

The Guide's Forecast - volume 12 issue number 6

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 5th – February 11th, 2010**

Oregon Fisheries Update:



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Willamette Valley/Metro- The areas first spring chinook have been tallied with 2 rumored at Oregon City and one downstream of the mouth of the Willamette on the Columbia River. It's a good sign to see any numbers at all this time of year- it bodes well for a productive season.

Fishery managers have modeled 5 different scenarios for the 2010 Columbia River salmon season. "Option A" doesn't allow for fishing upstream of I-5 with the season predicted to go through April 25th. "Option C" allows for a 7-day per week season upstream to I-205 only lasting until April 12th. Washington and Oregon will come together to decide the season at a February 18th meeting in Vancouver.

Flow in the lower Willamette is moderating with the water temperature in the middle to high 40's. The winter steelhead count at the Falls is approaching the 2,000 mark. A few steelhead are being taken by plunkers and optimistic trollers are seeking early spring chinook. It is not uncommon for early springers to be taken at Sellwood Bridge this time of year. Sturgeon fishing is fair.

McKenzie fly fishers are enjoying good results with caddis nymphs with the eponymous hatch just around the corner.

Steelheading on the Clackamas has been fair but better than recent seasons. Eagle Creek has slowed but a few are being hooked on small jigs.

The Sandy has been slow over the past week but the season is far from over here and improvement is expected. The river was clear early this week.

Scheduled for trout planting are E. E. Wilson Pond, Junction City Pond. Walling Pond, and Walter

Wirth Lake.

Northwest – Steelheaders working north coast streams have had good conditions over the past week. Although fresh fish are available on most systems, action has dropped off from the previous week's success rates. Lower, clearer water has that effect.

The Wilson remains one of the best options with fresh broodstock steelhead, a rare Alsea stock fish and wild fish all available. Aaron Fitzhenry came across a 15-pound bright winter chinook on Monday, releasing it unharmed. Chinook season won't reopen in Tillamook streams again until April 1st.

The Nestucca is a good second option but anglers should target the lower stretches of these rivers where they are more likely to intercept fresh fish. Returning adults migrate upstream slower in lower flows. River levels are expected to cooperate through the weekend.

Action has slowed on the smaller north coast streams where spawned out early returning steelhead make up the bulk of the catch. Wild fish will return to these systems later but these spawned out kelts make for good sport, just poor tablefare.

Favorable sturgeon tides will return this weekend for Tillamook Bay sturgeon anglers. The action isn't great but persistent anglers can take keepers home. Crabbing remains challenging in most estuaries but has improved over recent weeks.

Razor clam digging has re-opened north of the mouth of the Necanicum River. Diggers don't need minus tides for a productive harvest but a tame surf and near zero low tide are favorable. A weekend dig is feasible.

Southwest – Anglers launching off the California coast are taking large numbers of Humboldt squid. They should be available off the Oregon coast soon, but opinion is mixed as to whether large numbers of these voracious cephalopods is a good thing or not.

Steelheading is slow on the Umpqua with return numbers down this season. Sturgeon fishing is poor. Winchester Bay has been poor for crabbing due to low salinity levels.

Tenmile Creek has continued to produce a few steelhead with water conditions remaining good.

Coos River steelheaders have been making decent catches over the past week, The Millicoma has also been productive.

The South Fork Coquille has been productive for steelhead recently with several anglers reporting multiple hookups.

Steelheading on the lower Rogue has slowed. The Grants Pass stretch has been fair for winter steelhead and the most reliable stretch to fish. Water in the upper river is too skinny to be productive.

The Elk and Sixes have produced some winter steelhead as there has been little change in river conditions. The upper Elk has been most productive.

A rough ocean has discouraged fresh steelhead from entering the Chetco. As a result, fishing has only been fair. Steelhead are well distributed throughout the system at this time. Offshore forecasts have been challenging for weeks and this coming weekend is no different with wind

and wave heights combining to be in the double digits throughout the weekend.

Cooper Creek Reservoir is scheduled to be planted with hatchery trout.

Eastern – Steelheading is slow on the Deschutes with many of the summers spawning now. Fishing for reddsides is fair. The Deschutes opens to chinook on April 1st.

A few bull and brown trout are being hooked on the Metolius which is experiencing very light pressure.

The Crooked River has offered some of the most consistent winter trout fishing of any central/eastern stream.

SW Washington – February 6th from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. marks the first day that sport dippers can attempt to catch a 10-pound limit of smelt on the Cowlitz River. Smelt watchers report fish showing prior to the weekend, but have since disappeared.

