

The Guide's Forecast - volume 12 issue number 5

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 29<sup>th</sup> – February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

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**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro -** Lower Willamette water temperatures are in the mid-40s with visibility less than two feet. Sturgeon fishing is expected to be worthwhile while winter steelhead continue to chug across in double digits with the year-to-date total approaching 1,700.

Sturgeon anglers were catching some legal fish in the Bonneville Pool over the weekend.

The McKenzie will fall into shape and achieve good color this week to provide decent winter trout fishing on nymphs.

There are no plans to clear the slide below Barton Bridge on the Clackamas which is easily navigable by drift boats but may cause problems later in the year. Although recently the steelheading has been deemed fair, overall, anglers in the Clackamas are calling it a great season. Good numbers of winter fish will continue to enter the river into early April with a mix of wild, broodstock and a rare summer steelhead throughout the next 2 months.

The Sandy has been consistent for winter steelhead with the run improved over seasons past. Gravel is beginning to accumulate in some of the more popular drifts where previously, silt had inundated the lower reaches. Broodstock fish will become more plentiful in the coming weeks.

Sheridan Pond is scheduled to be stocked with hatchery trout.

**Northwest –** Steelheaders finally got their opportunity late last week when larger river systems finally came into shape after a long period of high water. The Wilson River produced good catches on Thursday and Friday with boat traffic really ramping up over the weekend. A slight rise in river levels dampened effort over the weekend but fishing picked back up again early in the week. A mix of hatchery broodstock steelhead and wild fish were available with reports of some fish nearing 20-pounds already. Most fish were taken side-drifting eggs and yarn.

Smaller streams like the popular North Fork Nehalem dropped off as the water cleared but fish were still being taken daily near the hatchery. The Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem, Three Rivers and Highway 30 streams will contain mostly spawned out fish for the next several weeks. Wild fish will make a showing later in February but effort will dramatically drop off as only catch and release is allowed.

The Nestucca fished fair over the weekend but has since dropped off according to recent reports. The river is expected to remain in fair shape through the weekend although another system may force anglers upstream by Saturday. Like the Wilson, broodstock fish should be available into April but adult returns seem to be a bit down in recent years.

The mainstem Nehalem should start to get fish but it fishes best when most other north coast streams are too low to successfully fish.

Sturgeon fishers are taking advantage of good tides this week on Tillamook Bay. Weather conditions were favorable and recent reports indicate there are fair numbers of fish available. Peak fishing tides will sink past sunset by the weekend but another series should produce results the following weekend.

Crabbing picked up in Netarts Bay recently but the larger estuaries remain challenging with high volumes of fresh water still inundating them. The ocean forecast remains too rough for saltwater recreation.

**Southwest** – The tide will be incoming at sunrise but look for minus tides after the sun goes down along the southwest coast.

Steelheaders on the Umpqua have been hooking good numbers of winter steelhead but a fin-clipped adult has been rare due to low hatchery returns.

Tenmile Creek should be a good bet for winter steelhead this week as the water is not expected to get too high.

Waters of the North Fork Coquille will drop and clear quickly this week and should provide good winter steelheading. The South Fork Coquille and Millicoma have been productive when the rivers have been in decent shape.

The lower Rogue was productive for plunkers last week but the latest freshet will cause the waters to peak at mid week, dropping thereafter. It should fish by the coming weekend. The middle river has been fishing fair to good. On the upper Rogue, where nearly 2,800 winter steelhead have crossed Gold Ray Dam, action should pick up in the coming weeks.

The Chetco was fishing well, producing a few 20-pounders right up until rain last Sunday pushed the flow to 9,200 cfs. It is expected to fish well by mid-week. Plunkers using Spin 'n' Glos with bait will score from gravel bars as conditions improve. Drift boaters may get a shot in the coming weekend. Another rough weekend is forecast offshore but there may be a window of opportunity on Sunday, January 31st. Check last-minute conditions.

