

The Guide's Forecast - volume 12 issue number 12

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **March 19<sup>th</sup> – March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**\* \* \* SPRING CHINOOK SPECIAL \* \* \***

Red hot spring chinook fishing is right around the corner and with a record return predicted this year, the action is sure to be great! Here is a list of spring chinook options for the 2010 season!

**Portland area spring chinook only, 1/2 day trip (minimum 4 hour "sunrise surprise")**

4 to 6 people for \$75.00 per person,

1 to 3 people for \$85.00 per person

**Portland area spring chinook full day trip (minimum 8 hours of fishing)**

4 to 6 people for \$150.00 per person,

1 to 3 people for \$175.00 per person

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**Book your trip NOW by calling (503) 812-9036 or emailing Bob Rees at [brees@pacifier.com](mailto:brees@pacifier.com).**

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** Mainstem Columbia springer fishermen are still waiting for better results. Although there have been fair catches of chinook upstream of the mouth of the Willamette, action remains much better in downstream areas such as Kalama and Westport. Test netting continues to disappoint biologists and hopeful anglers as well. If a significant showing of upriver chinook fail to materialize this week, the run could be a bust but cold water temperatures can play a role.

Bank anglers in the gorge are beginning to see fair catches of sturgeon. Although it's a bit early for consistent fishing, creel checks indicated better than a keeper for every 4 rods. Boat effort remained light but catches should improve in the month of April, before the significant May closure takes place there.

Early catches of spring chinook have been unusually good in the lower Willamette this year and a run predicted as the best since 2004, results will only improve in the next few months. Recent rains have improved sturgeon prospects but softened the chinook bite. Water clarity should begin to improve for weekend anglers.

McKenzie levels are dropping while the water temperature is rising. It holds promise for trout anglers this weekend. March Browns will be hatching.

North Santiam water, flow and color should be decent this coming weekend. Wild steelhead have been joined by a very few hatchery summers.

In preparation for spring break, numerous lakes and reservoirs will be stocked with catchable rainbow trout. It's likely to be some of the best trout fishing of the year.

**Northwest** – Steelheaders got the rain they were desperately seeking, allowing for great driftboat conditions on most north coast streams over the weekend. Smaller streams fished fair on Saturday but the Wilson and Nestucca produced good catches of steelhead by Sunday and into the early part of the week.

Broodstock fish were taken in good numbers on the Wilson and Nestucca while the Trask put out fair numbers of wild fish and an occasional hatchery stray. Most hatchery fish are averaging 7 to 9 pounds with an occasional fish topping 12 pounds. The larger 3-salt fish are not as prevalent this year as they were in the past.

Sidedrifters took the bulk of the catch using small clusters of eggs in the perfect water conditions. As flows drop into the weekend, the upper reaches will slow while the lower reaches should remain consistent. Plugs will become a fair option in the lower flows as fish congregate in bigger numbers in the deeper holes.

Sturgeon fishing and crabbing remain slow in Tillamook Bay but offshore anglers may be able to take advantage of calm seas over the weekend. Ocean crabbing should be fair but bottomfishing should be excellent. Lingcod will be a favorite for those exploring offshore reefs.

Anglers working the lower river near Astoria for spring chinook fared well over the weekend. The best catch rates of the season were realized near Altoona and Tenasillahe Island with nearly a fish for every 2 boats. Action should improve even more this week.

**Southwest** – Forecasts indicate the ocean laying down for the upcoming weekend. Count on a late morning launch with ebb tides early. Rock fish and lingcod catches should be excellent along with good crabbing.

While the final decision regarding opening dates won't be made until mid-April, it appears there will be an ocean chinook fishery off the Central Oregon coast for the first time since 2007.

As many as 20,000 spring Chinook are forecast to enter the Umpqua system this season. A few are being taken with the stretch below Scottsburg most productive. Steelheading is mostly catch-and-release for natives.

A few steelhead enter with each freshet on the Coquille, but hookups with spawned-out fish will increase as the season winds down. Steelheading has slowed on the Coos River although the Millicoma is still productive.

Steelhead and a couple of chinook were hooked over the last weekend on the Elk River.

While spring chinook fishing has been slow over the past week in the lower Rogue, off-color water from earlier rainfall started to color the lower river early this week and results for springers and steelhead are improving. Springer fishing continues here through June.

