

The Guide's Forecast - volume 12 issue number 11

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **March 12th – March 18th, 2010**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Although still too early to worry about the predicted record run on the Columbia this year, action has slowed on the mainstem and a lack of "upriver" hatchery springers put off the commercial gillnet fleet for at least a week. Dam passage at Bonneville remains low despite warmer than usual water temperatures. Catches should improve in the next two weeks if the run is going to materialize. The cold front however may further hamper success rates this week.

Keeper sturgeon success finally picked up a bit near Troutdale and in the Portland to Longview stretch, mostly near the mouth of the Cowlitz River. Although the cold weather is likely to slow catches, spring-time temperatures should improve the bite later this month.

Lower Willamette temperatures are in the mid-50s. Seven springers had been counted at the Falls along with nearly 3,500 steelhead. Springer fishing has slowed in the lower Willamette, but some quality 5-year old fish are still being caught near Sellwood Bridge. Blue-dyed trolled herring remains a favorite bait. Sturgeon fishing is fair from the Portland Harbor to Milwaukie.

As March Browns begin to hatch in decent numbers on the lower McKenzie, fly anglers are enjoying results with larger trout.

Catch-and-release fishing for wild winter steelhead has been decent below Foster Dam on the South Santiam.

Clackamas steelheading has been slow with the McIver stretch giving up a few fish. Rain will bring fresh fish into the system including early summer steelhead.

Bait is taking the occasional Sandy River steelhead with native fish numbers on the rise. The downed tree has been removed below Oxbow near Dabney.

Scheduled for trout planting are Alton Baker Canal, Cottage Grove Reservoir, Creswell Pond and Waverly Lake.

Northwest – Effort and catch has been sparse for north coast steelheaders. There have been fish available however to those anglers employing low water techniques. John Robinson of Portland landed a 12-pound wild buck using a K-11 Kwikfish on the lower Wilson Saturday.

The Wilson, Nestucca and Trask Rivers have been producing the best but rain is desperately needed to stimulate the bite. Flows are expected to increase by the weekend but if they go too high, only smaller streams will be viable until early next week.

The Kilchis, upper Trask, Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem may be the best options until higher flows subside. These systems will be primarily catch and release this late in the season.

Sturgeon effort was up over the sunny weekend but most anglers struggled to find any keepers. Crabbers were also out in force but keeper Dungeness were also hard to come by.

Ocean recreation won't be an option this weekend as seas are forecast to remain big.

Cape Mears Lake, Coffenbury Lake, Hebo Lake, Lost Lake (Clatsop County), Lytle Lake, Spring Lake, Town Lake and Vernonia Lake are scheduled to receive hatchery trout.

Southwest – Following the first confirmed spring chinook landing on the Umpqua last week, a dropping river hindered further salmon catches but steelheading has held up although most are wild here. Boaters are urged to use caution drifting the North Umpqua. Offshore bottom fishing has been excellent out of Reedsport when the ocean has cooperated with boaters.

Steelheading is fair at Tenmile Creek where pressure remains high.

Steelheading on the Coos had been fair but the number of spawned-out downrunners is on the increase. Similar results have been reported from anglers fishing the Coos River, even as it fell into shape last week.

The spring chinook season is underway on the lower Rogue, at least that's where enthusiasm is focused since the first few have been landed. Grants Pass steelheaders have been experiencing a spotty bite.

Chetco steelheading has held up fair with the number of spawned-out fish increasing as the season starts to wind down here. Nearshore rockfishing has yielded limits when ocean conditions allowed boats to get out over the past weekend.

Scheduled for trout planting are Empire Lake, Garrison Lake, Ben Irving Reservoir, Cooper Cr. Reservoir, Galesville Reservoir and Plat I Reservoir.

Eastern – Fishing is fair for reddsides on the Deschutes with nymphs most effective. Many steelhead are spawning now so avoid the redds to protect future stocks.

Although the Willowa River has been running low, steelheading has been good for those taking the train and possibly better for hikers.

Hatrock Pond, Tatone Pond and McNary Ponds are scheduled to be stocked with trout.

SW Washington – Late winter steelhead are making an appearance on the Cowlitz right now. Summer fish are likely on their heels. Boat anglers have been having the best luck. An occasional spring chinook is appearing in the catches.

The Kalama should soon be in full swing for the late returning broodstock steelhead. Although only small numbers are forecast, it is a good late season option for anglers wishing to keep hatchery fish.

The Lewis has recently produced a few spring chinook but wild steelhead will be most present in the coming weeks. Flows remain low so stealth tactics are called for.

Several rivers close to fishing beginning March 15th. Check regulations before heading out.

Under emergency rule, smelt dipping is closed state wide now, including the Columbia River.

Columbia River Fishing Report – With a recent lull in activity, enthusiasm is still running high for anglers still fishing without a take-home fish yet. Much of the action is still taking place

downstream of the mouth of the Multnomah Channel where anglers are intercepting primarily fish destined for the Willamette River.