High winds have plagued Elk River steelheaders recently. Water conditions were excellent Sunday then blown out on Monday this week. It'll drop and clear quickly and offer good fishing.

**Eastern** – Deschutes fly fishers endured cold, snowy and sometimes windy weather over the past weekend to experience fair results nymphing for redsides around Maupin on the Deschutes.

Steelheading has been slow on the Umatilla although a few are being taken in lower than normal flows.

The Grande Ronde remains a good option if night time temperatures don't cause ice formations in the river. Last week, steelheaders averaged a fish for every 2.3 hours of fishing. The Willowa, Imnaha and Grande Ronde Rivers now enjoy a 5 fin-clipped fish per day limit and it is attainable for the persistent angler.

**SW Washington** – Duck hunter Brandon McGavran reported hordes of harbor seals in the mainstem Columbia between Goble and the mouth of the Cowlitz on Tuesday. Seagulls accompanied the seals indicating the smelt run is on its way to the Cowlitz. The first day of

dipping starts on February 6<sup>th</sup>.

Steelhead are available in the Cowlitz, Kalama and Lewis Rivers but action is only fair. The Kalama and Lewis systems should produce the best in the coming weeks but a lull in activity is common for this time of year.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – With the exception of Bonneville Pool sturgeon and some limited success in the John Day Pool for steelhead, the mainstem Columbia remains a biological desert. As is typical for this time of year, effort is increasing with a new yearly quota for the Bonneville Pool Reservoir. Effort is of course dictated by success and it appears that there are good numbers of keepers being taken for the effort put forth.

Steelhead continue to cross Bonneville Dam albeit in low numbers. For the month of January, over 500 hatchery fish will have crossed with an additional 200 wild fish. These fish are likely a mix of winter and summer fish, destined for various tributaries above Bonneville including the Hood River. Check local regulations and don't go fishing with high expectations but small tributaries like the Hood can produce results in the late winter. John Day Pool trollers will also take fish into late winter with some quality fish in the mix.

Still no sign of a spring chinook although there were three chinook pass Bonneville Dam for the month of January. No one is ready to call them "spring" chinook. There are some people already trying and if the run does come in as predicted, February could be a fair month to start.

Commercial smelt netter reported about 2,000 pounds of smelt taken in a recent mainstem fishery. Couple this with reports of mega pods of seals present between Goble and the mouth of the Cowlitz and it appears that there are some of the prized baitfish in the river system. They'll likely enter the Cowlitz in the coming weeks. Some commercial smelt should be available for sale but expect to pay a premium price in this limited market.

**The Guide's Forecast** – No need to get too excited about this fishery this week, especially below Bonneville Dam. The best prospects for sturgeon are above Bonneville Dam and for sturgeon, in the John Day Pool. Action for both species will likely be better when air temperatures warm up from overnight lows. This can be the best time of year to target keepers in the Bonneville Pool and realize, the quota in these upstream reservoirs typically doesn't last much into spring.

Prepare yourselves for smelt dipping in the Cowlitz River for the February 6<sup>th</sup> opener. There's a good chance that there will be fish present when it opens. Only 4 days are being given to sport-dippers.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – Sturgeon fishing has been fair to good with the fish keyed primarily on smelt at this time of year, despite the crummy runs. Squid is a good back-up bait to have on hand. With the winter water temperature higher here than in the Columbia, results will be better. Keepers have come from Oregon City to Kelly Point and all points in between.

Following a slight rise when the McKenzie colored up on Tuesday this week, the water is dropping and clearing with temperatures in the low to mid 40s.

Steelheading remains slow on the Santiam despite much better returns this season than last. Be aware that the stretch of the North Santiam is dangerous for drift boaters to try at this time. At last report earlier this week it was reported as impassable due to storm debris and downed trees.

Regardless, even when clear, this stretch is hazardous due to ripping water, runs and channels which have changed over the winter. Wait it out.