Chetco water levels hit 7,800 cfs at Brookings on Saturday but have been dropping rapidly. Steelheading is fair. The Chetco closes to fishing on March 31st.

Emigrant Reservoir, Expo Pond, Lake Selmac, Lost Creek Reservoir, Willow Lake, Reinhart Pond, Herberts Pond, Marie Lake and Loon Lake are scheduled to be planted with trout.

**Eastern** – Wallowa River steelheading has been fair to good for fly rodders and spin fishers.

Green Peter Reservoir is filling and weekend parking is becoming a little tighter. Trolling for kokanee is producing fair catches of fish that are good-sized for early in the season.

**SW Washington** – Water levels for SW Washington streams are reaching ideal levels for steelheaders. The East Fork of the Lewis is primed for late wild steelhead and the Kalama is producing some fair broodstock fish as well.

The Cowlitz is now a strong late season option as hatchery production has once again shifted to a later returning stock of fish likely to peak in early April. Sidedrifters should score well on these quality fish and bank anglers will also catch a few close to the hatchery.

Cowlitz River smelt were recently listed as threatened on the Federal Endangered Species list. Future regulations and restrictions are likely.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – Reports from the mainstem are certainly mixed as consistent fishing doesn't even occur for folks during peak season. Overall however, sportfishing success does seem to be slowly picking up for the above Willamette tributary section of the river.

Of greatest concern is the abundance of upriver spring chinook stocks in the mix of sport and commercial catches. Most recent test fishing results showed primarily lower river (Willamette fish) still made up the bulk of the catch. In 16 drifts, only 6 chinook were caught and only one of those 6 were black faced upriver bound springers. But the real reason the gillnet fleet didn't go into the river for the 2<sup>nd</sup> consecutive week is the steelhead to chinook ratio remained high. Using 4½ inch mesh would have really put the hurt on the wild steelhead (and hatchery steelhead too). It may be another week before the wild steelhead numbers begin to decrease but it is likely that they will. The commercials want to take advantage of the smaller mesh nets as they are more effective in harvesting chinook but also steelhead. If chinook numbers were greater in the river and wild steelhead counts were still high, they would probably fish, just with the tooth tangle nets so steelhead would have a better chance of survival.

I know it's much to soak in but what we really have to pay attention to is the lower river/upper river ratios. Although lower river, Willamette bound fish are a good thing, if we don't start seeing more of the dark faced chinook coming in, the run will likely come in over-predicted. We really don't need that for the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> time in recent history. The 2010 spring chinook run prediction

was somewhat conservative anyway, based on previous years misses. And on top of that, the sportfishery is being managed in a very conservative way this year. More will certainly be revealed in the coming week and the Sunday test fishery.

Most recently, reports of fair catches were coming from the I-5 to Davis Bar area indicating those upriver fish are on their way. WDF&W recently reported that 80 kept chinook were tallied in their creel check with 56% of the catch identified as lower river stock. There is a small percentage of fish that can't be positively identified but that does leave a significant number of kept chinook in the "black faced" category. Also Bonneville Dam counts are finally starting to jump up with our first double digit day on the 16<sup>th</sup> with a running total of just 54 through the 16<sup>th</sup> of March. This passage number does fall short of the good return years of earlier on in this decade.

Although no section of river is very consistent yet, good reports have come from the Altoona area near Astoria as well as Tenasillahe Island near Westport, Oregon. These are strong indicators that the fish will soon show as some of the reports have been rather impressive. Prior to the Willamette blowing out late in the weekend, good catches of both Willamette's and upriver fish were reported at the mouth of the Multnomah Channel near St. Helens as well as in the channel itself. If I was hinging a bet myself, I'd say the Willamette run was under-predicted while the Columbia run was once again over-predicted. Nobody hopes I'm wrong more than me!

Although most anglers will continue to be focused on spring chinook in the coming weeks, anglers can't overlook the good creel check observed by ODF&W personnel for sturgeon anglers in the gorge. Although the creel checks indicate that the bank fishing was the best (likely towards the deadline) for keeper sturgeon. The weekend creel check revealed 9 legals and 1 oversize fish landed for 33 bank rods. Boat angling effort has been very light as most are focused on salmon. The Dalles Pool yielded 4 keepers and 3 oversized sturgeon for 10 boats. Walleye fishing in The Dalles Pool is fair as well with a little better than 1 keeper walleye per boat over the weekend.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Tides won't play a big role in success this week but consistent strong morning outgoing tides may aid bank anglers as well as those willing to sit on anchor in the lower reaches of the mainstem Columbia. The more important factor should be run timing. With late March fast approaching and a record return in the forecast, fish should begin to show in earnest this week.