Although the action had slowed over the recent week, better reports came in on Wednesday. **Pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)** reported in with his limit by 1:00 p.m. this day. Brandon submitted this report from the Kalama area: 3 for 3 by 1 pm today by my house. Ya, it's time, no more messing around! 2 out of 3 were Willamette bound. There were about 6 other boats out and 3 other confirmed fish caught. Another good bite at warrior rock and Davis was good this morning I heard. 2 caught at marker "72" this morning as well." That's a pretty good catch rate given the number of boats participating.

Much of the effort is taking place in the Willamette right now as anglers can see the clear trend leaning towards Willamette bound fish. Sellwood Bridge has been consistent but we'll save that info for the Willamette report.

Anglers fishing above I-5 don't have much good to say. It's a favorite stretch amongst anglers and a small group of anglers have been working the area with little to show for it. Visual Stock Indexing (VSI) indicates the vast majority of retained chinook are Willamette bound and therefore, shouldn't inspire many folks to get too excited about mainstem prospects. The most recent proposed gillnet fishery was postponed due to a high percentage of wild steelhead present and low abundance of upriver bound spring chinook. Biologists will look at test fishing results each week to determine if the nets should go in.

Herring remain the bait of choice but some fish are being taken on plugs. As water temperatures warm, plugs will become more effective.

Sturgeon fishing has improved slightly from the previous weeks (but it wouldn't have taken much to note an "improvement"). Catches have picked up in the Troutdale area as well as near the mouth of the Cowlitz. It still requires lots of hours on the river to find a keeper and effort is mainly focused on the Willamette this time of year.

The reservoirs above Bonneville have recently slowed with the cold front moving on shore.

The Guide's Forecast – Holdover tides may keep schools of springers from migrating very fast upriver. The recent weather change could also slow migration. None-the-less, springer season is fast approaching peak time and anglers should be warming up their engines in hopes for a good mainstem return of adults. Upper Columbia bound spring chinook should begin to make a stronger showing this week, despite cooler water and air temperatures.

Another front is approaching just prior to the weekend and then water temperatures are forecasted to bump up a bit which should further stimulate the bite on the mainstem Columbia. If the predicted run is going to materialize, test fishing and sport creel reports should dramatically be on the improvement.

Until we see this improvement, it will behoove most anglers to continue to focus their effort downstream of St. Helens where they have the highest probability of intercepting Willamette bound fish. If you plan on using plugs, wait until the outgoing tide. Use herring on the incoming and outgoing tide if you wish to work off of the anchor.

Motivated sturgeon anglers should target Troutdale and the Longview areas. Smelt will produce the best results, especially if it's this years variety. As temperatures warm, so should the gorge bite, at least before the spring closure.

Be sure to use the archived reports if you are looking for regulations for this season. It was printed in the last 2 weeks worth of issues for your careful review.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Rain this week will stall spring Chinook efforts on the lower Willamette as the water rises and turns brown. Springers continue to cross the Falls occasionally but the count has yet to reach double digits although online numbers have not been updated since March 7th.

Water level at the McKenzie began to rise early on the morning of March 11th and will continue to do so for the next couple of days. Once it comes back into shape, trout fishing should be good.

Hagg Lake was fair to good over opening weekend. No wonder with as many trout (18,000 eight to 10 inchers) that were planted the week before. A few holdovers over 20 inches were also caught. For those launching a boat, be aware that the new docks at the 'C' ramp are not yet installed and it will be weeks before the installation takes place. Docks are available at the 'A' ramp but it is understandably crowded.

The Guide's Forecast – Sturgeon will be the target in the lower Willamette as it rises and turns muddy. Multnomah Channel, which put out some big sturgeon last week, will definitely be worth a try. While sturgeon fishing should pick up with high, muddy water, watch out for logs and deadheads which can take down a boat on anchor. Keep an eye upstream and a knife handy just in case. Spring Chinook fishing will resume and should show some improvement once the water starts to clear. The Middle Fork of the Willamette, low and clear over the past week, has fished well on nymphs for trout. Following rain this week, results will be good as March Brown and Blue Winged Olive hatches occur with regularity.

The best chance for a hookup with a wild winter steelhead on the North Santiam is in the lower river where, not coincidentally, a few early summer fish should be showing up.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Rain is likely to roil both the Sandy and Clackamas this weekend. Try starting early next week.

The Guide's Forecast - When the Clackamas drops and clears, anglers stand a fair shot at summer steelhead in the lower river while optimists will be thinking early springer. It could happen.

The Sandy River Chapter of Northwest Steelheaders will be holding their annual Frostbit Follies on the Sandy River Saturday, March 13th. Expect much heavier boat traffic between Oxbow and Dabney during this event.

North Coast Fishing Report – Steelheaders put up with low, clear water conditions all week and it deterred most avid anglers from making the trip down to the coast. This left vast expanses of the lower stretches pretty open for anglers to look for willing fish. Some days it worked, other days it didn't.