The Annual Eugene Boat & Sportsmen's Show is February 5th through 7<sup>th</sup> at the Lane County Convention Center and Fairgrounds.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Keeper sturgeon are available to the patient angler on the lower Willamette and in Multnomah Channel. Don't give up if most of the fish you're catching are too small to keep; it's the same for everyone. Stay at it and your chance will come.

McKenzie fly fishers should have a good time with winter trout by throwing nymphs. The Prince pattern has been particularly effective this week.

Those trying for steelhead on the North Santiam are advised that bait will out-fish lures, by far.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – Steelheading has been slow on the Clackamas although bobber and jigs have fooled some fish lately and plug-pullers have scored. Conditions look optimum for the weekend so it might just be worth a try. Catches have slowed with a few winter steelhead present in Eagle Creek. The water has turned quite clear.

Sandy steelheaders have been enjoying decent catches over the past week for a mix of wild and hatchery fish. Winters are well-distributed throughout the system. Drifted bait and bobber & jig have been top producers.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – Steelheaders finally got to experience what we've been waiting for, for many weeks. Prime water conditions on the north coast reinvigorated steelheaders and once again pointed towards a good return of adult steelhead this year.

Judging from the number of boats working the Wilson River, people were clearly excited about broodstock fish available on this system. The Nestucca also endured crowds that guides haven't witnessed ever in their careers. The best catches always come on the front part of the rain freshet when fish finally have an opportunity to experience a well presented bait but also, fish are well distributed throughout the system. And when I say system, I mean in higher flows, these fish will often occupy lies where in lower flows, they're too exposed to position themselves in these areas. With such distribution throughout each hole, it's wise to hit every inch of water that is deeper than 1 foot and even 1-foot of water can be productive in some cases! Fish are on the move so even if 25 boats are downstream of you and you're battling cleanup, you still have a viable chance if you can fish water that has been rested for 20 minutes or longer. It's the ideal scenario but we just don't experience these prime conditions all that often.

Those prime days last week were Thursday and Friday. Thursday, the Wilson was at about 5.5 foot according to the National Weather Service site linked from our homepage: <http://www.theguidesforecast.com/oregonrivers.shtml>. Not many people were fishing yet, the water was not the perfect steelhead green but fish were present and willing. By Friday, the level hit closer to 5 foot, was steelhead green and people were calling in sick to work. The river was over-run with driftboats but fish were available. We floated from Siskeyville Boat Ramp to Mills Bridge going 3 for 3 for 3 rods. All fish were broodstock fish and in quality shape as you can see:



These fish fell to EZ eggs (latex imitation eggs) sidedrifted with pink yarn and Berkley Gulp scent. We took 2 fish above Mills Bridge and one below. As I mentioned before, there were a lot of boats on the water but there were also a lot of fish caught on Friday. By Saturday, it was mayhem and a good day to stay home with the family (if you can fish on the weekday that is). The fishing had also slowed with all the boat traffic and sore-mouthed fish from the previous days catches.

Other systems produced results as well with the other broodstock option being the Nestucca system. Guides reported fish around in the early part of the drop but the action didn't last long with success rates dropping fast as the river began to clear. One guide expressed concern that there were more seals in the system keeping the fish from migrating upstream. It's clear that this system hasn't had the adult returns that it did just a few years ago. None-the-less, it is a good late season option.

The Trask also produced fair fishing but without the broodstock option. By the weekend, anglers looking to avoid the crowds were fishing from Loren's Drift to Highway 101 with fair results for wild fish with a few hatchery strays in the mix.

The smaller streams we had been touting so much in recent weeks were still options but by far, the bulk of the fish are spawned out. Aggressive and plentiful, just spawned out. The bright spot on the north coast, the North Fork Nehalem, is still producing catches at the hatchery, especially at the handicap platform, but the river is quite clear now and the best success is taking place at first light and fishing right up on the deadline. The Necanicum River is filthy with spawned out fish.