Even though the upriver component of spring chinook should start to make a stronger appearance, it's still a good idea to target salmon downstream of the mouth of the Multnomah Channel in order to cash in on the Willamette bound adults. Herring will remain the top option but more anglers are reporting catches using plugs wrapped with sardines. It may be a nice weekend to try your hand on the wing jetties in the lower river. Although it's a commitment to drive down there, the scenery and opportunities may very well be worth it. Boat ramps in the area to access this beautiful section of river include Westport ramp, Aldridge Point (although there is a slide across the road people need to be aware of). Apparently it's still accessible but you may want to have a 4WD vehicle. And also the John Day Ramp which most use for sturgeon fishing the lower river. Travel up the shipping channel to Altoona and the area's wing jetties at Jim Crow Sands.

The river around and upstream of I-5 should begin to produce catches this weekend too but hopefully the water temperatures begin to warm as that should help stimulate the bite. Trolled herring is surely a staple up here although backtrolled plugs did work well last year. Remember, boat anglers can not fish above the I-205 Bridge at all this season. It's restricted to just bank anglers only.

Bank angling isn't likely to pick up significantly this week and no catch was reported last week for

gorge bank anglers. It may not be long however until some good bank fishing opportunities do creep up in the gorge area. Spin-n-glos and eggs will work well here.

And as long as you're versed in bank fishing opportunities, you may want to look to sturgeon in the gorge. Catch rates should just continue to improve into April with smelt being the top bait.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – Lower Willamette water temperature dropped into the mid-40s with the recent rainfall as did the visibility, from 4.5 to less than 2.5 feet. Springers continue to cross Willamette Falls as anglers anticipate a decent run which has not happened in a half-dozen or so years. Over 200 summer steelhead have been counted. an impressive number for this early in the season without consideration to how many summers crossed before the 'official' count began on the first day of March. The water is clearing with the flow moderating. It should be in decent shape by the weekend. Over the last retention period, 176 boats took 85 legal-sized sturgeon according to ODFW fish checkers.

The McKenzie is dropping and should offer decent trout fishing to fly anglers this weekend.

North Santiam steelheaders will find reasonably good water conditions this coming weekend although the water has been running cold. The next 'Learn the River' trip on the North Santiam is scheduled for April 3rd and will cover Stayton to Green's Bridge. For information on this and other educational driftboat opportunities, call 503-897-3301.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Trollers will find fair to good water conditions with prospects improving for spring Chinook. Sell wood and St. Johns will be popular (as always) but don't overlook lower Multnomah Channel. Whole or plug-cut herring is de rigueur but prawn spinners have accounted for the occasional hookup. If springers won't cooperate (which has been the case more often than not this week), try for sturgeon. It's been spotty but those who have moved to find biters have done well with consistent action for shakers and a few keepers. Sand shrimp and smelt have been winners this week and, to no one's surprise with all the trollers in the river, herring has been taken eagerly. Areas which have been productive include downstream from the St. Johns Bridge, Milwaukie and the Toyota Hole.

With the March Brown hatch in full force now, fly fishing on the McKenzie is expected to be worthwhile. If the trout have not yet keyed on dries, nymphs will be effective.

Try jigs in the North and South Santiam for catch and release fishing for wild steelhead. Try the lower stretches of the mainstem if targeting one of the few summers which should be in the river now.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** –Water conditions are fair to good and improving on the Clackamas with steelhead scattered. The temperature is in the low to mid forties.

Water clarity is good on the Sandy River where steelheading has been fair but steady.

**The Guide's Forecast** - Despite fresh steelhead entering the Clackamas, fishing has been slow this week. Stay persistent as there are steelheading the river although it's too early to have high hope for a springer.

Winter steelhead are scattered and moving through the Sand. The right time and place with an appealing presentation will put you into fish.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – Steelheaders rejoiced as optimum conditions graced the north coast over the weekend. The primary targets, the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers produced fine results with some of the better reports coming from the Wilson River. These rivers were just a bit too high for great action on Saturday but by Sunday, they were fishing quite well.

