

The Guide's Forecast - volume 12 issue number 50

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 17th – December 23rd, 2010**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro - Sturgeon catches remained poor on the lower Columbia but the fishery above Bonneville should begin to heat up when weather patterns stabilize. Anglers are already looking forward to the 2011 spring chinook return. Columbia returns are expected to be down while another great year is in the works for Willamette anglers. A bigger component of the larger 5-year old fish is expected this season.

The lower Willamette is swollen and opaque. Fish passage has virtually stopped in the torrent. The January 1st sturgeon opener may not occur as scheduled and anglers can expect an additional 29% quota reduction in 2011 due to increased sea lion predation and reduced food resources.

Clackamas water levels were very high at mid-week. There are steelhead in the system but it will only fish on the drop. Eagle Creek will be the best bet for weekend foray's and the run should be peaking about now.

Water levels on the Sandy are predicted to fall through the week and if accurate, the river should fish later this week. The bulk of the run isn't due for several more weeks however.

Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake are scheduled to be planted with legal and larger trout.

Northwest – With north coast rivers reaching flood stage over the weekend, fishing effort was non-existent. Smaller streams will be the first to recover and should produce good results for steelhead.

The North Fork Nehalem was likely to come in by today and should fish well this weekend. Returns have been good for this system and it will likely produce the best results of all north coast streams.

The Necanicum and Three Rivers will also be top bets, along with Gnat Creek, Big Creek and the Klaskanine River. Bigger baits fished in softer water will be the rule this weekend and fish will likely be on the move until flows drop. Be prepared to cover a lot of water but plunking can also be a very effective tool when flows are up. Spin-n-glos tipped with bait or loaded with scent will produce the best.

The Kilchis River is also an option but steelhead returns are lower on this system than most in the district. The Trask River, especially at the Dam Hole, could produce fair catches of both wild and an occasional hatchery stray.

Chinook are still on the table for the Wilson and Kilchis Rivers but target bucks for best tablefare, leaving hens to seed future generations. Plugs should be effective in the higher flows, especially in the tailouts but bait will produce results as well.

Still not many anglers targeting sturgeon in Tillamook Bay but the estuary should have catchable numbers present. The west channel is the likely area of interception. Crab won't be an issue.

Crabbers should focus their efforts on Netarts Bay or the lower Columbia River. The ocean won't be an option in the foreseeable future.

Southwest – Rain has slowed crabbing in many smaller bays and estuaries although Winchester and Coos Bays have remained productive.

Recent heavy rains have put fresh winter steelhead in the Alsea River where anglers may expect success into March.

Siuslaw steelheaders will begin to find winters starting in January.

Steelhead were caught in the South Fork Coquille River late last week but it has since blown out with storm fronts passing through this week.

Umpqua steelheaders are taking a break this week with the river high, muddy and unfishable.

When there's even a brief break in the downpour, try the Elk or Sixes rivers. The small systems fall quickly with the Elk inevitably a day or two ahead for coming into shape. Start high on the system when this occurs. Both fresh winter steelhead and bright chinook are in these rivers.

The lower Rogue, reported as high over the past weekend, had risen another foot by mid-day Tuesday. High, muddy water has stalled fishing efforts on the middle and upper Rogue while plunkers on the lower river are catching steelhead whenever the river is on the drop. Wild steelhead must be released until January 1st.

While plunkers enjoyed some success on the Chetco River over the past weekend, with the flow over 15,000 cfs, a break in precipitation will be required for any fishing opportunity here. There are some large fish in the system with an estimated 60-pound chinook caught and released last week. Boats out of Brookings have been making good catches of rockfish but conditions in the coming weekend will disallow launches.

Eastern – The Deschutes is high from recent east-side rainfall. Trout fishing is closed from Pelton to the Northern Reservation Boundary and steelheading closes on this stretch December 31st.

High and muddy, the Metolius may not fish until Christmas week.

The Grande Ronde remains a good option for steelheaders willing to travel but dropping temperatures could make for treacherous travel. Fishing conditions however may be ideal with anglers scoring results every 4 to 7 hours of effort.

SW Washington – Light effort and catch in the region this week as watersheds were inundated with rainfall, causing systems to jump their banks.

The Cowlitz will remain a top option when flows recede with the Kalama and Lewis a distant second option. The smaller Washougal may be a good bet as all of the district's streams showing improved return rates over last year at this time.

Columbia River Fishing Report – With very few fisheries taking place on the Columbia, anglers are more focused on what lies ahead. We'll continue to detail the 2011 prospects as they become available.

Sturgeon fishing is poor as is often the case this time of year. Also common, no keepers were tallied this week. Even shakers were hard to come by.

The John Day Pool will be an option for steelhead trollers. Better than a fish per boat was tallied last weekend. The official creel count is:

Weekly checking showed two adipose fin-clipped steelhead kept, plus three unclipped steelhead released for 10 bank anglers; and six adipose fin-clipped steelhead kept, plus three unclipped steelhead released for five boats (10 anglers).