Switching to sturgeon, effort was running a bit higher with the nicer weather and favorable tides early in the week. Catches were fair with effort spread out between Bay City, the west channel and in the middle bay for the low slack bite. Shrimp is the bait of choice this time of year and there are a good proportion of keepers available.

Offshore angling remains a poor option and even though a calming sea is in the forecast, it still looks as if the wind waves will keep things quite bumpy out there.

Crabbing has picked up in Netarts Bay but other estuaries remain relatively crab free.

**The Guide's Forecast** – River levels are forecasted to maintain composure for much of the week allowing anglers to once again take advantage of good conditions through the weekend. A slight bump is forecasted for the weekend which shouldn't only bring about more steelhead, but open up other north coast options as well. Regardless of what river system is your favorite, the

best opportunity for later running hatchery fish will be those systems that maintain broodstock steelhead programs, specifically the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers.

What's most encouraging this season is the number of early broodstock fish already returning to the Wilson system and to a lesser degree, the Nestucca. Good numbers early often translate into great numbers later. It looks like it may be one for the memory bank!

Although tides will still be favorable, this time of year, it's more about river conditions than anything else and the river conditions should remain great if the weather models remain accurate. Just remember the rule of high water, high in the river. Low water dictates that you fish lower in the river system. Higher flows will also dictate what size bait you'll want to use. Bigger water equals bigger and brighter baits although small baits will also work.

If you want action, go to the North Fork Nehalem, Necanicum, Three Rivers or the Highway 30 streams for great opportunity for spawned out hatchery fish. These fish are still fair sport but a poor choice for tablefare. It's a good opportunity for a beginner to take advantage of a plentiful resource, especially this year!

Sturgeon tides are now peaking past sunset, but they are good tides. Maybe you should consider clam digging instead. If you are going to target razor clams, don't do so north of the mouth of the Necanicum River, it's closed due to toxins in the tissues of these bivalves.

If you're going to go crabbing, you better make it Netarts Bay. There has been an improvement in action in this estuary and it may remain that way as long as outside crabbers don't target the estuary mouth. Ocean crabbing looks to be a poor option throughout the week. Bottomfishing is out.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – According to the ODA website, recreational clamming is open on the southwest coast from the mouth of the Necanicum River to the California border while mussel harvesting remains open coast-wide. Call 1-800-448-2474 for the latest updates.

Unless boaters catch a break on this coming Sunday, when offshore conditions are forecast to moderate slightly, ocean fishing will once again be off limits this week. When offshore conditions have allowed, recreational crabbing is very good and commercial harvesters are having the best early season in several years.

Steelheaders on the Siletz are reporting improving results with fish scattered throughout the system. Whitaker Creek has produced some good catches.

The hatchery facility on the Alsea has had about 400 winter steelhead return, most of which came in January. Fishing here has been slow to fair but conditions here are improving.

The Siuslaw is fishing well and should continue to do so as water conditions improve prior to the freshet predicted for the weekend. There has been quite a bit of pressure here but a good number of steelhead are being landed regardless.

The first week of February is historically productive for winter steelhead on Tenmile Creek, making it a good bet for the weekend.

While the North Umpqua is slow for steelhead, the South Umpqua is in good shape and producing good numbers of winters with the number of hatchery fish improving. The mainstem is slow but will improve as the water drops and clears.

Coquille steelheaders are hooking good numbers of fish now with drifted eggs the top producer, Most of the fish in the system now are of hatchery origin.

Crabbing has held up in Coos Bay despite the recent influx of fresh water. Boaters are doing best although crabbing from docks is producing fair catches as well. Jetty fishing is producing fair to good catches of rockfish when ocean conditions allow the activity. The Coos River has been producing some steelhead on drifted bait. Water conditions are improving on the Rogue allowing plunkers to hook a few winter steelhead on the lower river.

