

The Guide's Forecast - volume 12 issue number 3

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 15<sup>th</sup> – January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2010**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro** - With a record run of spring chinook forecast, anglers are anxious to learn what opportunities will exist for them this spring. Managers will likely decide seasons for spring salmon and sturgeon in a series of upcoming meetings beginning in early February. The new catch sharing agreement between upriver tribes and lower river users will constrict opportunity.

The Columbia is currently open for spring chinook although fishable numbers won't be present for many more weeks. With the large number of fish predicted back this year, fishing should get good earlier than usual. Earnest effort should begin in March.

While conditions for sturgeon on the Willamette improved this week, boating conditions deteriorated with debris washing downstream. Caution is advised until it clears out. The Multnomah Channel has produced keepers recently.

The majority of summers have passed above Leaburg Dam on the McKenzie. There are better prospects at this time of year.

The North Santiam will be falling through the weekend. There are native steelhead available for catch-and-release.

Clackamas River levels will be high but dropping into the weekend with winter steelhead scattered. Eagle Creek has been slow and the fish present are close to spawning.

Sandy steelheading will be worthwhile anytime it's dropping and clearing at this time of year.

Huddleston Pond, Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake are scheduled to be planted with hatchery trout.

The truncated Portland Boat Show runs through Sunday, January 17th at the Expo Center in Portland.

**Northwest** – North coast anglers continue to be faced with high water conditions, leaving only the smaller tributaries fishable for much of last week. The North Fork Nehalem continues to be one of the best producing streams with fresh steelhead still coming into the hatchery trap for personnel to take eggs and recycle back downstream for another run past anglers.

**Pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** reports, "The Nestucca is fishing slow to fair. There are only a handful of fish being caught."

Three Rivers hatchery on the Nestucca system is also a good small stream option but it's not producing the numbers that the North Fork Nehalem is. Fishing is best close to the hatchery deadlines on these rivers but pressure is intense, somewhat compromising the fishing experience. None-the-less, it's one of the best returning years for adult steelhead in recent history.

If weather models come to fruition, the most popular north coast streams will stay out of shape until late into the weekend. The Wilson and Nestucca may produce light catches in the upper reaches by Saturday but serious steelheaders may want to look to the North Fork Nehalem, Three Rivers and the upper Trask for early action.

The Highway 30 streams near Astoria also offer up fair opportunity for hatchery steelhead as well.

**Southwest** – Success will be difficult to gauge this week as the southwest coast is predicted to get slammed by another storm front, blowing out rivers once again. Only the smaller tributaries are likely to fish by the weekend.

Mild morning incoming tides will be of little advantage with rough offshore conditions predicted for the weekend. When boats have been able to get out, ocean crabbing and bottom fishing has been good.

Over the past weekend, fishing was slow on the Umpqua system. Of the possibilities here, the South Umpqua fished the best.

When the lower Rogue falls back into shape, expect above-average fishing for hatchery steelhead. It has been very good lately. Bait tempted native steelhead and trout on the upper Rogue over the past weekend creating a fairly productive catch-and-release fishery.

Fresh steelhead moved into the Chetco River late last week, providing decent action for anglers. Water flow of the river at Brookings is forecast to crest at 11,000 cfs mid week, then fall, but not to optimum flow by the coming weekend.

Coquille River steelheaders did well last week with bank anglers taking fish on both the north and south forks. South Fork boaters did well from Beaver Creek to Myrtle Point. Another shot of steelhead should come in after the river swells again.

Fishing will be good when the river recovers from the current freshet and plunkers may have a window of opportunity late this week as waters near 5,000 cfs. Once again, an angry ocean will disallow offshore excursions this weekend.

**Pro guide Andy Martin (206-388-8988)** reports that steelheading on the Chetco is good and improving.

Elk River anglers enjoyed decent action for both chinook and steelhead over the past week. This is one of the southwest rivers which will return to good condition quickly following a freshet.

The Sixes River closed to the retention of chinook on December 31<sup>st</sup> but remains open to steelhead.