I put in three days of fishing this week with varied results. On Friday, I fished the Nestucca River from 1st Bridge to Three Rivers. We never drew a strike in all that distance and other guides didn't find success until they dropped below the Highway 101 Bridge. Although I didn't hear his final tally for the day, **pro guide Kent Anderson (503-550-6303)** did hook 3 fish and landed 1 downstream of the 101 Bridge. He primarily sidedrifted while I spent a good portion of my time pulling plugs.

On Saturday, I had John and Hunter Robinson on the trip they had won in last years Bounty on the Bay Tournament (<http://www.tbnep.org/events/bounty-on-the-bay>) for the springers John landed. Despite low water conditions, John hooked into an early steelhead on a K-11 Kwikfish, landing it in the Windy Bend Hole. Although I am the one holding the fish, John is the one that caught it:



Finally, I fished on Monday, floating from Mills Bridge to Sollie Smith and the water was even lower than it was over the weekend. There was only a skeleton crew out that day, which allowed for plenty of room for all of us to work our favorite stretches. We put in a valiant effort, coming up with 3 steelhead to the boat but only landing one of them, a nice hatchery hen. All fish took plugs and most of the fish we hooked were in deep, slow water. This oftentimes accounts for the lost fish as steelhead, like salmon, bite differently in slow flows. Unlike most traditional steelhead water, when you encounter fish in the deep, slow holes, you have to let the fish really grab a hold of your plug until it hooks itself. Fish will hold your plug and shake their heads side to side in the slow water, enabling you to pull the plug free of the fish's mouth since it's still facing upstream. In faster flows, they turn immediately after hitting and thus the better strike to hook ratio. This is simply not the case in slow water. You've got to wait out the bite.....

There were other fish taken by sidedrifters that morning. You definitely know where the fish hold in these lower flows. Deep water for most of the day with the exception of more shallow water for the first thing in the morning.

Most recently, fishing remains challenging with the new cold front coming on shore. Unsettled weather has fish turned off and dropping air and water temperatures are not helping things. The Nestucca has been fishing fair at best recently with only a few broodstock fish showing. The lower stretches (below 1st Bridge) are producing the best. These stretches are also the safest to float at these water levels.

The Trask and Nehalem Rivers are primarily wild fish fisheries right now with both producing some catches of fish. The upper stretches of the Nehalem have fish present and they are responding to wobblers and bobber and jig combinations.

Smaller streams are a poor option right now but that may change in the near future.

There was some fair effort for sturgeon last weekend on Tillamook Bay but catches remained light. The nice weather drew out crabbers and sturgeon chasers with both reporting poor results. After such a positive report for one crabber the weekend before, Tillamook Bay and ocean crabbers reported very poor results this weekend.

The Guide's Forecast – It's all about the weather right now. A nice freshet is "on deck" and if it comes to fruition, the fishing should be great after it hits. Models right now indicate the major rise will occur on Thursday and Friday and begin to subside on Saturday.

Smaller streams that harbor wild runs of steelhead may be strong options over the weekend but low level snows may hamper driving conditions. Bank anglers may also want to take advantage of the Dam Hole on the Trask River, which also fishes well in high water conditions.

The north coast favorites may not fish well until early next week with anglers anticipating big numbers on the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers when levels fall back to fishable levels. As the general rule specifies, fish higher up in the watershed the higher the river level is. You can fish these stretches earlier in the drop as well with Vanderzanden's to Mills Bridge on the Wilson fishing well by Sunday and 6th Bridge downstream on the Nestucca.

In these higher flows, fish will be well distributed throughout the river, and I'm not just talking about high to low. I'm talking about side to side. The higher the flow, the shallower the water these fish will be migrating in. Don't overlook the slower, shallower flats and the mantra "don't leave any pocket untouched" really carries weight in these types of conditions.

Bait will work best, as in shrimp or eggs but plugs can take a few fish too. Traditionally, plugs become more effective when fish settle into the deeper holes versus on the move, which should be the scenario on this upcoming rain freshet.

The two hatchery favorites, the Wilson and Nestucca, should fish great early next week and fair through mid-week. The Trask should stay fairly strong for much of next week. The Nehalem won't be an option again until the following weekend at the earliest.

Don't bother with the sturgeon or crabbing options. The tides are mild for crabbing but the fresh water influx will likely send what few crabs are available to sea. Furthermore, if you're interested in sturgeon, the fishing really isn't all that good enough to justify braving high winds and frigid temperatures over the weekend. Most of the keepers have exited the estuary.

Central & South Coast Reports – Bottom fishers out of Newport have been catching some dandy rockfish and a few ling cod out of Newport. Try near Seal Rock for best results if and when ocean conditions allow.

Rain late this week will raise the water level of the Alsea River five feet by Saturday but it's forecast to drop thereafter. It should fish by Monday or Tuesday and, while angler participation tends to be high here, fresh fish should be in the system.

The Siuslaw may be worth a try following storms this week. It's been so slow up 'til now that it's hard to predict.