I started out my “work week” on the Necanicum River, only to come away somewhat disappointed despite good river conditions. We had the river to ourselves on Saturday, coming up with just 3 opportunities and capitalizing on just one of those 3 fish. The fish was wild just as I had anticipated it would be. This river was fishing just right and likely only was safe to float for just that day as downed logs and newly formed gravel bars would make it quite challenging in lower flows. Other small streams likely fished fair last weekend as well such as the North Fork Nehalem and the Klaskanine, Big Creek and Gnat Creek in Clatsop County.

Sunday brought a flotilla of boats to the Tillamook area streams where good numbers of anglers took good numbers of both wild and hatchery steelhead that day as well as into early this week. Sidedrifters did the best using clusters of eggs from Siskeyville to Sollie Smith Bridge. The stretch downstream of Sollie Smith is also getting popular when flows begin to drop lower. The last day I floated the Wilson was Tuesday (3/16) going bite-less (much to my surprise) above Mills Bridge with only 1 other boat on that stretch. Once we got downstream of Mills Bridge, we hooked and landed 3 steelhead of which one was a hatchery fish for the home-pack. All 3 fish were taken on chrome plugs; 1 Hot Shot #30 and 2 on the chrome with red dot K11 Kwikfish in the deeper water. All fish were between 7 and 9 pounds and were in good shape. We saw another boat land a nice 12 pounder above Mills Bridge that day but overall, most would say that the average size fish is on the lighter side this year. Although not great news for this year, it may bode well for 3-salt returning fish next year.

I fished the Trask River on Monday (3/15), also getting 3 good opportunities for steelhead on plugs but not capitalizing on any of them. The fish were taking metallic red plugs that day and all our action was upstream of Loren’s Drift and downstream of Cedar Creek. Although there were very few other boats on the river, there were other fish taken and bank anglers fishing near the hatchery were reporting fair action.

The Nestucca was also fishing well during the same period with the higher stretches fishing best early in the drop and the lower stretches still fishing fair into the early part of the week. Sidedrifters also took the majority of fish here but plugs became more effective later in the week.

The Nehalem is still too high for productive fishing but some fair action is likely to be had in the Vernonia stretch. Reports are closely guarded in this section.

The bay and ocean remained too rough for recreation last week but that could very well change by the weekend. Looks like good times ahead!

**The Guide’s Forecast** – Well, we’re back to low, clearing water conditions this week so many anglers will switch their focus to spring chinook again. Catches should begin to improve in the spring chinook fisheries further alleviating crowding issues on the north coast. And there are crowding issues on the north coast (if you haven’t noticed).

Most systems will likely witness a lull in success as we had the big push of fish come in over the last week. The Wilson and Nestucca will still likely be fair options for both wild and hatchery fish with the lower portions producing the best results. As flows drop, anglers may even want to explore the tidewater option, working the tides to best suit the technique you are employing. Bobbers and jigs or bait may become a good option in the lower flows. Plugs properly backrolled should also become a good option.

The Trask and Nehalem Rivers will be fair wild fish options with some nice fish likely available from both systems. Remember that the Nehalem take-out options vary depending on the day. The Roy Creek take-out is the only option on the weekend. Mohler Sand and Gravel is closed on the weekends.

Crabbing and sturgeon fishing will likely remain poor at this time. The offshore option looked to be strong however, a recent weather change has the forecast looking a bit ugly for Saturday and Sunday with East winds dominating the forecast. If you can get out Friday however, take advantage of it as bottomfishing should be quite good and ocean crabbing a much better option than bay crabbing.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – The entire Oregon coast is open to clamming and mussel harvest as of this writing on March 18th. For current updates and last moment closures, check the shellfish hotline at 1-800-448-2474.

Steelheading has been slow to fair on the Siletz River with side-drifters predictably hooking the majority of winter

steelhead here. A mix of native and hatchery fish are in the river now and the Siletz receives a few spring Chinook, fewer of which are actually hooked by anglers, the majority of which do so inadvertently while targeting steelhead.

Alsea water levels are on a steady decline. Expect to see a drop of a few inches in height every day through the weekend with the level below four feet at tidewater by Sunday.

While hookups on winter steelhead has been fair to good for side drifters on the Coquille, a greater number of downrunners are showing up as the run winds down.

Winter steelheading has been fair but steady on the mainstem Umpqua on the Elkton stretch. With the recent freshet invigorating the North and South Umpqua, steelhead catches have improved here. Plug-pullers and side-drifters are both finding success. Passage over Winchester Dam is near a 10-year high with over 2,500 winters counted.