**Central and Eastern Oregon – Pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688)** reports the Grande Ronde opened up early this week as ice broke up. Level and flow is steady with anglers making multiple steelhead hookups.

Fishing on the Deschutes is fair with a few steelhead available around Maupin but they're coloring up. Winter trout may be taken on nymphs.

**Steve Fleming (1-888-624-9424)** reports the John Day is now free of ice and fishing well for steelhead from Kimerly to Clarno.

Crescent Lake has continued to deliver large Mackinaw to trollers using downriggers to work the deep water for them.

Warmer weather broke ice up on the Grande Ronde River where steelheaders reported good success in the early part of the week. A generous daily bag limit remains in effect here.

**SW Washington –** Like many river systems in NW Oregon, district streams have been high and unfishable for much of the past week. If flows drop as expected, steelhead fishing should improve with the Cowlitz, Kalama and Lewis Rivers being the best prospects.

The Kalama will get quality broodstock adults into March while wild fish will make a stronger showing on the Lewis through that time frame.

There are still no reports of smelt in the lower Columbia but they are likely to show in the coming weeks if a run is to materialize.

**Columbia River Fishing Report –** There's still no stories coming from the Columbia River although sturgeon effort is still present at Bonneville Dam. There was even a boat recorded salmon fishing in the area. Catches have been non-existent however. And to put it bluntly, things aren't going to improve anytime soon on the mainstem.

Smelt often make an appearance this time of year but users will have a fresh set of rules to abide by for the 2010 year. Seasons are set based on projected abundance and season setting will be occurring in the coming weeks. The warmer weather that we've been experiencing often times draws smelt into the lower river where commercial effort and catch typically gets underway. Sport and commercial seasons are currently open although sportanglers rarely catch smelt of any significance in the mainstem Columbia. A decision on the listing of smelt from NOAA fisheries is due out in March.

**The Guide's Forecast –** Prospects for salmon and sturgeon remain poor. It's important to note however that given the predicted record return of spring chinook this year, good action can be anticipated in the early part of the season. Look for a fair possibility for a spring chinook in February and a good chance by mid-March if the run comes in close to prediction.

Sturgeon fishing likely won't improve until water temperatures warm up later in March. WDF&W is also considering the idea to expand the sanctuary fishery in the gorge under several different scenarios. See full story here: <http://www.columbian.com/news/2010/jan/11/gorge-sturgeon-sanctuary-could-grow/>.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report –** ODFW biologists theorize the same conditions which provided anglers a banner year for coho is producing and excellent winter steelhead return this season. Numbers reported from the Clackamas and Sandy are very good for this time of year and counts approaching 1,000 at Willamette Falls is one of the largest in years for this time of year.

Willamette water levels will be on the drop though the weekend but will get another bump with the next round of rainfall early next week. Sturgeon fishing has been fair to good and it's the only game in town where the lower Willamette/Multnomah Channel is concerned.

While we have attempted to make boaters aware of the \$7 permit required for all watercraft, powered or not, the Oregon State Marine Board recently modified the manner in which the rule is applied. Previously, the operator of the boat had to be the owner of the craft with a permit in his/her name. Now the permit will be issued to the watercraft and anyone may operate it as long as the permit is on board. Funds from the newly-required document are intended to fight non-native invasive species in Oregon waters.

Another new requirement for 2010 is that all on board are required to wear Personal Flotation Devices at all times on rivers rated Class 3 or higher.

While not pertinent to northwest fishing, this new, mentioned briefly in the Fisheries Forecast, is of interest to all bass fishermen who are well aware of the 22 pound, four ounce world record largemouth taken by George Perry from Montgomery Lake in Georgia in 1932. Most bassers can recite that data from memory and a bigmouth that size is considered either the Holy Grail or an unattainable goal. It has therefore surprised the bass-fishing community that a fish of that weight would come from anywhere but Florida, where the eponymous Florida-strain largemouth grow to exceptional size or California where that strain of bass has flourished, attaining weights in the teens with some regularity. No, the 21st-century catch of a 22.25-pounder comes instead from the Far East. Manabu Kurita landed the behemoth in just three minutes on Lake Biwa near Kyoto, the largest and one of the oldest impoundments in Japan. While the fish was taken on July 2nd, 2009, it has taken six months to verify and certify the catch. Stats: 25-pound test line, live bluegill for bait, length from nose to fork 27.2 inches and girth of 26.7 inches.