While high wave action has prevented rock and jetty fishing in the Winchester Bay area recently, rockfish and ling cod catches have been good when conditions have allowed. Spring Chinook catches on the Umpqua recently has been a non-event, despite a couple of early landings during the previous week. Effort for sturgeon and striped bass has increased on the lower Umpqua but results for all the trying are few. On the main Umpqua, best steelheading results have come once again near the confluence but results have slowed over the past week. Upriver, the low, clear waters of the North and South Umpqua will change to blowout conditions into the weekend but should offer decent results starting early next week as they drop and clear, although most fish hooked here are wild which require release.

Crabbing in Coos Bay has been worthwhile, but freshets resulting from storms this week are likely to slow action until the salinity level returns to normal.

The Coquille has been producing fair to good catches and should be productive following rain this weekend but expect to find a higher number of steelhead which are obviously past their pull date.

Despite anglers having their hopes raised by several early catches on the Rogue, few are trying now and no springer landings have been reported over the past week. Steelheaders have faced low, cold water which has stalled catches on the lower river. Upriver, winter steelhead are scattered with best results coming from the Grants Pass stretch. Side drifters and plug-pullers have been taking a mix of hatchery and wild steelhead averaging eight pounds. The lower Rogue is predicted to be blown out this weekend but will be dropping through the coming week. This should create a brief window of opportunity on the upper Rogue where restricted outflow from Lost Creek Lake has kept flow extremely low for weeks. A flush will allow driftboats to try for winters which will move upstream with the increased water levels and flow.

Some of the better winter steelhead catches of the year surprised anglers on the Chetco in the first week of March, but that's about to change. Forecasts indicate the Chetco will be a torrent this coming weekend with flows hitting 10,000 cfs at Brookings on Saturday. It's well worth a try as the river drops next week following the good results early this month. Try bait which has been more effective than lures recently. Several large fish have been taken this season, the best of which was a 21-pounder landed late in January. While the Chetco has been producing worthwhile numbers of hatchery brats, winter fishing will be winding down with anglers encountering a greater number of dark and spawned out steelhead. The Chetco will close to fishing at the end of March.

Central and Eastern Oregon –Redside fishing has been good around Maupin on the lower Deschutes. March Brown hatches are producing some dry fly action while nymphing is effective all day long. Fishing is slow on the middle Deschutes and is unlikely to improve until the water level comes down in three of four weeks.

Lake Billy Chinook is producing fair catches of kokanee and a few bull trout.

Crooked River has been fishing well with Blue Winged Olives hatching some days and nymphing effective otherwise.

Green Peter has been producing fair to good catches of kokanee to trollers, some of which are taking fish without downriggers.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report March 3 through March 17

North Puget Sound

While there have been a few reports of anglers hauling in some nice blackmouth, salmon fishing in Puget Sound continues to be slow. "To have any success in northern Puget Sound, anglers really need to put in some time on the water," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist.

Anglers fishing 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) have a two-**salmon** daily limit, but must release wild chinook. Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) is closed to salmon fishing.

Thiesfeld said anglers might want to consider heading to the Strait of Juan de Fuca, where salmon fishing continues to be good.

Marine areas 5 and 6 have been the hotspots, he said. In Sekiu, 23 anglers in eight boats landed 17 blackmouth during the last day in February. Anglers have also been landing good numbers of fish at the Ediz Hook ramp in Port Angeles. "The season started strong in the Strait and it's stayed that way," said Thiesfeld. "It's definitely the best bet for blackmouth right now."

Meanwhile, numerous rivers are closed to **steelhead** fishing, including the Skagit, Sauk and Samish. The three rivers, usually open in March, closed early to protect wild steelhead that are listed as "threatened" under the federal Endangered Species Act. The closures include:

- The Skagit River, from the mouth upstream to Highway 536 (Memorial Hwy. Bridge) at Mount Vernon, through April 30; and from Highway 536 (Memorial Hwy. Bridge) at Mount Vernon upstream to the Gorge Powerhouse through May 31.
- The Sauk River, from the mouth upstream to the Whitechuck River through June 4.
- The Samish River, from the mouth to the Hickson Bridge, through June 4.

Before heading out, anglers should check the current regulations for all fisheries in WDFW's *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>).

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

Anglers are reeling in increasing numbers of steelhead from rivers on the Olympic Peninsula, while catch rates remain strong for blackmouth salmon in the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Lingcod fishing opens March 13 in ocean areas south of Cape Alava, and another razor clam dig is tentatively scheduled March 26-April 1 at various ocean beaches.

"This is a great time of year for fishing and other outdoor activities, but deciding where to go can be tough," said Steve Thiesfeld, a WDFW fish biologist. "With so many opportunities out there, anglers have to make some hard choices about how they want to spend their weekends."

Steelhead fishing on the northern peninsula is definitely a good bet right now, said David Low, another WDFW fish biologist. During a creel check on the Sol Duc River conducted during the last four days of February, 78 anglers reported catching 74 wild steelhead (and releasing 64 of them) along with 13 hatchery fish (and releasing four of those). On the Calawah River, 21 anglers reported catching 22 wild fish and releasing 19.

"This is peak season for wild steelhead on most of these rivers," Low said. "Anglers need to keep an eye on river conditions, but fishing is definitely good right now."

As in years past, anglers may retain only 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.