Catches are improving for plug-pullers as well. The middle Rogue has been most productive and is expected to remain so through the weekend. Results have been good 'most anywhere below the mouth of the Applegate. The upper river is running low and clear, offering slow to fair fishing for a mix of aging summer and fresh winter steelhead.

Flows at the Chetco River were 4,450 cfs at Brookings the morning of Thursday, January 28th. This means that drift boaters can get busy and remain so until the river drops below 2,200 or so or the next front hits. Fishing has been good as the last freshet brought good numbers of hatchery steelhead into the system. Side-drifting small clusters of cured eggs has been most effective for taking steelhead from boats. Although ocean conditions are challenging this coming weekend, rockfishing has been good and catches of large ling cod are improving as they move closer to shore in preparation for spawning.

Elk River flows were still a little high at mid-week, but dropping and clearing rapidly and producing a few steelhead. It should be fishing well by Friday and with catches good, will produce through the weekend. The Sixes has also fallen into shape and with steelhead scattered, is producing fair to good catches.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – No report this week.

**Washington fishing reports:**

**From the WDF&W Weekender Report *January 20<sup>th</sup> – February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009***

**North Puget Sound**

This time of year anglers have a decision to make: cast for steelhead in the local rivers or get out onto Puget Sound and fish for salmon.

"Weather conditions usually help anglers make that choice," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "If the rivers are in shape, steelheading is a good bet. But if the rivers are blown out, blackmouth fishing in the marine areas is probably the best option."

Thiesfeld said he has heard reports of a few nice **blackmouth** - resident chinook - hooked in Marine Area 7 (San Juan Islands), where fishing has picked up recently. Anglers fishing Marine Area 7 have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook.

Elsewhere, Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet) recently reopened to salmon fishing. However, the fishery got off to a slow start, said Thiesfeld. "Overall, fishing was spotty on the opener," he said. "It certainly did not start off the way it ended in November, when fishing was pretty good."

Anglers fishing Marine Area 9 - 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 10 is only open through Jan. 31.

In the freshwater, fishing for **steelhead** continues to be slow. Thiesfeld said anglers should be aware that the lower portion of the Green River closed to fishing Jan. 16, while the upper stretch is scheduled to close Feb. 1. The Skagit and Sauk rivers also will close to fishing Feb. 16. With low steelhead returns expected back to those rivers, the emergency closures are necessary to protect wild steelhead.

Meanwhile, both the North Fork Stillaguamish and the Cascade rivers recently re-opened for fishing. Details on those emergency rules can be found on WDFW's fishing regulation website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

## **South Sound/Olympic Peninsula**

Heavy rain and high water have put a damper on steelhead fishing in the new year, but anglers have some other options to consider while waiting for the rivers to drop back into shape.

**Razor clams**, for example. Five ocean beaches are scheduled to open for razor-clam digging later this month if marine toxin tests show the clams are safe to eat. Under the current plan, Long Beach and Twin Harbors will be open Jan. 27-31, Copalis and Mockrocks will 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. Under WDFW rules, harvesters may take no more than 15 razor clams and must keep the first 15 taken, regardless of size or condition.

"With the rough weather we had during the last opener, digging dropped off significantly as people played it safe," said Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager. "On the plus side, there are likely enough clams remaining in the quota to offer more digs later."

**Blackmouth** fishing on Puget Sound is another option. Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet) recently opened to resident chinook fishing, and two additional areas - 11 (Tacoma-Vashon) and 12 (Hood Canal) - are scheduled to open Feb. 1. Marine Area 10 is also open for blackmouth through Jan. 31.

Anglers are required to release wild salmon in all four areas. Regulations are described in the *Fishing in Washington* rules pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>).

"Blackmouth fishing in Puget Sound has generally been slow, but that can turn around fairly quickly," said Steve Thiefeld, a WDFW fish biologist. "You can't catch them unless you go out there and find them."

But high-water conditions have made it tough - even dangerous - for anglers to find steelhead during the first two weeks of the new year. After some good fishing in December, most anglers are taking cover until the rain subsides and the rivers drop back into shape.