Photo courtesy of IGFA.org

**The Guide's Forecast** – Lots of shakers is the report from most sturgeon anglers on the lower Willamette but those who persist, changing location, depth and experimenting with various baits and scents, are those who are most likely to hook a fish of keeper size. Keep mind that when the water is high and swift, shallow flats will often be the preferred feeding grounds for sturgeon. While the regular array of baits is drawing interest, smelt has been most effective recently. Various locations on the lower Willamette and on Multnomah Channel have produced keepers. Be prepared for a reduction in allowable harvest numbers as will as a harvest cap (cutoff) on the Willamette and be expect it to happen some time in 2010. The next meeting on the subject is scheduled for February 18th. When we know, you'll know.

McKenzie has been falling and is fishable at 6,000 cfs below Leaburg Dam. Steelheading is about over here with a few available upriver.

The water of the North Santiam is forecast to receded through the weekend. It's still high at this writing on Thursday, January 14th, but should provide catch-and-release fishing for wild winter steelhead by the weekend.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – The Clackamas river will be dropping through the weekend. Steelheading has been fair to good, best for those equipped to drift it at low levels. Rain has brought fresh chrome into Eagle Creek and fishing for winter steel has been worthwhile. As if it wasn't already one of the most crowded fisheries on the northwest. It will probably be too low this weekend but should fish well again after then rainfall due next week.

Steelheading has been slow too fair on the Sandy but then it's been high and roiled with conditions ranging from flat-out muddy earlier this week to green today (Thursday). Despite the marginal conditions, those in know have been hitting dome fish. If it drop and the water color improves, it holds hope of producing steelhead this weekend for those of us who might be less than intimately familiar with the river. Jigs have been most consistently effective here. Just be certain to set the depth to be certain it's running about a foot off bottom.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – It's been another trying week for trying steelheaders. Anglers working the smaller streams are finding some success such as the North Fork Nehalem. The fishing on this smaller hatchery managed stream has been great but even it has experienced some big water over the course of the last several days. It is one of the earliest to clear and anglers (both handicap and not) have been experiencing double-digit days near the hatchery deadline. Fish are being recycled on a regular basis, providing even more opportunity for even the most novice of anglers.

Other small systems have also yielded results but not to the extent that the North Fork has. Three Rivers has been a fair option as well as the Necanicum, Big Creek, Gnat Creek and the Klaskanine River. Hatchery runs exist on all of these systems but with the exception of Three Rivers, steelhead are not forced to stop at a weir and therefore, don't concentrate in numbers like what we see on these 2 key river systems. Three Rivers plants were down a bit as fish more fish were planted in the mainstem so not all the hatchery stock returns to Three Rivers. None-the-less, there is ample opportunity for long stretches in this watershed.

Bigger systems like the Trask, Nestucca and Wilson were too far out to think about pursuing fish for most of the week. The one exception may have been the upper reaches of each of these rivers.

Reports of some fish coming from the upper Trask are likely accurate as several runs can be productive in higher flows. This section of river can be technical however and it's not advised to float unless you have experience in this stretch to begin with.

The Nestucca reports came in as spotty as **pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** reports, "The Nestucca is fishing slow to fair. There are only a handful of fish being caught. We have been battling weather and high water for quite sometime, and the majority of the fish here seem to be in shock. Hopefully soon we will see some better conditions. Expect to see some new fish over this period, and as conditions improve, the fishing should do the same. There are small shots of fish hitting Three Rivers each day, with most being caught near the Deadline. However, the fish being caught have been a little colored, and mostly recycled fish. There are some fresh ones in the mix, but the bite here has slowed as well..."

Not many folks got out and took advantage of the sturgeon tides in the recent weather. No reports are available as effort was next to nil. The ocean has been upside down putting ocean crabbing and bottomfishing on hold.