Low specifically reminds anglers that no wild steelhead may be retained on the Hoh River above the DNR Oxbow Campground. Rules for each river are described in the 2009-10 *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

Not surprisingly, angler turnout on the north coast has been strong - due to good catch rates and the fact that most rivers in the Puget Sound region are now closed to steelhead fishing. Low suggests the Skookumchuck River as a viable alternative for anglers looking to catch steelhead.

"This tributary to the Chehalis River is a great option for Puget Sound anglers looking for a fishing opportunity closer to home," said Low, noting that the Skookumchuck offers a strong run of late-returning hatchery fish. "Besides, it's pretty tough to find an empty seat in a guide boat on the Olympic Peninsula at this point in the season."

Rather catch a **blackmouth salmon** ? Several areas of Puget Sound are open to fishing for resident chinook, although marine areas 5 and 6 in the Strait of Juan de Fuca have clearly been the hotspots. In Sekiu, 23 anglers in eight boats landed 17 blackmouth during the last day in February. Anglers have also been landing good numbers of fish at the Ediz Hook ramp in Port Angeles.

"The season started strong in the Strait and it's stayed that way," said Thiesfeld, who also monitors the fishery elsewhere in Puget Sound. "It's definitely the best bet for blackmouth right now."

Another option is **lingcod** fishing, which gets under way March 13 in marine areas 1-3, south of Cape Alava. The minimum size for lingcod in these areas is 22 inches, with a daily limit of two fish per angler. In Marine Area 2 (Westport/Ocean Shores), recreational fishing for rockfish or lingcod is not allowed in waters deeper than 30 fathoms. Additional information about the lingcod fishery and other bottom fish is available on the WDFW Fishing Hotline (360) 902-2500 or online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

WDFW has also announced plans for a **razor-clam dig** tentatively scheduled March 26-April 1 at various ocean beaches. As always, final approval of the dig - the first of the spring season - will depend on results of marine toxin tests that show the clams are safe to eat.

Prospective diggers should note that the proposed dig would start on evening tides, then switch to morning tides for the final four days, said Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager. "The digs planned this month span the seasonal change, when the lowest tides shift from evening to morning hours," he said. "As in past months, razor-clam digging will be allowed after noon for the first three days of the opening, but will then switch to morning hours starting Monday, March 29."

Tentative days, tides and beach openings for this month's dig are:

- Friday, March 26, (4:29 p.m., +0.1) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Kalaloch
- Saturday, March 27, (5:19 p.m., -0.1) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Sunday, March 28, (6:04 p.m., 0.0) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Monday, March 29, (6:35 A.M., -0.1) Long Beach and Twin Harbors only
- Tuesday, March 30, (7:22 A.M., -0.7) Long Beach and Twin Harbors only
- Wednesday, March 31, (8:07 A.M., -1.0) Long Beach and Twin Harbors only
- Thursday, April 1, (8:52 A.M., -1.0) Long Beach and Twin Harbors only

Any 2009-10 annual shellfish/seaweed license or combination license is valid through March 31. However, a new license will be required for anyone age 15 or older to participate in a subsequent dig, tentatively scheduled April 16-18. Descriptions of the various licensing options are available on the WDFW website at <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov>.

Southwest Washington

Spring chinook fever continues to spread on the Columbia River, although the prized fish were hard to find during the last week of February. On the last Saturday of the month, 250 bank anglers and more than 300 boats were counted on the lower river - twice as many boats as the same time last year. But only three spring chinook, all from lower-river stocks, turned up in WDFW creel checks that day.

"We've had a pretty good showing of lower-river springers, but the upriver fish are off to another slow start," said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist. "So far, we have seen little evidence of the huge run of upriver fish expected this year, but that could change any day now."

According to the pre-season forecast, 559,900 **spring chinook salmon** - 470,000 of which are upriver bound - will return to the Columbia River and its tributaries this year, the largest run since 1938. While most of those fish aren't expected to arrive until later this month or early April, it's hardly surprising that anglers are eager to test the waters.

"This is shakedown time for the spring chinook fishery," Hymer said. "It's a good time to get your boat and gear in order and pick your spots before the crowds arrive. Catching fish is a bonus at this point in the season."

Under regulations established by fishery managers from Washington and Oregon, the fishery is now open at the following places and times:

- **Buoy 10 upstream to the I-5 Bridge:** Seven days per week from March 1 through April 18, except closed on the following Tuesdays: March 9, 16, 23 and 30.
- **I-5 Bridge upstream to I-205 Bridge:** Seven days per week from March 1-14, except closed on Tuesday March 9. Beginning March 18 through April 3, fishing will be limited to three days per week, Thursday through Saturday.
- **I-205 Bridge upstream to Bonneville Dam:** Bank angling only, seven days per week from March 1-14, except closed on Tuesday, March 9. Beginning March 18 through April 3, fishing will be limited to three days per week, Thursday through Saturday.
- **Bonneville Dam to McNary Dam:** Seven days per week from March 16 through May 31. Bank fishing only from Bonneville Dam upstream to the Tower Island power lines, six miles downstream from The Dalles Dam.