Steelheaders continue to take some fish in district streams with the Lewis a fair prospect. The hatchery run should dwindle with a fair wild run on its heels.

The Cowlitz and Kalama Rivers are a distant second but a few fish should be available. Most of the districts anglers will wait for the spring chinook to arrive. The Cowlitz and Lewis are expected to have banner returns.

Columbia River Fishing Report – With the season's first spring chinook reported on the Columbia River downstream of the mouth of the Willamette, a flurry of effort is likely to follow. High expectations are among us and people are anxious to begin to cash in on what is predicted to be a record return of spring chinook this year. Trolled herring were said to be responsible for the catches this week.

Bigger news is just how the departments will shape a season for this predicted record run. You would think that with huge numbers forecast, we'd be back to the 2-fish bag limits and fishing 7 days per week. Well, you won't be surprised to find out that it just isn't going to be that way. Below are listed the 5 different options that will be presented to the Columbia River Recreational Sportfishing Advisory Group, set to meet next Tuesday. Although other options may be brought forth, this is the general framework that the group will use to help set the seasons:

Spring Chinook Sport Fishing Options for 2010
 Prepared for Columbia River Recreational Advisor Group Meeting
 February 9, 2010

Option A - Below I-5 Only												
	Season	Days			Trips			Handle			Uprivers	Total
		March	April	Total	March	April	Total	March	April	Total	Catch Bal	Kept
Below I-5	1/1-4/25	31	25	56	54,211	92,123	146,334	8,977	15,234	24,211		19,569
Above I-5	none											-
Totals		31	25	56	54,211	92,123	146,334	8,977	15,234	24,211	16,880	19,569
Below assumptions	2009 effort scaled to 7d/wk, 2001 CPUE scaled to 1 fish bag											
Above assumptions	NA											
Option B - Below I-5 plus Weekends Above												
	Season	Days			Trips			Handle			Uprivers	Total
		March	April	Total	March	April	Total	March	April	Total	Catch Bal	Kept
Below I-5	1/1-4/7	31	7	38	54,211	26,023	80,233	8,977	7,485	16,462		13,295
Above I-5	Fr-Sa 3/19-4/10	4	4	8	9,045	16,239	25,284	1,884	4,710	6,593		5,406
Totals		31	9	40	63,256	42,261	105,517	10,861	12,194	23,056	16,880	18,702
Below assumptions	2009 effort scaled to 7d/wk, 2001 CPUE scaled to 1 fish bag											
Above assumptions	2009 effort scaled to 2d/wk in April, 2008 CPUE											
Option C - I-205												
	Season	Days			Trips			Handle			Uprivers	Total
		March	April	Total	March	April	Total	March	April	Total	Catch Bal	Kept
Below I-5	1/1-4/12 7d	31	12	43	54,211	47,178	101,388	8,977	11,133	20,110		16,248
Above I-5	1/1-4/12 to 205 7d	31	12	43	11,944	13,741	25,686	1,402	2,676	4,077		3,343
Totals		31	12	43	66,155	60,919	127,074	10,379	13,808	24,187	17,373	19,592
Below assumptions	2009 effort scaled to 7d/wk, 2001 CPUE scaled to 1 fish bag											
Above assumptions	2009 I-205 effort, avg section 3 CPUE											
Option D - 45 Days starting March 1												
	Season	Days			Trips			Handle			Uprivers	Total
		March	April	Total	March	April	Total	March	April	Total	Catch Bal	Kept
Below I-5	1/1-4/14 7d	31	14	45	54,211	54,424	108,635	8,977	11,760	20,737		16,756
Above I-5	4/1-4/3	-	3	3	-	14,112	14,112	-	3,417	3,417		2,802
Totals		31	14	45	54,211	68,536	122,747	8,977	15,176	24,154	17,266	19,558
Below assumptions	2009 effort scaled to 7d/wk, 2001 CPUE scaled to 1 fish bag											
Above assumptions	2009 effort, 2008 CPUE											
Option E - Days per Week												
	Season	Days			Trips			Handle			Uprivers	Total
		March	April	Total	March	April	Total	March	April	Total	Catch Bal	Kept
Below I-5	1/1-3/21 7d, then We-Sa to 4/7	26	4	30	49,281	17,639	66,920	6,724	5,078	11,802		9,531
Above I-5	3/1-3/21 7d, then We-Sa to 4/7	26	4	30	26,103	13,542	39,644	7,709	3,666	11,375		9,327
Totals		26	4	30	75,383	31,181	106,564	14,433	8,744	23,177	17,660	18,858
Below assumptions	2009 Effort, 2001 CPUE scaled to 1 fish bag											
Above assumptions	2009 Effort, 2001 CPUE scaled to 1 fish bag											

*All Options are based on a 40% run size buffer including set aside for fisheries above Bonneville Dam.