**The Guide's Forecast** – A reprieve in the rain downpours may finally put the larger systems within reach of steelheaders by late in the weekend. It's more likely however that only the upper stretches of these systems will fish again before the next rain system puts them all out again.

Most river systems with early returning hatchery fish will begin to show signs of spawning. Many of these fish have already undergone the ritual and are getting a bit too spent to be calling them quality tablefare. In conditions like what we've been experiencing, these fish will often migrate up smaller tributaries and spawn in the systems that have the capability to sustain their incubating eggs. Of course these smaller systems are not open to angling but the adults will drop back into the mainstems and become quite willing to bite. They'll often be silver-sided but sunken-bellied, especially the hens. It will become ever-so more difficult to find fresh fish starting this week.

The Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem, Three Rivers and Highway 30 streams will remain the regions top bets but fresh broodstock fish may be available in the upper reaches of the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers. These fish are more likely to be in good shape for steelheaders to take as quality fish. Be prepared for windfall on any of these streams, especially if you are drifting in a boat. Smaller streams are more hazardous this time of year.

Poor tides for sturgeon and wickedly dangerous seas for offshore recreationalists will keep many from fishing near the salt. Don't waste your time fishing or crabbing in the estuaries or ocean.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – Winter steelhead are available in virtually every river and stream on the southwest coast. That said, these waters will be in various stages of level and color so the angler's priority this weekend will be choosing one with better level and color.

Crossing the bar at out of Newport to take advantage of decent bottomfishing and worthwhile ocean crabbing will not be an option this weekend with 12 to 15-foot seas in the offing.

Crabbing has remained fair to good in many bays and estuaries such as Winchester and Coos bays and will improve with rising salinity levels.

Steelheading has been slow to fair on the Siletz, but the time is right and the river should be in good condition as it drops and clears in the next few days.

While results over the past weekend were very slow, water level and color are expected to improve on the Alsea River through the weekend, making this a possible winter steelhead destination, although only 200 or so had entered the hatchery facility as of the second week of January.

A few steelhead have been taken this week on the Siuslaw which river is on track to be in good shape for the weekend. Lake Creek has given up a couple on jigs.

Prospects are good for weekend steelheading on the Umpqua. Conditions on the South Umpqua will depend upon whether water release from the reservoir. Counts on the North Umpqua at Winchester Dam have been favorable. The mainstem

Umpqua will provide action providing it drops and clears sufficiently but forecasts are favorable. The entire system will have winter steelhead available; it's all contingent on finding favorable water conditions. Be aware the mainstem is a little off-color as of Thursday this week and the North Umpqua a little high but the South Umpqua should be prime, in good condition with decent numbers available.

South Fork Coquille was high at mid week but is expected to fish well for steelhead when it returns to shape, possibly as early as Saturday.

Millicoma anglers have continued to bank some very late coho, some of which are actually sort of silverish.

As of January 14th, the Rogue River was running 13,000 cfs near Agness but is predicted to drop and clear though the weekend. Winter steelheading has been good here at times and prospects for the weekend look decent. Plunkers will have the greater success with plug-pullers' hookups improving as the flow moderates. In either case, the inside bends will be the productive targets. The Grants Pass stretch holds promise of the water clears by the weekend. Steelheading in this stretch has been fair and will fish well with better visibility. With steelhead charging upriver in the recent freshet, the upper Rogue holds promise as good numbers are being counted at Gold Ray Dam. A mix of late summers and bright winters will greet weekend anglers on the upper Rogue where bait and plugs will definitely take some fish. Water conditions are good.

Chetco flows measured 7,700 cfs on Thursday this week with the forecast calling for a fall to about 4,500 on Saturday, then a rise once again to around 8,000 cfs into the coming week. This will give plunkers an excellent opportunity not to be overlooked and the recent push of steelhead have been hatchery fish where the majority in past weeks have been natives which must be released here. The winter steelhead run will continue to improve through January and while 2,500 to 4,00 cfs is considered optimum, consider two Chetco-centric facts: 1) Water levels here drop more quickly than many anglers realize, often catching them with their waders down and 2) The Chetco fishes well for plunkers between 4,000 and 6,00 cfs. and holds a few surprises higher on the system with a few being taken by anglers drifting puffballs and roe on Wednesday this week. The gray-green water holds steelhead. Crossing the bar out of the Port Of Brookings will not be an option due to high wind and seas this weekend.