Anglers fishing below Bonneville Dam may retain one adult spring chinook salmon per day, while those fishing above the dam can keep two per day. As in previous years, only hatchery-reared fish marked with a clipped adipose fin and a healed scar may be retained. All wild spring chinook, identifiable by an intact adipose fin, must be released unharmed.

After watching spring chinook runs fall short of expectations for the past two years, fishery managers exercised caution in setting fishing seasons below Bonneville Dam. In calculating the number of fish available for harvest, they set aside a 40 percent "buffer" until the forecast can be verified by data collected once the run is under way.

On area tributaries, the first spring chinook of the season has returned to the Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery and some springers have been showing up in the catch on the Cowlitz, Kalama and Lewis rivers. In addition, anglers are catching **late-run hatchery steelhead**, particularly on the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers where the run is reaching its peak. As an added bonus, anglers fishing the lower Cowlitz River may now keep steelhead with a clipped right ventral fin.

In other waters, anglers should be aware that March 15 is the last day to fish for steelhead on Abernathy, Cedar (Clark Co.), Germany, Mill (Cowlitz Co.), Rock (Skamania Co.), Salmon (Clark Co.) creeks and on the Coweeman, Elochoman, Grays, East Fork Lewis and Washougal rivers.

Other rule changes coming up in the days ahead will affect several tributaries to the Bonneville Pool:

- **Drano Lake:** The anti-snag rule will no longer be in effect as of March 16. Starting April 16, fishing around the outlet of Drano Lake will be limited to bank fishing west of a line projected from the eastern-most pillar of the Highway 14 Bridge to a posted marker on the north shore.
- **Wind River:** Starting March 16, the anti-snag rule will no longer be in effect from the mouth upstream to the Burlington Northern Railroad Bridge.
- **Klickitat River:** Starting April 3, anglers fishing from the Fisher Hill Bridge downstream will be able to retain two hatchery chinook, hatchery steelhead or one of each as part of their daily limit. Fishing will be open four days per week - Mondays, Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays.

Meanwhile, anglers have been reeling in some **legal-sized white sturgeon** from The Dalles Pool, although none were found in creel checks conducted the last week of February. Sturgeon retention is closed in the Bonneville and John Day pools, and fishing has been slow below Bonneville Dam where most of the big fish have yet to awaken from their winter slumber.

In mid-February, fishery managers from Washington and Oregon adopted fishing seasons for white sturgeon that provide greater protection for declining numbers of sturgeon below Bonneville Dam. New harvest guidelines approved by both states will limit this year's catch below the dam to 24,000 fish, a 40 percent reduction from levels approved in 2009. Of that total, 19,200 will be available for harvest by the sport fishery and 4,800 by the commercial fishery.

To increase protection for spawning sturgeon, fishery managers also agreed to expand the existing six-mile sanctuary area below the dam, where sturgeon fishing is prohibited in late spring and early summer. The new agreement expands the sanctuary 3.5 miles downstream to Skamania Island and extends the fishing prohibition from May 1 to Aug. 31, adding the month of August. Oregon will also establish a new spawning sanctuary on the Willamette River downstream from Willamette Falls to Interstate 205.

Fishing seasons for retention of white sturgeon approved for the 2010 sport fishery in the Columbia River and adjacent tributaries are as follows:

- **Buoy 10 to the Wauna powerlines:** The retention fishery for white sturgeon is open seven days per week through April and again from May 22 to June 26. The fork length of retained sturgeon must be a minimum of 38 inches through April and 41 inches beginning in May. Maximum fork length is 54 inches. Catch-and-release fishing is allowed during non-retention days.
- **Wauna powerlines to Bonneville Dam:** The retention fishery for white sturgeon will be open three days per week (Thursday, Friday and Saturday) through July 31, and again from Oct. 1 through Dec. 31. The fork length of retained sturgeon must be a minimum of 38 inches and a maximum of 54 inches. Catch-and-release fishing is allowed on days when sturgeon retention is prohibited, except in the sanctuary area from May through August.

The fishing periods will be reassessed in June based on available catch data, and may be modified to match catch guidelines.

Smelt (eulachon) dipping is now closed in all Washington rivers except the mainstem Columbia River, but fishing for **walleye** and bass is picking up above Bonneville Dam. Boat anglers fishing the John Day Pool have been averaging a bass per rod and a walleye for every three rods. The Dalles Pool is also giving up some walleye.

A recent creel check at Kline Pond tallied 26 bank anglers with 42 **rainbow trout**. Kline Pond was recently stocked with 2,300 half-pound rainbows, while Battleground Lake got 1,000 and Kress Lake near Kalama got 16 **surplus hatchery steelhead** averaging 10 pounds apiece.

Eastern Washington

Anglers enjoyed spring weather at the region's dozen or so lakes that opened to fishing March 1, with catches coming out of open water instead of through the ice.