Spring Chinook fishing is rated at slow to fair on the lower Rogue but it's still early in the run. On an optimistic note, while only 12 confirmed springer catches were reported last week, about a half-dozen a day are now being landed. Only fin-clipped fish may be retained so carefully release all wild Chinook. Anchovies are the top fish-getters here. Winters steelhead, including a few large specimens, are predictably in the mix. Steelheading on the middle Rogue has been worthwhile as anglers are making steady catches of winter fish, A few spring Chinook have been sighted but none have been landed on the middle stretch as of Thursday this week. The upper Rogue remains low and clear as it has for weeks due to restricted outflow from Lost Creek Lake.

With the winter steelhead run nearly wrapped on the Chetco, the last storm front brought a few more fresh fish into the system, the number of which pleasantly surprised local anglers and guides. Despite a poor run this season, fishing was fair at the beginning of this week as the river

recovered and a mix of ocean fresh and spawned out steelhead were hooked. Fishing is expected to remain worthwhile right up to the closure at the end of March.

Relatively calm seas will greet boaters this weekend with early morning most promising. Offshore waters hold promise at this time of year for rockfish and ling cod. Take crab pots to drop in 40 feet of water on the way out in order to supplement those seafood feasts as it should remain good.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – Mackinaw catches have slowed at Crescent Lake where downriggers are required to reach these large char. Dress for frigid weather if you try it.

Kokanee fishing has been slow to fair for trollers at Green Peter.

The low, clear waters of the Imnaha hold lots of steelhead for those stealthy enough to fool a few.

### **Washington fishing reports:**

**From the WDF&W Weekender Report for March 17<sup>th</sup> – March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

### **North Puget Sound**

With the region's rivers closed to steelhead fishing, anglers' attention has turned to salmon in the marine areas of Puget Sound. 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.

Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW biologist, said effort has been light in the region and fishing continues to be slow. "There have been a few blackmouth caught, but overall it's been a real grind for anglers fishing the waters of northern Puget Sound," he said.

Thiesfeld said the Strait of Juan de Fuca is the better bet for anglers looking to hook a blackmouth – resident chinook. Anglers fishing marine areas 5 (Sekiu) and 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca) have a daily limit of one chinook.

Looking forward to the **summer salmon fishing** season? There's still time to provide input on proposals for this year's fisheries. Several public meetings have been scheduled as fishery managers continue to develop the 2010 salmon seasons. Those meetings are scheduled for:

- **March 23** – Eastern Washington North of Falcon discussion, 6 p.m.-9 p.m., Benton PUD, 2721 W. 10th Ave. Kennewick.
- **March 24** – Second coastal fisheries discussion, 6 p.m.-8 p.m., Raymond Elks Lodge, 326 Third St., Raymond.
- **March 25** – Puget Sound commercial fisheries discussion, 10 a.m.-noon, WDFW Mill Creek Office, 16018 Mill Creek Blvd., Mill Creek.
- **March 25** – Puget Sound recreational fisheries discussion, 6 p.m.-8 p.m., WDFW Mill Creek Office, 16018 Mill Creek Blvd., Mill Creek.
- **March 29** – Public hearing on ocean salmon management options, 7 p.m., Chateau Westport, 710 W. Hancock, Westport.
- **March 30** – Final Grays Harbor/Willapa Bay fisheries discussion, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Room 172 of the Natural Resources Building, 1111 Washington St. S.E., Olympia.

- **April 6** – Second North of Falcon meeting, 9 a.m.- 4 p.m., Embassy Suites Hotel, 20610 44th Ave. West, Lynnwood.

The final fishing package for Washington's waters will be finalized in mid-April. More information about the salmon season-setting process can be found on WDFW's North of Falcon website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/northfalcon/>).

Meanwhile, a couple of lakes in King County that are open year-round have been planted with catchable-size **rainbow trout**. Angle and Green lakes each received 10,000 rainbow trout recently. Check out WDFW's weekly stocking report for catchable trout on the department's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly/index.htm>.

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

### **South Sound/Olympic Peninsula**

The fishery for wild steelhead is peaking on the northern Olympia Peninsula, and blackmouth fishing is still going strong on the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Rough seas have slowed the start of the lingcod fishery, but ocean beaches are tentatively scheduled to open March 26 for a weeklong razor clam fishery.