**Pro guide Andy Martin (206-388-8988)** sent this January 9th report on the Chetco, "We hooked three on Wednesday, two Thursday, four Friday and seven today. Most of the fish we are catching right now are hatchery fish. The first big push of hatchery steelhead typically arrives in the Chetco in late December. Once the Chetco got back into shape, we found steelhead spread throughout the river," Martin said. "The lower half of the river is still best, but we've been seeing more fish near Emily Creek and near the culverts between Loeb and Ice Box. I'm using black size 2 Eagle Claw octopus hooks and 10-pound leader," Martin said. "Orange Puff Balls were working best when the water was still a little high, but pink has been the hot color at around 3,000 cfs."



The Elk and Sixes should have recovered from the latest storm front and both are expected to be fishing well for winter steelhead by Friday and through the weekend.

**Central and Eastern Oregon – Steve Fleming (1-888-624-9424)** reports from the John Day, "This is the time of year that I do my paperwork, etc., but I did go down to the river on Saturday and I'm glad to report it had just cleaned the ice out and was dropping very nicely and cleaning up good. It is 781 CFS today, and should be great for fishing. There are fish from Kimerly all the way down, with the biggest concentration in the Clarno area. I've had some very nice polite call about the river condition, so it's working."

**Pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688)** reports, "The Grande Ronde opened up early this week after warmer weather broke out ice jams so boaters could float again. The water level has remained steady at about 1,000 cfs, which is decent for floating and good for fishing. I talked to one angler that knew of two different outfits that had caught 9 and 17 fish respectively on Monday. There is good bank access, but ice is still piled along much of the shoreline and this ice will remain intact until the water rises enough to wash it away."

Crescent Lake remains accessible and trollers running large plugs which imitate rainbows or kokanee stand a good chance of an encounter with broad-shouldered mackinaw.

## Washington fishing reports:

**From the WDF&W Weekender Report January 6<sup>th</sup> – January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

### North Puget Sound

Anglers have been reeling in some blackmouth in the marine areas and there have been a few scattered reports of steelhead caught in the rivers but, overall, fishing in the region continues to be slow. "It's been quiet out there," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fisheries biologist. "Effort continues to be light, and those who are getting out have had to work to find fish."

One bright spot has been the San Juan Islands, where fishing has been fair for **blackmouth**, Thiesfeld said. "Like elsewhere, there are not a lot of anglers fishing there, but those who have put in some time over the last week are finding fish."

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

Thiesfeld reminds anglers that Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet) re-opens for salmon fishing beginning Jan. 16. Anglers fishing that area will also have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook.

With Puget Sound now closed to **recreational crab fishing**, all crabbers licensed to fish in those waters are required to report their winter catch to WDFW by Jan. 15. Reports are due for the season running Sept. 8 to Jan. 2, whether or not crabbers actually fished or caught Dungeness crab. Sport crabbers who file their catch reports by the Jan. 15 deadline will be entered in a drawing for one of 10 free combination fishing licenses, which allow the holder to fish for a variety of freshwater and saltwater species during the 2010-11 season.

To submit catch reports, crabbers may send their catch record card to WDFW by mail or file their report on a special webpage on the department's licensing website. The mailing address is WDFW CRC Unit, 600 Capitol Way N., Olympia, WA 98501-1091. The online reporting system is available Jan. 3-15 at [https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/wdfw/puget\\_sound\\_crab\\_catch.html](https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/wdfw/puget_sound_crab_catch.html).

In the rivers, there have been reports of anglers hooking some bright steelhead. However, returns of hatchery **steelhead** to a few rivers have been low, prompting the department to close portions of some rivers, including the North Fork Stillaguamish, the North Fork Nooksack and the Cascade. The early closures are necessary to ensure hatcheries in the three rivers can meet their egg-take goals for winter steelhead.