The seven impoundments off the Tucannon River on WDFW's Wooten Wildlife Area in Columbia County provided lots of action on hatchery **rainbow trout**. Beaver, Big Four, Blue, Deer, Rainbow, Spring and Watson lakes were stocked with "catchable-size" (about one-third pound) and "jumbo" (about 1.5 pound) trout from the Tucannon and Lyons Ferry fish hatcheries.

WDFW Fish Biologist Jeremy Trump checked anglers on opening day at most of the Tucannon lakes, where fish averaged about 12 inches. Better fishing seemed to be in the morning, except for at Big Four, where fishing was slower than expected all day. Spring Lake had the highest average number of fish caught per angler - just over three - and Big Four had the lowest, at less than one fish apiece. The largest rainbow measured was a 17.3-inch fish caught at Rainbow Lake.

Wooten Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Kari Dingman said camping activity on the area is picking up, along with the fishing, because of the warm weather.

Fishhook Pond in Walla Walla County and Pampa Pond in Whitman County were also well-stocked with rainbows for the March 1 opener, although no creel checks were conducted at those waters.

Chris Donley, WDFW central district fish biologist, said there was good fishing at most March 1-opening fisheries near Spokane. Downs Lake was producing **largemouth bass** in the three- to four-pound range, along with a few rainbow trout and **yellow perch**. Liberty Lake shore anglers on the opener averaged one fish each and boat anglers averaged three fish each - almost all were **brown trout** in the 14- to 20-inch range, with the occasional winter carryover rainbow up to 18 inches. Anglers fishing Medical Lake on opening day averaged three fish each.

Donley said that anglers at Amber Lake, which opened for catch-and-release fishing March 1, averaged five to six trout each. About 90 percent of the catch at Amber was rainbows measuring 13 to 20 inches. The remainder of the catch was **cutthroat trout** that measured between 14 to 18 inches.

Coffeepot Lake also opened for catch-and-release fishing, and although it was not officially surveyed, Donley said fishing was slow.

Bill Baker, WDFW northeast district fish biologist, reports that fishing for **lake trout** and **rainbows** was fair at Stevens County's Deer Lake on the March 1 opener. Lake trout anglers averaged less than one fish apiece, from 24 to 34 inches. Rainbow trout anglers averaged one fish apiece, from 13 to 15 inches. Baker said the water temperature was still cold, at around 37 degrees, so fishing will likely pick up as the lake warms up.

Baker also noted the winter-season fisheries, Hatch and Williams lakes, will remain open to fishing through March 31.

WDFW Fish Biologist Marc Divens said that although water temperatures are still a little cold to expect fast action, anglers interested in warmwater "spiny-ray" species have many opportunities now and in coming weeks and months at both year-round and early-opening waters.

For year-round lakes: Lake Roosevelt offers **walleye** and **smallmouth bass** , along with **rainbows** and **kokanee** ; Silver Lake has **tiger muskie** , **largemouth bass** , and **yellow perch** ; and Newman Lake has tiger muskie, largemouth and smallmouth bass, and **crappie** .

Among March 1-opening waters: Liberty Lake has largemouth and smallmouth bass, walleye, and yellow perch; Downs Lake has largemouth bass, yellow perch and crappie; Coffeepot Lake has bass, crappie and perch; and Deer Lake has smallmouth bass.

Anglers can gear up and learn about fishing opportunities at the third annual **Great Western Sportfishing Show** , March 5-7, at the Spokane Convention Center. The show includes inland trout lakes seminars conducted by WDFW Fish Biologist Chris Donley. For more information see <http://www.greatwesternsportfishingshow.com/Home.html> .

Anglers can also pick up lots of information at the Inland Northwest Wildlife Council's **50th annual Big Horn Outdoor Adventure Show** , March 18-21, at the Spokane County Fair and Expo Center. An indoor kids' fishing pond, where youngsters can learn to cast and actually catch trout to take home and eat, is one of the highlights of this event. A non-profit organization, the council donates proceeds from the show to fish and wildlife projects. For more information about the show, see <http://www.wildlifecouncil.com/> .

Northcentral Washington

Anglers from 12 counties (six westside, six eastside) fished the Columbia Basin's opening day on March 1 on ice-free lakes and under sunny skies with unseasonably warm weather. "There were lots of folks out, considering that the opener fell on a Monday," said WDFW District Fish Biologist Chad Jackson of Moses Lake. "As far as fishery performance, it was a bit of a mixed bag with some good, some bad, and some under-utilized lakes."

Jackson said the greatest effort and catches were checked at Martha, Upper Caliche, and Lenice lakes. At Martha and Caliche lakes, anglers averaged nearly five-fish limits of **rainbow trout** , with several taking full limits in less than an hour. Most rainbows caught at Martha Lake were about 13 inches, with a few winter-carryovers running 16 to 24 inches. The size of trout harvested at Caliche Lake was smaller at 10 to 11 inches.

Lenice Lake was the most popular and best performing selective-gear water on the opener, with most anglers catching and releasing around six trout each in two to four hours of fishing. Most of the trout were 19 to 21 inches, with a few up to 24 inches. A few anglers surveyed by Jackson said they had caught and released a few of last year's plants of **tiger trout** .