*All Options assume a 1 fish daily limit.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
February 2, 2010

Although this graph may be a bit difficult to decipher, what's obvious is that if we don't have any directed fisheries above I-5, then we can have opportunity downstream well into April. With each day that we fish upstream of I-5, we'll compromise the length of the season and achieve our impacts to Snake River chinook or catch sharing targets even before the bulk of the run arrives. It's a catch-22 but going with the theme we know all too well, there isn't much we can do about it.

You may wish to attend your states respective commission meetings coming up this month (February 5th in Salem and I don't know when in Washington (no dates listed on their website). Both states will come together at the "compact" where the final decision will be made on February 18th.

Switching to sturgeon, the mainstem bite remains subdued. Despite poor catch rates, there is still a fair amount of effort taking place near St. Helens with anglers anticipating healthy numbers present in anticipation of a smelt run into the Cowlitz River. Well, this isn't the good 'ol days and it hasn't been for quite some years now so don't expect this fishery to materialize.

The fishery above Bonneville Dam is still producing some keepers however. Fresh smelt would certainly produce good catches but is hard to find. Washington creel checkers noted a keeper for every 9 rods for boat anglers while bank anglers didn't tally any keepers.

Steelhead are also still available in The Dalles Pool as sampler reported 1.5 fish for every boat angler and 1 fish for every bank anglers last week. Samplers also reported that 70% of the fish were wild and had to be released. From January 1st through February 2nd, 860 steelhead (mostly hatchery fish) have been counted at Bonneville Dam.

The Guide's Forecast – Despite the hype, spring chinook will remain elusive in the mainstem Columbia until numbers build later into March. None-the-less, if the weather is good, temperatures remain mild and anglers target areas downstream of the mouth of the Willamette, you're more likely to catch one than if you are watching TV in your front room. How's that for sound advice?

But seriously, it's likely water temperatures are warmer than usual for this time of year and a strong Columbia run coupled with a fair Willamette run could produce results for a lucky few. Troll herring this time of year as fish will be keyed in on bait being so fresh from the ocean. Can anyone get a smelt to plug-cut?

Your best chances are actually going to take place downstream of St. Helens just to give you the most access to Willamette bound springers that may be taking a right turn into the Multnomah Channel. Even if you are on anchor, herring will be the best choice as long as you can get it to spin in the current.

Sturgeon anglers should focus their efforts above Bonneville Dam. Fresh smelt or shrimp will offer the best chance at a keeper but squid may work as well. Action has slowed from the previous week but any warming trend should activate sturgeon once again.

To date, just over 2,000 pounds of smelt have been commercially landed. Catches dropped off

this week however and the pilot run of smelt found in the Cowlitz last Friday have seemingly disappeared. The first sport dipping season starts on Saturday from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Willamette Falls water temperature is on the upper 40s as the flow moderates. Winter steelhead passage has been in the double digits on all but one day during the past two weeks. Biologists claim it's an above-average run this year but anglers would do well to remember that, with the exception of the possibility that a very few of these fish are early summers, the steelhead which pass over the Falls at this time of year are of non-hatchery origin. Sturgeon results have been spotty. Rumors abound regarding springers landed from boat and/or bank but no confirmed catches have yet occurred on the Willamette. Expect to see effort by trollers and plunkers, however. The run forecast for 2010 is 62,700, up from the actual Fall count of 28,514 in 2009 and a much brighter return than the disappointing 2008 total of 14,672. Another hearing is scheduled for February 18th.

An ODFW Commission meeting starting at 8 AM on February 5th at the ODFW Headquarters at 3406 Cherry Ave. NE in Salem will decide sturgeon fishing issues on the lower Willamette. Expect a closure from Willamette Falls to the I-503 Bridge from May through July starting this year to protect spawning in this stretch. There will also be a discussion of the spring Chinook fishery. Stay tuned.

The McKenzie has been in excellent shape and is producing decent catches of reddsides. The river around Eugene has been particularly productive with results on the lower river slower.

Drift boaters should keep an eye out for downed trees on the Shelburn to Green's Bridge drift and should expect to do some dragging in those spots.