Details on those emergency rules can be found on WDFW's fishing regulation website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>. Anglers are advised to check that website for news about the Cascade River, which could re-open soon, said Bob Leland, WDFW's steelhead program manager.

### South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

January is typically the best month for catching hatchery steelhead, but heavy rain rendered most area rivers unfishable during the first days of the new year. After several weeks of good fishing, most anglers decided to take cover until the rain subsided and the rivers dropped back into shape.

"It's a waiting game right now," said Ron Warren, regional fish manager for south Puget Sound and the Olympic Peninsula. "Lots of hatchery steelhead are moving into the rivers, but they're tough to catch under these conditions."

Anglers waiting for the rivers to drop might consider fishing for **blackmouth salmon** in one of a number of areas open in Puget Sound. Some nice fish were recently checked at the Pleasant Harbor boat ramp on Hood Canal, and Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet) opens for salmon fishing Jan. 16.

Another **razor clam** opening is also tentatively scheduled later this month. If marine toxin tests show the clams are safe to eat, diggers will get a chance to hit the beach starting Jan. 27. Assuming the tests go well, Long Beach and Twin Harbors will be open for digging Jan. 27-31, Copalis and Mockrocks will be open Jan. 29-31 and Kalaloch beach Jan. 30-31.

Digging at all five beaches will be restricted to the hours between noon and midnight. Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager, said final word on the dig will be announced once test results show whether the clams are safe to eat. If the dig is approved, he strongly advises clam diggers to check weather and surf forecasts before heading out.

Weather and stream conditions have been a major preoccupation for **steelheaders** for more than a month. In early January, the drop-off in participation was especially apparent on the Bogachiel River, where WDFW interviewed only four anglers with two fish from Jan. 1-3. By comparison, 163 anglers were checked with 120 hatchery steelhead - and 15 fish released - from Christmas Day through Dec. 27.

"High water has also put a damper on steelhead fishing in rivers around Grays Harbor, but that will change once we get some clear weather," Warren said.

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 on those rivers. On all other rivers, anglers may retain only hatchery-reared steelhead marked with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar.

Specific rules for each river are described in the 2009-10 *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

Recreational **crab** fishers are also reminded that all Puget Sound marine areas are now closed to crab fishing and that winter catch reports are due by Jan. 15. Crabbers may report their catch by sending their winter catch card to WDFW or by filing their report online. People who fail 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

Rivers are running high throughout the lower Columbia Basin, but anglers are still hooking up with inbound hatchery winter steelhead between rainstorms. Meanwhile, sturgeon fishing is now open in all areas of the mainstem Columbia below the Highway 395 Bridge, and catchable-size rainbow are still available in a number of lakes throughout the region.

As in December, timing is key for anglers hoping to catch **hatchery steelhead** in the first weeks of the new year, said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist.

"Since mid-December, we've seen a progression of frigid-water, low-water and now high-water conditions," Hymer said. "Catch rates have been up and down, but fishing has generally been pretty decent for anglers who hit it between major weather events."

Some of the best fishing has been on the North Fork Lewis River around the salmon hatchery, Hymer said. During creel checks in the week leading up to New Year's, 136 bank anglers checked on the North Fork had caught 23 steelhead and released nine others - most using jigs

and bobbers around the salmon hatchery. Twenty-six boat anglers checked during the same period took home six more winter steelhead.

On the Cowlitz River, boat anglers fishing between the trout and salmon hatcheries accounted for the largest share of the catch. Seventy-eight boat anglers reported 24 "keepers" while 44 bank anglers accounted for four more during creel checks ending Dec. 31.

The Kalama, Grays, Elochoman and Washougal rivers - plus Salmon Creek in Clark County - should also be good bets in the days ahead, Hymer said.

"The early run usually peaks around New Year's, but there are still plenty of fish in those rivers," he said. "The late winter run is also starting to arrive, which can provide decent steelhead fishing in the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers through March."