Scott Barbour, a WDFW fish biologist, said the Chehalis River has been awash in high water and debris. "Right now it's a safety issue," he said. "Fishing aside, I wouldn't recommend that anyone take a boat out there with all those logs and tree limbs floating down the river."

Fishing conditions have also been tough on the north coast rivers, said Randy Cooper, another WDFW fish biologist. "The rivers have started dropping, but that could change with another heavy rain."

On the bright side, Cooper said the high water has brought some good-sized wild steelhead into the rivers. "We're approaching the time when the focus shifts from hatchery steelhead to wild fish, and what I'm seeing bodes well for the weeks ahead," he 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.

"It's a waiting game," said Ron Warren, WDFW 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."

## Southwest Washington

Late-run winter steelhead are moving into area tributaries, thousands of trout have recently been planted in area lakes, sturgeon are beginning to stir, and openings have been scheduled for both smelt and razor clams. Fishing opportunities abound in the days ahead, but prospects for success vary, said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist.

"Weather is always a factor at this time of year, but there are also other things to consider in deciding what and where to fish," Hymer said. Here's his assessment of fisheries coming up in the next few weeks:

- **Winter steelhead:** The early run is winding down, but late-run winter steelhead are beginning to move toward the hatcheries on the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers where they were raised. The fishery for late-run fish tends to peak in late February and early March, although some late-run steelhead are already beginning to show up in the catch. As with the early run, high water can always push those rivers out of shape for fishing.
- **Smelt:** Projecting another poor return, WDFW is limiting the Cowlitz River sport fishery for smelt to four days this winter. That river will be open for smelt dipping Feb. 6, 13, 20 and 27, between 7 a.m. and 3 p.m. with a 10-pound daily limit. "This fishery is primarily intended to provide information on the size of this year's run," said Hymer, noting that NOAA Fisheries is currently considering listing West Coast smelt under the federal Endangered Species Act. Sport fishing for smelt on the mainstem Columbia River opened seven days per week, 24-hours day, starting Jan. 1, although anglers catch very few fish there.
- **White sturgeon:** Catch rates of legal-size sturgeon have picked up considerably in the Bonneville Pool in recent days, likely triggered by warming water temperatures. Sturgeon fishing in the lower river remains slow, but that could change if smelt return to the Cowlitz River in greater numbers than expected, Hymer said. Sturgeon regulations for all areas of the lower Columbia River listed in the Fishing in Washington rule pamphlet will remain in effect through February. New seasons will be set by fishery managers from Washington and Oregon at a public meeting scheduled Feb. 18 in Oregon City, Ore.
- **Razor clams:** Five ocean beaches are tentatively scheduled to open for razor-clam digging in late January. If marine toxin tests show the clams are safe to eat, Long Beach and Twin Harbors will be open Jan. 27-31, Copalis and Mockrocks will open Jan. 29-31 and Kalaloch beach Jan. 30-31. "Once WDFW gives final approval for the dig, the main concern is the surf," Hymer said. "People can dig a limit of razor clams in foul weather, but a big surf can make digging difficult and potentially dangerous." He strongly recommends that diggers check surf conditions before hitting the beach.
- **Trout:** While nothing is certain, anglers have a pretty good chance of catching trout - some averaging eight pounds - in lakes planted by WDFW during the winter months. During the second full week of January, hatchery crews planted 3,000 catchable-size fish in Kress Lake near Kalama, 1,500 in Battleground Lake and 1,500 in Klineline Pond. Several hundred broodstock rainbows, ranging from four to eight pounds apiece, were

also planted in Lake Sacajawea in Longview, Spearfish Lake near Dallesport, and Rowland Lake near Lyle.

As of mid-January, Hymer said he had not received any reports of spring chinook landed in the lower Columbia River, so they didn't make his list of fishing options. "But the season is currently open, and we expect to start hearing catch reports soon," he said.