The 37th annual Eugene Boat & Sportsmen's Show runs February 5th through 7th at the Lane County Convention Center and Fairgrounds. Here's the schedule of events and speakers:

Friday, Feb. 5.

- 1 p.m.: Coastal Crabbing Techniques and Hot Spots, Andy Martin
- 2 p.m.: Bank Fishing for Salmon and Steelhead, Scott Haugen
- 3 p.m.: Coos Bay Salmon, Pete McMenamain
- 4 p.m.: Fall Salmon Tactics, Gary Lewis.
- 5 p.m.: Rattling Blacktails, Scott Haugen
- 6 p.m.: Advanced Tuna Tactics, Jim Pex

Saturday, Feb. 6

- 10 a.m.: Crabbing Techniques, Andy Martin
- 11 a.m.: Diamond Lake Trout, Rick Rockholt
- Noon: Live Bait Tuna Fishing, Tron Bull
- 1 p.m.: Rattling Blacktails, Scott Haugen
- 2 p.m.: Willamette Sturgeon, Pete McMenamain
- 3 p.m.: Do It Yourself Alaska, Randy Wells
- 4 p.m.: Spring Salmon Techniques, Buzz Ramsey
- 5 p.m.: Oregon Trophy Salmon, Andy Martin
- 6 p.m.: New Zealand Hunting, Rodney Smith

Sunday, Feb. 7

- 10 a.m.: Salmon Fly Fishing, Gary Lewis
- 11 a.m.: Willamette Sturgeon, Gary Lewis

Noon: How To Cure Salmon Eggs, Andy Martin
1 p.m.: Rattling Blacktails, Scott Haugen
2 p.m.: Advanced Tuna Tactics, Jim Pex

The Guide's Forecast – Expect slow to fair but steady action on the lower Willamette for sturgeon. The majority of catches will be shakers but those who are persistent and stay mobile to find larger-sized biters will prevail. While it's never hot fishing, plunkers on Meldrum Bar may expect periodic action with winter steelhead bound upstream for the Clackamas. The higher the water level, the closer these fish will pass to the bank. Trout fishing on the Middle Fork will provide steady action on nymphs but fly-rodders should keep an eye out for Blue-Winged Olive hatches. Often, these brief flurries aren't of interest to the fish, but when they start to key it will make for entertaining dry action.

Fish nymphs on the McKenzie and keep an eye out for Blue-Winged Olive hatches. Soon, March Browns and stoneflies will be on the hatch.

Try the North Santiam if catch-and-release for native steelhead is your thing. That said, while the river isn't jammed with fish, there are some double-digit specimens in there for your personal Kodak moment. Trout fishing is expected to be decent at Minto Park.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – The slide between Barton and Carver is not presenting any navigational issues on the Clackamas River. Water conditions are good and improving.

While the Sandy had been slow over the past weekend and earlier this week, conditions are improving. Plunkers near the mouth have hooked up with some steelhead recently.

The Guide's Forecast – The Clack has been producing steelhead this week and with a break in the precipitation, is a good bet for winters over the weekend. Eagle Creek was in great shape Wednesday this week and is producing steelhead. Try small jigs here and get away from the crowds for the best chance of a hookup. It's a hike, but can be worth it.

Steelheading has improved this week on the Sandy Try around the old Marmot Dam site, drifting small baits of cured eggs with a bit of year or a puffball.

North Coast Fishing Report – Steelheaders have had great conditions on most north coast streams lately but success rates have fallen as is often the case this time of year. February can be an excellent month for steelhead catches but there always seems to be a consistent lull in activity between early run and late run fish. There has been great catches during Sportsmen Show week in the past however and given the early returns of fish available this season, we'll certainly see action perk back up again this month sometime.

Most recently, **pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** floated the Nestucca from First Bridge to Three Rivers only getting one bite. On Monday, Chris floated the Wilson River getting 1 dark wild fish, one bright Alsea stock hatchery fish and a winter chinook of about 15 pounds. All that action took place downstream of Mills Bridge. Reports from other guides in the area parallel what Chris has reported. You have to work harder for your fish in these lower, clearer rivers until we get some more rain and more fish in the system. It's hard to believe the rivers are already too low for good success rates but they are. River forecasts call for better conditions ahead.

The Trask and Nehalem are also option this time of year with the Nehalem being one of the better bets when other systems get too low to fish well. Boaters did score some results over the weekend, even a few hatchery strays from the North Fork which boasted a very good return this year. Bank anglers have good access to much of the lower reaches of the mainstem Nehalem but a washed out bridge upstream from Mohler about 14 miles does limit access above that. Boaters typically put in at the Beaver slide and drift down to Mohler Sand and Gravel during the week but are forced to fish to Roy Creek on the weekends.