As in past years, all wild steelhead must be released. Anglers may retain only hatchery-reared fish with a clipped adipose fin and a healed scar. That also applies to **spring chinook salmon**, which could start entering the Columbia River in small numbers any day, Hymer said. Marked springers are available for harvest on a daily basis in the Columbia and its tributaries from the I-5 Bridge downstream until 2010 seasons are set in mid-February, he said.

Regulations for these and other fisheries are described in the *Fishing in Washington* rule pamphlet, available online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

As outlined in the rule pamphlet, **sturgeon** fishing is now open in all areas of the mainstem Columbia below the Highway 395 Bridge. Anglers may retain sturgeon daily except in the area from the Wauna powerlines to Bonneville Dam, where retention fishing is limited to Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays only. Fishing opportunities for sturgeon from March-December 2010 on the mainstem Columbia River will be decided by Washington and Oregon at a joint state hearing Feb. 18.

While temperatures are still a bit cold for red-hot sturgeon action, Hymer noted that anglers surveyed in The Dalles Pool caught three legal-size fish during the first three days of 2010.

Just as soon fish for **trout**? During the final days of 2009, WDFW planted nearly 15,000 catchable-size rainbows in seven area waters to give anglers some options during the cold of winter. Battleground Lake got 2,500 Dec. 21; Klineline Pond 2,500 Dec. 21; Icehouse Lake (near Bridge of the Gods) 1,022 Dec. 29; Spearfish Lake (near Dallesport) 2,002 Dec. 24; Rowland Lake (near Lyle) 4,057 Dec. 24; and Maryhill Pond (in Klickitat County) 501 Dec. 29. In addition, Fort Borst Park Pond, open only to juveniles under 15 years old, got 3,029 on Dec. 28.

Anyone curious about prospects for **smelt** dipping on the Cowlitz River and other Columbia River tributaries is encouraged to attend a public meeting sponsored by WDFW on that subject Jan. 6 in Kelso. The meeting will be held from 6-8 p.m. on the third floor of the Cowlitz County Administration Building at 207 4th Ave. N. in Kelso.

Last month, representatives of WDFW and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife set sport and commercial smelt-fishing seasons for the Columbia River, but delayed decisions about the tributaries due to a low run projection and the fact that smelt is under consideration for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act. The sport limit on the mainstem Columbia River is 10 pounds per day.

## Eastern Washington

The hottest fishing in the region is for net-pen-reared **rainbow trout** on Lake Roosevelt - the Columbia River reservoir off Grand Coulee Dam on the Lincoln, Ferry and Stevens county lines. John Whalen, WDFW regional fish program manager, said daily limits of five rainbows, running 14 to 20 inches, are readily being caught from Hunters downstream. Anglers who regularly fish the big reservoir say it's the best it has been in the past 10 years.

Bill Baker, WDFW district fish biologist, said fishing for **rainbow trout** remains good at Hatch and Williams lakes in Stevens County. The two lakes are the only winter-only season (Dec. 1 - March 31) waters that have fish to catch. Spokane County's Fourth of July and Hog Canyon lakes were treated last fall and will not be re-stocked with trout until spring.

Sprague Lake, on the Lincoln-Adams county line, continues to provide good catches of **rainbow trout** through the ice, although recent warmer weather and rain has left the safety of that ice questionable. WDFW Regional Enforcement Capt. Mike Whorton said that Sprague is under the same catch rules as Lake Roosevelt - five trout daily with no more than two over 20 inches - and the size of most fish there sometimes tempts anglers into violations. Whorton also notes that anglers who leave equipment or debris on the ice - from buckets to old armchairs - can be fined for littering.

Chris Donley, WDFW district fish biologist, reports Whitman County's Rock Lake is producing catches of rainbow and most notably **brown trout**. Spokane County's Eloika and Silver lakes are yielding lots of **yellow perch** through the ice, but anglers need to be cautious about "rotten ice" during recent thawing and re-freezing.