And just in time for spring break, WDFW is stocking several lakes in Mason and Grays Harbor counties with trout – some weighing up to five pounds apiece.

"Fishing opportunities are really picking up throughout the region," said Ron Warren, regional WDFW fish manager. "By the end of the month, there should be something for just about everybody who likes to fish or collect shellfish."

As local schools count down to spring break, WDFW is planting 5,000 catchable-size rainbow trout in Duck Lake, Lake Sylvia and Vance Creek (Elma) Pond #1 in Grays Harbor County. Lake Nahwatzel, in Mason County, will receive more than 3,000 catchable-size trout and several hundred coastal cutthroat.

Larger trout, averaging three to five pounds each, also will be planted in the four lakes in time for the spring-break fishery. Vance Creek (Elma) Pond #1, south of Elma, will be open from March 29 to April 4 for juvenile fishers, seniors over 70 and WDFW-licensed anglers with disabilities. The other three lakes are open year-round.

"This is a great opportunity for folks to enjoy early-season fishing during local schools' spring vacations," said Richard Ereth, a WDFW fish biologist in Montesano.

Ereth noted that a new daily bag limit is in effect this year on Duck Lake and Vance Creek (Elma) Pond #1. The new limit is five fish, including up to two fish over 15 inches. When bait is used, anglers must stop fishing after the first five fish are landed, regardless of whether the fish are kept or released.

Meanwhile, steelhead anglers continue to catch – and often release – high numbers of wild fish on rivers around the northern Olympic Peninsula. On the Sol Duc, 63 anglers reported catching 100 wild steelhead (91 released) and eight hatchery fish during a creel check conducted March 12-14. Elsewhere, success rates ranged from about a fish to two fish for every two rods.

Anglers fishing for blackmouth salmon in the Strait of Juan de Fuca have also continued to rack up good catch rates. While fishing has generally been slow elsewhere in Puget Sound, 10

anglers checked five fish in Seiku and 27 anglers checked 13 fish at Ediz Hook during a creel survey March 14.

But those hoping to catch lingcod off the south coast haven't been quite so fortunate. Heavy seas kept most boats at the dock for several days after marine areas 1-3 opened for lingcod fishing, said Wendy Beeghley, another WDFW fish biologist. "Based on the latest reports, they may not be able to get out for another week," she said.

The minimum size for lingcod in marine areas 1-3 south of Cape Alava 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. Marine Area 4, north of Cape Alava, remains closed to lingcod fishing until April 16. Additional information about the lingcod fishery is available on the WDFW Fishing Hotline (360) 902-2500 or online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm/>.

Those eager for the final word about a **razor-clam dig** at ocean beaches tentatively scheduled March 26-April 1 don't have to wait much longer. Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager, said the results should be available by Friday, March 19 from marine toxin tests required to make sure the clams are safe to eat.

Prospective diggers should be aware that the proposed dig is scheduled to start on evening tides, then switch to morning tides for the final four days, Ayres said. "The digs planned this month span the seasonal change, when the lowest tides shift from evening to morning hours," he said. "So 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 and 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

## Southwest Washington

Spring chinook salmon fishing is starting to pick up on the lower Columbia River, although anglers are still working hard to catch fish. During a creel survey conducted during the second week of March, checkers counted 86 adult chinook and three steelhead among the 1,103 boat anglers contacted. Just one chinook and two steelhead were counted among the 196 bank anglers contacted.

"**Spring chinook** have been striking in fits and starts, but catch rates should start ramping up any day," said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist. "Regardless of how big this run turns out to be, fishing will almost certainly improve in the days ahead."

Hymer said boat anglers, fishing between Cathlamet and Vancouver, have taken most of the springers hooked so far this year. Lower river stocks – including some lunkers up to 30 pounds – have accounted for about half the catch, although upriver fish have been increasing in number in recent days. As of mid-March, the fishery was drawing approximately 600-800 boats to the lower Columbia River on weekend days. Those numbers are also expected to increase along with more fish and hopefully spring-like weather.

"If you put in some time, there's a good chance you'll take home a spring chinook," Hymer said. "Boat anglers have better odds, because the river's so low right 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 at least 1938. Under regulations established by fishery managers from Washington and Oregon, fishing is now open at the following places and times:

- **Buoy 10 upstream to the I-5 Bridge:** Seven days per week through April 18, except closed Tuesdays in March.
- **I-5 Bridge upstream to I-205 Bridge:** Three days per week – Thursdays through Saturdays – from March 18 through April 3.
- **I-205 Bridge upstream to Bonneville Dam (Bank fishing only):** Three days per week – Thursdays through Saturdays – from March 18 through April 3.
- **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.