Smaller tributaries remain too low and clear for good action and spawned out fish make up the bulk of the catches here anyway. Those systems include the Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem, Kilchis, Three Rivers and the Highway 30 streams. Small runs of wild fish will return later into February.

Tides have not been favorable for sturgeon anglers in Tillamook Bay but effort was fairly high on the last one. Good tides return this weekend so check out the next section if you're planning a trip.

Crabbing is picking up but until sport crabbers can get offshore to harvest in the big water, catches will remain somewhat unimpressive. The weekend forecast calls for:

FRI

S WIND 20 TO 25 KT WITH GUSTS TO 30 KT. WIND WAVES 6 FT.
SW SWELL 11 FT. CHANCE OF SHOWERS.

FRI NIGHT

SE WIND 20 TO 25 KT...EASING TO 15 TO 20 KT AFTER
MIDNIGHT. WIND WAVES 5 FT. SW SWELL 12 FT. CHANCE OF SHOWERS.

SAT

S WIND 20 TO 25 KT...EASING TO 10 TO 15 KT IN THE
AFTERNOON. WIND WAVES 5 FT. SW SWELL 11 FT. SHOWERS LIKELY.

SAT NIGHT

SW WIND 5 TO 10 KT. GUSTS UP TO 15 KT IN THE
EVENING. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 12 FT. CHANCE OF SHOWERS.

SUN

S WIND 10 TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 13 FT.

MON

SE WIND 20 TO 25 KT. WIND WAVES 4 FT. W SWELL 8 FT.

Not fun in other words.....

The Guide's Forecast – It's still steelhead season but we're transitioning to late season with wild and broodstock fish the likely targets in the weeks ahead. If quality fish is still your quarry, keep with the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers. Both currently have fish available but heavy pressure in the last weeks and low water has biters hard to come by. Another bump in river levels is expected prior to the weekend and should allow for another spurt of fish to enter into these systems. The early run fish are on their way back to the sea and you're quite likely to catch some of these as they become more aggressive on the downstream run.

Most of the sections of the Wilson and Nestucca should be floatable if we get the rise in rivers predicted by the weather models. Spoons and spinners become a good tool for these later returning fish.

The Nehalem should also offer some opportunities unless the rain forecast is higher further north than the Tillamook area. It's likely that this system will remain fishable through the weekend but keep in mind, it's mostly a wild fish fishery with a few hatchery strays from the North Fork available for harvest.

Sturgeon anglers can look to the weekend for opportunities in the west and middle channels of Tillamook Bay. Fresh shrimp should provide some opportunity as the tide nears low slack and the first part of incoming tide.

Crabbing should also be improving in the coming weeks with a slowdown in the winter weather cycle that brings so much fresh water.

Clamming tides improve after the weekend but rough surf will likely keep them from feeding near the surface. Be very cautious and don't overlook the dry sand as previous years sets have seeded high on the beach.

Central & South Coast Reports – A morning outgoing tide with a six to seven foot swing will occur this weekend despite the fact there are no AM minus tides.

While one might expect numbers of keeper Dungeness to be depleted by this time of year, there's no indication in catches that this has occurred. Recreational as well as commercial efforts are returning to port with very good hauls of large keepers whenever the ocean allows the activity.

Bottom-fishers are taking seven-fish limits or near limits of rockfish offshore as well as enjoying success with large ling cod which move close to shore to spawn at this time of year. Effort has been light, however, as high wind and wave have disallowed boats crossing the bar.

The water level of the Siletz is predicted to rise only slightly on Saturday and to be on the drop in the coming week. Fishing has been slow to fair here for steelhead.

The Alsea River is forecast to crest on Friday afternoon this week and will be on the drop through the weekend. Prospects are fair to good although this one can get inundated by crowds.

Fishing has been slow on the Siuslaw but that hasn't prevented very heavy boat and bank pressure.

Steelheading on the Umpqua has been best at the forks but both the North and South Umpqua are fishing well. The mainstem, however, has yet to pick up, but may show some improvement following the freshet this weekend. Most of the steelhead taken on the mainstem have been wild which must be released here.

Tenmile Creek has been quite productive for steelhead as it is effected to a lesser degree by rainfall on the south coast.

Coquille steelheaders are making good catches with side-drifting most effective. This river has remained productive for most of the winter steelhead season.

The Coos was clear mid-week, requiring a switch to lighter leaders. It paid off for a few anglers, however, who hooked up and jogs and small, drifted eggs.