Snake River **steelheading** remains productive for anglers who find the fish pooled up near the mouths of tributaries. WDFW Fish Biologist Joe Bumgarner reports the latest creel check data shows the best catch rates below Hellar Bar near the mouth of the Grand Ronde River, and in the lower Grand Ronde itself where anglers average a little over six hours of fishing per catch. In the mainstem Snake, from Ice Harbor to Lower Monumental dams, steelheaders average almost 12 hours per fish caught. From Lower Monumental to Little Goose dams, the average is just under 17 hours per catch, and from Little Goose to Lower Granite dams, the average is 17.5 hours.

### **Northcentral Washington**

WDFW regional fish program manager Jeff Korth reports a variety of fishing opportunities throughout the region, but with recent warming trends he cautions anglers about deteriorating ice conditions, both on lakes and along river shorelines.

"Ice fishing for **rainbow trout** at the Windmill/Canal lakes in the Potholes Reservoir area in Grant County has been good," Korth said. "Ice fishing for **yellow perch** has been decent at Moses Lake and at Fish Lake in Chelan County. And ice fishing for **whitefish** at Banks Lake near Coulee City is reportedly good. But with thawing and re-freezing, anglers need to be sure the ice is safe before venturing on or near it."

WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff of Twisp reports good **rainbow trout** fishing through the ice at Rat Lake near Brewster, Sidley/Molson Lake near Oroville, Big and Little Green lakes near Omak, and Davis Lake near Winthrop. Patterson Lake near Winthrop is producing **yellow perch** in the 7-8-inch range, with some larger fish to 10 inches.

Jateff also reports that upper Columbia River **steelhead** fishing picked up slightly in the tributaries above Wells Dam while air temperatures were above freezing. "Fishing will taper off as the temperatures fall and ice forms in the rivers, so anglers planning a trip should call ahead first to check weather conditions," he said. "Anglers do best when drifting the slower-moving, deeper runs as the fish tend to hold in these areas during the winter months."

Jateff reminds steelheaders that a mandatory retention of adipose-fin-clipped hatchery steelhead is in effect during the fishery.

The Methow River is open to **whitefish** from Gold Creek upstream to the falls above Brush Creek and the Chewuch River from the mouth to the Pasayten Wilderness boundary. The Similkameen River is open from the mouth to the Canadian border. Anglers fishing for whitefish in areas that are currently open for steelhead must use selective gear (single barbless lures and flies, no bait allowed).

## **Southcentral Washington**

Anglers are taking limits of **whitefish** on the Yakima River and other local streams, according to WDFW district fish biologist Eric Anderson. "Some of the best whitefish areas besides the mainstem Yakima are the Naches, Tieton, Cle Elum and Bumping rivers," Anderson said. "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. Fish are usually caught with a small fly tipped with a maggot. Up to 15 whitefish can be retained daily. Most fish are 10 to 15 inches. Anderson recommends that anglers concentrate fishing efforts in deep pools below riffles.

**Steelhead** fishing in the Ringold area of the Columbia River near the Tri-Cities is still producing for bank anglers and boaters alike, reports WDFW Ringold/Meseberg Fish Hatchery specialist Mike Erickson. "At least for the few willing to brave the weather," he added.

## **TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail**

Subscriber '**Gene the fishnut**' reminds us, "Remember the Sixes river closes for the taking of chinook salmon as of 12/31.... Can only take Chinook on the Elk river.....of that pair....."

Thanks, Gene!

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

Write to the TGF staff:

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## **Random Links**

Final funding for Gold Ray Dam removal could come soon:

<http://www.mailtribune.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20091227/NEWS/912270324#STS=g3vt5qir.dlm>

Discussion underway regarding sturgeon fishing off OC's controversial 'Wall':

[http://www.oregonlive.com/sports/oregonian/bill\\_monroe/index.ssf/2010/01/sturgeon\\_fishing\\_tactics\\_in\\_or.html](http://www.oregonlive.com/sports/oregonian/bill_monroe/index.ssf/2010/01/sturgeon_fishing_tactics_in_or.html)

Mark your calendar - FisherPoets January 16 - 18, 2010:

<http://fisherpoets.writersontheedge.org/emails/fpoe.html>

**GOOD LUCK!**