Spring chinook fishing opened March 16 on the lower Wind River and at Drano Lake, although Hymer noted that the action won't pick up there until more fish pass Bonneville Dam. Anglers can check fish counts at the dam on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers website at <https://www.nwp.usace.army.mil/op/fishdata/home.asp>. Anglers should be aware of several changes in fishing rules on tributaries to the Bonneville Pool:

- **Drano Lake:** The anti-s snag rule was removed 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:** The anti-s snag rule has been removed 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.

Below Bonneville, spring chinook are starting to make an appearance in several tributaries, although late-run **hatchery winter steelhead** continue to make up the bulk of the catch on the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers. At the Cowlitz Hatchery, 24 adult spring chinook and 225 winter-run steelhead were recovered during the second week of March. A creel survey that week on the Cowlitz turned up 17 hatchery steelhead and one adult chinook among 44 boat anglers. Eighty-eight bank anglers had caught 14 hatchery steelhead and released two others.

The odds of catching hatchery steelhead were even better that week on the Kalama River, where 12 boat anglers had caught five fish and released three others. "Fishing for late-run hatchery steelhead is peaking right now, providing a great fishing opportunity as more spring chinook move into the rivers," said Hymer, noting that anglers have also been catching some steelhead in The Dalles Pool.

Anglers should be aware, however, that March 15 was 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.

Meanwhile, **sturgeon** fishing has been slow, although boat anglers have been catching some legal-size fish in the Kalama area as well as in The Dalles Pool, where **walleye** fishing is starting to heat up along with the weather. Boat anglers fishing there have been averaging a walleye per rod, along with some **bass**.

**Trout** anglers should know that WDFW recently stocked Battleground Lake with 3,000 rainbow trout averaging half-a-pound apiece. Nine recycled winter steelhead were also planted in Kress Lake on March 10.

### **Eastern Washington**

The Grand Ronde River, a tributary of the Snake River in the southeast corner of the region, is providing good **steelhead trout** action. Steelheading has been reportedly excellent near the mouth of the Grand Ronde and near the mouth of Cottonwood Creek, which flows into the Grand Ronde northeast of Troy, Oregon.

The seven impoundments off the Tucannon River on WDFW's Wooten Wildlife Area in Columbia County, which opened March 1, continue to produce catches of hatchery **rainbow trout**. Beaver, Big Four, Blue, Deer, Rainbow, Spring and Watson lakes have been stocked with "catchable-size" (about one-third pound) and "jumbo" (about one-and-a-half pound) trout from the Tucannon and Lyons Ferry fish hatcheries.

WDFW fish biologist Chris Donley of Spokane says some of the March 1-opening waters in the central district are also seeing good action on rainbow trout. Notable are Amber, Downs, Liberty and Medical lakes in Spokane County. Liberty and Downs recently received more catchable-size hatchery rainbows (see the WDFW Trout Plants at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly/> for details).

Downs Lake, on the Spokane-Lincoln county line east of Sprague, is also already providing catches of **largemouth bass**. Liberty and Medical lakes are also producing catches of **brown trout**.

Year-round fisheries at Sprague Lake, on the Lincoln-Adams county line, and Rock Lake in Whitman County, remain good, Donley said. Sprague is all rainbows and Rock has both rainbows and browns.

Donley also noted Lake Roosevelt, the Columbia River reservoir off Grand Coulee Dam, is good for rainbows and **kokanee**, "if you can find the fish."

The region's winter-season fisheries in Stevens County – Williams and Hatch lakes near Colville – offer completely open water fishing for stocked rainbows for the rest of the month. Both close March 31.

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**

Over 30 waters in the Columbia Basin lakes open to fishing April 1 and WDFW district fish biologist Chad Jackson says prospects are fair to good.

"With one exception, all these waters are located either within or adjacent to the Columbia National Wildlife Refuge south of Potholes Reservoir," Jackson said. "Over half are planted with spring and/or fall **rainbow trout** fry. Although most are in need of rehabilitation to rid them of competing fish species, nice sized trout can be found in many, including Upper and Lower Hampton lakes, North and South Teal lakes, and the Pillar-Widgeon chain of lakes."