Until mid-February, when fishery managers will meet to set the new season, anglers may retain hatchery-reared spring chinook under the rules printed in the Fishing in Washington rules pamphlet. "At this time of year, we consider spring chinook 'bonus fish' in the winter steelhead fishery," Hymer said.

### **Eastern Washington**

Fishing for **rainbow trout** and **kokanee** continues to be excellent at Lake Roosevelt, the reservoir on the Columbia River off Grand Coulee Dam. "During the winter, the rainbows usually move down into the lower reservoir," said WDFW District Fish Biologist Chris Donley. "They're following the movement of zooplankton downstream, so the Keller and Spring Canyon areas become the target, rather than Seven Bays and above."

Donley said kokanee or "silver trout" can be found near the surface of Lake Roosevelt in late January and into February. "Roosevelt is really the place to be for trout fishing now with these warm conditions," Donley said. "That's because ice on smaller trout waters is probably pretty rotten."

Marc Divens, WDFW warmwater fish biologist, said that without freezing nighttime temperatures, and daytime temperatures exceeding 40 degrees, many year-round open fishing waters that appear iced-over are probably unsafe to fish.

"Usually this is a good time to fish Eloika or Newman lakes for their **bass, perch, crappie**, and other fish," Divens said. "But I wouldn't recommend anyone venture out on the ice on those lakes, at least not until we return to more normal temperatures with freezing days and nights." For more on ice-fishing safety, see [http://wdfw.wa.gov/factsheets/ice\\_fishing.htm](http://wdfw.wa.gov/factsheets/ice_fishing.htm).

Snake River steelhead action has slowed, but tenacious anglers who find the fish pooled up near the mouths of tributaries may be successful.

### **Northcentral Washington**

Bob Jateff, WDFW district fish biologist, said upper Columbia River **steelheading** is best in the tributaries above Wells Dam. Anglers who are drifting the slower moving, deeper runs, where the fish tend to hold at this time of year, are probably doing best. Steelheaders must retain all adipose-fin-clipped hatchery steelhead, up to the limit of four per day. They must also immediately release all steelhead with an intact adipose fin without removing the fish entirely from the water.

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. Jateff said those fishing for whitefish in areas that are currently open for steelhead must use selective gear (single barbless lures and flies, no bait allowed).

The safety of ice fishing throughout the region is questionable with recent warm weather and rain, and anglers are advised to be very cautious. **Rainbow trout** are available at Rat Lake near Brewster, Sidley/Molson Lake near Oroville, Big and Little Green lakes near Omak, and Davis Lake near Winthrop. Yellow perch are available at Patterson Lake near Winthrop. For more on ice-

fishing safety, see [http://wdfw.wa.gov/factshts/ice\\_fishing.htm](http://wdfw.wa.gov/factshts/ice_fishing.htm) .

Winchester Wasteway (the portion within the Winchester Game Reserve) and Stratford/Brook Lake in Grant County opens Feb. 1 for fishing under standard statewide rules.

### **Southcentral Washington**

WDFW District Fish Biologist Paul Hoffarth said **steelhead** fishing in the Ringold area on the Columbia River near Tri-Cities should be slightly above normal through the rest of the season, which runs into mid-April.

"I think the pattern we saw in December will hold," Hoffarth said. "December's catch and harvest was higher than any of the past six years. Boat anglers averaged 5.8 hours per fish in December and bank anglers averaged roughly 10 hours of angling per steelhead."

**Whitefish** action on the Yakima River and other local streams continues to be good. "Some of the best whitefish areas besides the mainstem Yakima are the Naches, Tieton, Cle Elum, and Bumping rivers," said WDFW District Fish Biologist Eric Anderson in Yakima.

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. Concentrate fishing efforts in deep pools below riffles, Anderson said.

### **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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### **Random Links**

Oregon Dinner from the ODFW - Surf and Turf:

<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/docs/HolidayFlyerSurfTurf.pdf>

**GOOD LUCK!**