Although low and clear at mid-week, the west fork Millicoma provided hookups to steelheaders drifting small baits or jigs.

Side-drifting good quality cured eggs will produce steelhead in the Agness stretch of the lower Rogue. Plunking along gravel bars on the inside bends of the river will also take steelhead until the water drops and runs clear. Drift boats launching from Grants Pass have been doing well for winter steelhead. Side-drifting has been the most productive method for boating fish. The middle Rogue will experience a bump in water level and flow Saturday but is forecast to drop for several days thereafter. Steelheading following the next freshet is expected to live up too legendary Rogue standards in this stretch. One wild steelhead per day may be retained below Gold Ray Dam. The Applegate, where most middle Rogue steelies are destined, is producing a few steelhead to hardware anglers. Water conditions have remained low and clear on the upper Rogue doe to low releases. Rain late this week will allow for additional fish passage over the dam, but fishing is expected to be only fair. .

On the rise mid-week, the Elk is expected to be productive once it crests and begins to drop. Water conditions on the Sixes is reported as high and off-color.

Rain on the southwest coast during the first three days of February drove the flow at the Chetco over 7,200 cfs. It was about 6,400 cfs on the morning of Thursday, February 4th, but should fish well for plunkers on Friday. Drift boaters will enjoy action with fresh, bright winter steelhead by the weekend and it should continue to fish well through much of the week. Early morning forays for rockfish and ling cod may be possible this weekend but those who try should be prepared to duck back into port before the ocean kicks up. Evidence that ling cod have started to spawn early this year has been sighted by divers off Port Orford.

Finally, words of wisdom from Mark Freeman in the Medford Mail-Tribude:

"Remember, if you release a hatchery steelhead, there are four things that can happen and they're all bad.

"First, it could end up an excess fish at Cole Rivers Hatchery and clog hatchery ponds until it is killed. Or, it could stray onto wild steelhead spawning grounds and get its groove on with a wild steelhead. And worst, some other dork will catch it and kill it for his smoker ... and probably ruin it."

OK ... I only count three. But they're true, nonetheless.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Deschutes fly rodders are having fun with redsides this week. Even though the occasional Blue-Winged Olive hatch has gone largely ignored by resident trout, nymphs are drawing some interest and the fishing becomes more interesting still when the occasional steelhead grabs an angler's offering/ Try it around Maupin.

Streamers are producing good catches of bull and brown trout for fly anglers on the Metolius.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report *February 4th – February 18th, 2009*

North Puget Sound

Most marine areas in Puget Sound are open for salmon, but blackmouth fishing has yet to heat up this year. "I've heard reports of anglers reeling in a salmon here and a salmon there, but overall fishing for blackmouth has been slow," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist.

Marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands), 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) and 9 (Admiralty Inlet) are open for **blackmouth** - resident chinook. Anglers fishing those marine areas have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook.

Thiesfeld reminds anglers that Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) is closed to salmon fishing.

In the rivers, **steelhead** fishing continues to be slow as well. Some hatchery steelhead have been reeled in recently at Reiter Ponds on the Skykomish River and at Tokul Creek. There also have been reports of some wild steelhead in the Pilchuck and Wallace rivers, said Bob Leland, WDFW's steelhead program manager.

Leland reminds anglers that the Green River is closed to fishing from the 1st Ave. South Bridge upstream to the Tacoma Headworks Dam, and the Skagit and Sauk rivers close Feb. 16. With low steelhead returns expected back to those rivers, the emergency closures are necessary to protect wild steelhead, Leland said.

Meanwhile, a portion of the North Fork Nooksack River re-opened Feb. 2.

Details on all of these emergency rules can be found on WDFW's fishing regulation website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

Freshwater anglers looking for a change of pace might want to try fishing for **cutthroat** trout in Lake Washington. The daily limit is five trout, but rainbow trout measuring more than 20 inches and steelhead must be released.

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

Several new areas of Puget Sound are opening to blackmouth fishing, more wild steelhead are moving into coastal rivers and another razor clam dig is tentatively scheduled for later this month.

"**Blackmouth** fishing has been pretty slow around the Sound, but these new areas could be a different story," said Steve Thiesfeld, a WDFW fish biologist. He was talking about marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon) and 12 (Hood Canal), both of which opened to fishing for resident chinook salmon Feb. 1.