Nunnally and Merry lakes, near Lenice and also under the selective-gear and one-trout daily retention rules, were not checked on the opener. But Jackson said fishing, at least on the larger Nunnally, is similar to Lenice. Nunnally and Lenice will be re-stocked with trout this spring, he noted.

"Two lakes that underperformed this opener were Quincy and Burke," Jackson said. "Despite our supplemental catchable-size trout plants, on top of sizeable spring fry plants, both lakes failed to produce a harvest rate of one trout per angler. However, since the catchable trout plant occurred only two weeks ago, I expect that these two lakes will fish a lot better as the spring progresses."

Anglers who did catch trout at Burke had 12- to 24-inch rainbows, and those at Quincy had 20- to 21-inch fish from fry plants.

Jackson said angler effort appeared to be down on the opener at Dusty and Lenore lakes. The highest angler counts recorded during the creel survey at Dusty and Lenore lakes were eight and 13, respectively. That made determining the overall opening day success difficult, he said. Among the anglers checked at Dusty, one rainbow trout and one tiger trout were measured, both at 16 inches. At Lenore, which is catch-and-release through May, anglers each reported catching about seven **cutthroat trout** of 14 to 22 inches in length. "Both Dusty and Lenore will be very good to fish as the season progresses," Jackson said.

Other Columbia Basin lakes that opened March 1, but were not surveyed, are several "walk-in" waters on WDFW's Quincy Wildlife Area - Cascade, Cliff, Crystal, Cup, Dot, George and Spring.

Matt Polacek, WDFW fish biologist, said anglers are catching **yellow perch** at the Coulee City Marina on Banks Lake. Pre-spawn perch can be found in or near weed beds throughout the lake.

WDFW Okanogan District Fish Biologist Bob Jateff reminds **steelhead** anglers that two sections of the Okanogan River will close March 15 - from the first powerline crossing downstream of the Highway 155 Bridge in Omak (Coulee Dam Credit Union Building) upstream to the mouth of Omak Creek; and from the Tonasket Bridge (4th Street) downstream to the Tonasket Lagoons Park boat launch. Those closures are necessary to protect natural origin steelhead staging prior to spawning in those tributaries.

The rest of the steelhead areas upstream of Wells Dam will remain open until March 31, but Jateff advises anglers to periodically check for fishery changes on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

Whitefish remains open on portions of the Methow and Similkameen rivers until March 31. The daily catch limit is 15 whitefish and gear restrictions are in effect. Check the rules pamphlet for all details.

Southcentral Washington

WDFW hatchery crews have been stocking catchable-size (one-third pound and nearly one pound) **rainbow trout** over the last couple weeks at waterways throughout Kittitas and Yakima counties. Eric Anderson, WDFW district fish biologist, said there are lots of good fishing opportunities during these warm, pre-spring days.

In Kittitas County, McCabe Pond recently received 510 one-third-pound rainbows, Woodhouse Ponds got 810, South Fio Rito got 1,500, North Fio Rito got 3,210, and Mattoon Lake got 1,610. North Fio Rito Lake also received 700 nearly one-pounders, and Mattoon Lake got 400.

In Yakima County, I-82 Pond #4 and Pond #6 each received 2,520 one-third pound rainbows, Sarge Hubbard Pond got 308, Rotary Lake got 2,520, and Myron Lake got 504. Sarge Hubbard also received 100 nearly one-pound rainbows, and Myron Lake got 500.

All catchable-size trout plants are posted weekly on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly/>.

TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail

Subscriber 'Kevin' wrote pro guide Bob Rees to ask, "I was wondering if you can list your preferences in order of confidence while fishing for Spring Chinook while anchored.

"Here is my list:

Wrapped Kwikfish
Mag Wiggle Warts
Large Spinners
Alvins, Spoons

"What is your go to rig (and color) if you know you will only get 3-4 trips for Springers and fish with a friend who will anchor in the Kalama area.

"I prefer to fish with the spinners but have heard the water temperature needs to be > 50 degrees F and are reluctant to use them.

"Also, I think trolled herring is very effective for Spring Salmon. Can cut herring be used while anchored? Do you recommend it?

"Do you brine or brighten your herring?

"And, can you comment on rubber gloves. I know some guides and articles say it is a must when handling gear and bait?

"Appreciate you time and reply."

Bob replied, "I suggest just using plugs, either the new Worden's Mag Lip in green or Kwikfish in green or chrome with pink dots is another favorite. I would just stick to plugs in that stretch of the river.

"If you do use spinners, go small, not large.

"I do use gloves and recommend it. It's cheap insurance.

"I brine my herring in ocean water along with additional salt, then drain, then add my favorite scent and keep as cold as possible without freezing.

"Good luck and thanks for being a TGF subscriber!"

Questions? Comments? Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com
Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com
Michael Teague: Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com

Random Links

Snopes on the Recreational Fishing Ban rumor:

<http://www.snopes.com/politics/obama/fishingban.asp>

Recent revelation about what fish see:

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/02/100225122653.htm>

GOOD LUCK!