**