Jackson notes that anglers who plan on fishing the refuge area lakes, especially the hike-in ones, should remember that – with the unseasonably warm weather the Columbia Basin has been experiencing the past month – rattlesnakes may be out earlier and in greater numbers than normal.

Dry Falls Lake, which also opens April 1, is located just northeast of Park Lake within the Sun Lakes State Park southwest of Coulee City. The 99-acre lake is under selective gear rules and a one-trout daily bag limit.

"Opening day success at Dry Falls in previous years was a little slow because of cold weather," Jackson said. "But this year abnormally warmer air temperatures are heating up the lake much quicker and it may very well fish better on this year's opener. I expect anglers to take 13-14-inch yearling rainbows and carryovers up to 24 inches, just like the last two years."

**Brown** and **tiger trout** are also planted into Dry Falls Lake. Jackson reported that a total of 9,900 rainbow, 1,000 tiger, and 1,000 brown trout fry were stocked into Dry Falls Lake in 2009.

"Some of the Columbia Refuge area lakes also offer excellent fishing for **warmwater** species," Jackson said. "Probably the best opportunity is at Hutchinson and Shiner lakes. Since their rehabilitations in 1997, these two lakes have developed into quality fisheries for **largemouth bass** and **bluegill**. Anglers should note that only non-motorized boats are allowed on these two lakes."

Other warmwater fishing options are the Coyote, Bobcat, and Hayes creek ponds located just south of Morgan and Halfmoon lakes. Jackson says these ponds are relatively small and shallow, so they warm up quickly, and offer good fishing for largemouth bass. Another option might be Deadman Lake located just off McManamon Road next to Halfmoon Lake.

Further north in the region, **steelhead** fishing in the upper Columbia River above Wells Dam is scheduled to close one hour after sunset on March 31.

"Steelheading can be very good during the month of March as fish become more active due to warming water temperatures," said WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff of Twisp.

"Remember, there is mandatory retention of hatchery adipose-fin-clipped fish up to the maximum daily limit of four steelhead. And since March 15, there are two section closures on the Okanogan River – one is from the first power line crossing near Coulee Dam Credit Union Building in Omak upstream to the mouth of Omak Creek, and the second one is from the Tonasket Bridge on 4th Street downstream to the Tonasket Lagoons Park boat launch. Selective gear rules are in effect for the Okanogan, Similkameen and Methow rivers."

Several Okanogan County lakes open to fishing April 1. Jateff says Spectacle Lake, southwest of Tonasket, should produce catches of yearling **rainbow trout** up to 12 inches, with carryover fish to 15 inches. Washburn Island Pond, a diked oxbow of the Columbia River near Fort Okanogan State Park, mostly produces **largemouth bass** with some **bluegill** available.

Other waters opening on April 1 for catch-and-release fishing are Davis and Campbell lakes near Winthrop, Rat Lake near Brewster and Big and Little Green lakes near Omak. Predominant species for these lakes are rainbow trout.

"Anglers planning to fish the Winthrop area lakes -- Davis and Campbell -- should check first as the ice may not be completely melted by the opener," Jateff said.

## **Southcentral Washington**

WDFW district fish biologist Eric Anderson of Yakima says fishing is still good in the region's year-round-open lakes.

"We just stocked more hatchery **rainbow trout** in I-82 Ponds 1, 2 and 3 near Yakima," he said. "About 2,500 one-third-pounders went into each of those waters this week. More will go into other waters in the region by the end of this month or early next month."

See the WDFW website for weekly catchable-size trout stocking details at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly/> .

Forecasts for strong **chinook salmon** returns to the Columbia River this summer could lead to improved fishing in the river and Washington's ocean waters. Public meetings in March and April will discuss regional fisheries issues and input will be considered as the season-setting process moves into the "North of Falcon" and Pacific Fisheries Management Council meetings to determine the final 2010 salmon seasons. This year's meetings include one in the Tri-Cities area – Tuesday, March 23, 6 - 9 p.m., at the Benton Public Utilities District (PUD) building, 2721 W. 10th Ave. in Kennewick.

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

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

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### **Random Links**

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<http://www.shopbettys.com/detail.aspx?ID=380>

Interesting book review - One Strange Fish Tale:

<http://chronicle.com/article/One-Strange-Fish-Tale/64348/>

**GOOD LUCK!**