Starting Feb. 13, anglers will also be able to fish for blackmouth in marine areas 5 and 6 on the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

There is a daily limit of one chinook, measuring at least 22 inches, in all of those areas, although anglers fishing for blackmouth in Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet) can keep two fish per day. Marine Area 10 (Seattle-Bremerton) closed for blackmouth fishing Jan. 31.

Rather fish for **steelhead** ? This is the time of year when wild steelhead begin moving into coastal rivers in large numbers and - as of Feb. 1 - most of those rivers were in good shape for fishing, said Randy Cooper, another WDFW fish biologist.

"Fishing has been pretty good on the lower Hoh River, although the Sol Duc has been drawing the largest number of anglers," Cooper said. "Hatchery steelhead are clearly winding down, but the fishery for wild fish should keep improving through the month."

Anglers may retain one wild steelhead per license year on the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Hoko, Pysht, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc 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>.

WDFW has tentatively scheduled an evening **razor clam** dig at several ocean beaches in late February, pending the results of marine toxin tests. Shellfish managers are optimistic that elevated levels of paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) - which disqualified Long Beach from a dig in late January - will have dissipated by then.

"The toxin appears to have moved up the coast from Oregon, where it has cleared up enough to open beaches for razor clam digging," said Dan Ayes, WDFW coastal shellfish coordinator. "That's a good sign, but it's still important that diggers here wait for a final announcement on the opening before they hit the beach."

Approved digging days in February for specific beaches are shown below, along with evening low tides:

- Friday, Feb. 26, (4:49 p.m., -0.7) Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Saturday, Feb. 27, (5:34 p.m., -0.9) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Sunday, Feb. 28, (6:16 p.m., -0.8) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch

Harvesters may take no more than 15 razor clams and must keep the first 15 taken, regardless of size or condition. Each digger's limit must be kept in a separate container. All diggers must have an applicable 2009-10 fishing license to dig razor clams on any beach. A license is required for anyone age 15 or older.

Anglers can buy a combination license or an annual shellfish/seaweed license. Also available are razor-clam only licenses in annual or three-day only versions. Descriptions of the various licensing options are available on the WDFW website at <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov>. A list of state license vendors is available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/licensing/vendors/>.

Southwest Washington

The first **spring chinook salmon** of the year was caught Feb. 1 in the Columbia River off Davis Bar, west of Vancouver. The fish reportedly took a cutplug herring on a "downhill" troll with the current.

So began the 2010 spring chinook fishery, which could promise to be one of the best on record. With over 550,000 springers predicted to return to the Columbia River this year, anglers are already prospecting for early arrivals.

Columbia River anglers may retain hatchery-reared spring chinook under last year's rules until fishery managers from Washington and Oregon meet to establish new fishing seasons for the remainder of 2010. That meeting, which is open to the public, is set to begin at 10 a.m. Feb. 18 in Oregon City, 211 Tumwater Dr.

But since the bulk of the spring chinook run isn't expected to arrive until mid-March, anglers may want to consider some other options between now and then:

- **Winter steelhead:** Anglers fishing The Dalles Pool have been averaging one to 1.5 steelhead per rod, although 70 percent of the fish were wild and had to be released. Meanwhile, 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.

- **White sturgeon:** Catch rates of legal-size sturgeon have picked up above Bonneville Dam 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. 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.
- **Smelt:** Projecting another poor return, WDFW is limiting the Cowlitz River sport fishery for smelt to four days this winter. The Cowlitz 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. 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. Commercial boats on the Columbia landed about 2,700 pounds of smelt in January, but the catch dropped off during the last few days of fishing.
- **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. At Klineline Pond, 106 bank anglers caught and kept 123 catchable-size rainbows and 10 broodstock rainbows and released another 106 catchables and three brooders during the last week of January. During that week, Klineline was stocked with 4,500 catchables, Lake Sacajawea in Longview got 3,000 catchables and Battleground Lake got 1,500 catchable, plus 150 surplus hatchery steelhead averaging eight pounds each. In addition, a couple of lakes in the gorge (Rowland Lake near Lyle and Spearfish Lake near Dallesport) got a total of nearly 100 broodstock rainbows averaging four pounds each.
- **Razor clams:** WDFW has tentatively scheduled an evening razor clam dig at Long Beach and several ocean beaches in late February. If toxin tests show the clams are safe to eat, Long Beach will open for digging Feb. 27-28 after noon both days. (See the South Sound/Olympic Peninsula report for digs scheduled at other beaches.) Shellfish managers are optimistic that the elevated levels of paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) - which disqualified Long Beach from a dig in late January - will have dissipated by then. "But it's important that diggers wait for a final announcement on the opening before they hit the beach," said Dan Ayes, WDFW coastal shellfish coordinator.

During the last week in January, Tacoma Power recovered 44 winter-run steelhead, five coho adults and one jack during five days of operation at the Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery separator. Also that week, Tacoma Power employees released five winter-run steelhead into the Tilton River at Gust Backstrom Park in Morton and 11 winter-run steelhead and one coho jack into Lake Scanewa behind Cowlitz Falls Dam.

Eastern Washington

Ice on lakes throughout most of the region remains questionable since daytime temperatures have been above 40 degrees. Bill Baker, WDFW northeast district fish biologist, said the two winter-season **rainbow trout** lakes - Williams and Hatch lakes in Stevens County near Colville - remain iced over and a few folks are fishing through the ice. But ice fishing is definitely "at your own risk," he said. Baker encourages anglers to check WDFW's ice fishing safety information at http://wdfw.wa.gov/factshts/ice_fishing.htm.

Chris Donley, WDFW central district fish biologist, said there is open water at the northeast end of Sprague Lake, and anglers continue to catch the lake's big **rainbow trout**. Year-round Eloika Lake in north Spokane County has mostly open water for anglers.

Year-round Rock Lake in Whitman County rarely freezes up completely and has been providing good open-water fishing for rainbow and **brown trout**. "But the best bet right now is still Lake

Roosevelt," Donley said. "The rainbow trout and **kokanee** fishing there is very good, especially on the south end."

Steelhead fishing is also good in the Snake River drainage, especially on the tributaries like the Grand Ronde, Touchet, Tucannon, and Walla Walla. When water levels drop and the water clears, steelhead are harder to catch. But the fish are there, so persistent anglers can be successful. Anglers fishing the system can retain hatchery steelhead, but are required to release all wild fish. See the details in the rules pamphlet at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

Northcentral Washington

WDFW fish biologist Matt Polacek recommends year-round Banks Lake in Grant County for good fishing opportunities for **rainbow trout** and **kokanee**. "The main lake is ice free," he said, "but a small group of anglers are also catching **whitefish** and **perch** through the ice on the south end of Banks Lake."

Warmer weather has opened up previously iced-over sections of the Methow and Okanogan rivers, providing some good winter **steelhead** fishing. WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff of Twisp reports catch rates of one fish for every six to eight hours of fishing for the last two weeks.

"Jig and bobber setups for the gear fishermen, as well as smaller flies under float indicators for the fly fishermen, have all been producing catches of steelhead," Jateff said.

Jateff reminds steelheaders that both the Okanogan and the Methow are under selective gear rules and no bait is allowed. Retention of hatchery-origin fish with clipped adipose fins is mandatory, up to the daily limit of four. Anglers should make sure to gain permission before crossing private property alongside both of these rivers.

Meanwhile, ice fishing opportunities on Okanogan County lakes has been reduced due to warming temperatures. "The ice in some areas appears to be unstable," he said. "However, Patterson Lake in the Winthrop area is still producing catches of **yellow perch**, with a few rainbows mixed in. There is no minimum size and no daily limit on yellow perch in Patterson because we actually want anglers to remove as many as possible."

For information on ice-fishing safety, see http://wdfw.wa.gov/factshts/ice_fishing.htm.

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 notes those 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

Three out of 14 boat anglers fishing the John Day Pool on the Columbia River took home a legal-size sturgeon, according to a creel survey conducted the last week of January. "Legal-size sturgeon must measure between 43 and 54 inches in fork length," said Paul Hoffarth, a WDFW fish biologist. "New regulations went into effect last year changing how sturgeon are measured from total length to fork length. Fork length is defined as the distance from the tip of the nose to the middle of the fork in the tail, and that's the length you record on your catch record card, even if the card has the old 'total length' column."

Hoffarth notes the sturgeon fishery in this area will remain open until the quota is reached and closure announced.

"**Walleye** fishing in the Tri-Cities area and upstream in the Snake River is beginning to pick up," Hoffarth said. "Anglers are reporting fair catches below and above McNary Dam and in the Snake River below Ice Harbor and Little Goose dams."

Hoffarth says **steelhead** fishing in the district has been spotty this winter but should pick up in late February and early March.

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

Michael Teague: Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com

Random Links

Fact sheet from the ODFW/WDFW joint staff meeting:

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/OSCRP/CRM/reports/10_reports/2010springjsr.pdf

Great photography on the February online issue of Catch Magazine:

<http://www.catchmagazine.net/>

GOOD LUCK!