Crabbing remains fair in the lower river but the commercial opener may quell catches.

The Guide's Forecast – Steelheading the John Day Pool may be the best thing going on the Columbia this weekend. If you participate in this fishery however, make sure your propane bottles are full of fuel as you'll be eager to drain them in the cold weather when trolling the area.

Even crabbing will be a poor option the weekend as magnum tides will limit success.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – The lower Willamette is still high and muddy. Fish counts at the Falls are at a virtual standstill.

McKenzie River levels approaches bank full on Monday this week.

There are summer steelhead as well as a few coho available in the North Santiam but water levels are extremely high here. Rain and snow over the past weekend increased the water level in Detroit Reservoir over four feet on this past Sunday alone.

The Guide's Forecast – Until the Willamette flow moderates a little and the water starts to clear, plunking off the bank below the mouth of the Clackamas will be fruitless. When conditions start to improve, winter steelhead will be available as they hug the bank on their way to that tributary.

While summer steelhead are available historically below Leaburg Dam through December on the McKenzie, it is very high with levels fluctuating this week.

It will be weeks until the water level of the North Santiam will allow fishing and that only of there is a considerable dry period. The next run will be of wild winter steelhead which provide a catch-and-release fishery here.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Clackamas levels approached flood levels early this week but water levels are expected to be falling as the weekend approaches. When conditions have allowed, a few winter steelhead have been caught.

While the Sandy blew out with flows over 16 feet early this week, forecasts of improving water conditions had steelheaders sharpening hooks this week. Early catches have been a mix of wild and hatchery winter steelhead. Fish will be scattered so plan on covering plenty of water. Results will improve in late December and into the New Year.

The Guide's Forecast – Clackamas water levels have been dropping since mid-day Tuesday. Barring another deluge, it should produce winter steelhead this weekend. The lower river is traditionally most productive for steelhead at this time of year. There are likely to be a few steelhead in Eagle Creek but as this tributary is the first to come into shape, it will get crowded.

The Sandy had dropped to less than seven feet at Bull Run on the morning of December 16th. The water is still a little off-color but is improving. While the Sandy is traditionally a later-season fishery, early returns this year are providing some action for steelheaders below Cedar Creek.

North Coast Fishing Report – With river systems high, there is little to report this week. Some good steelheading was reported on the Wilson prior to the blow-out that we're still currently on. One boat reported a 7 steelhead day on the Wilson with 4 of those 7 fish being of hatchery origin. A Chinook was also taken by this group of guided anglers.

Rivers began to come up the middle of last week and haven't come down to fishable levels yet. We'll focus the bulk of our content on what's on tap for next week; see below.

The Guide's Forecast – At mid-week, even the small streams of the north coast were nearly over their banks. The North Fork Nehalem, one of the bright spots this season already, was too high to fish on Tuesday, despite a reprieve in the weather. The good news is, on these smaller streams, they should clear rather quickly and offer up some of the best steelhead opportunities of the early season as early as Friday.

Prioritize these systems (in order) if you're a serious steelheader this weekend:

North Fork Nehalem River- It's peak season right now and given the recent condition of the river, when it comes into fishable shape (as early as today), fishing should be excellent. Use bigger baits and drift-bobbers in the bigger flows and fish near the rivers edge where calorie conscious fish will be migrating.

Gnat Creek and Big Creek, the Klaskanine River- Three great small stream options that are already likely fishing. By the weekend, they'll still be in great shape but you'll likely be a day late on fishing these systems already. You can still expect good results however. Respect private property owners and there's lots of that land in these watersheds.

The Necanicum and Three Rivers- Both great go to systems this time of year with multiple hook-ups likely. Target fish near the hatchery on Three Rivers or at the mouth, where some fish may congregate before making the trek into the tributary. Bank anglers have fair access on the Necanicum where hatchery and some wild fish should be well distributed throughout the system. Although recent wind storms may have made this river more difficult to navigate, the river was relatively free of hazards prior to the flood. Needless to say, use extreme caution when floating a boat down these systems.

The Kilchis and Trask Rivers- Not high on the priority list but viable candidates for steelhead when flows drop. The Kilchis only gets a small hatchery return these days but fish are being caught on a regular basis right now. The Trask performs well at the Dam Hole in high water situations and an occasional stray hatchery fish is available about this time of year. The Dam Hole could be fishing pretty well by Sunday.

The Wilson River- Likely one of the last to clear given the fact there is a slide associated with poor road building practices on state forest land about mile post 20, this system may not fish until late in the weekend at the earliest. Both Chinook and steelhead will be on tap and both should be present in fair numbers when the river clears. Target fish higher in the system when flows are high and lower in the systems as the river drops. Fish will be well distributed allowing both bank and boat anglers good access to them in the coming week. Big baits in big water, small baits in lower flows.

The Nehalem mainstem- Not the best option this week for several reasons. First, it's a bit early for good returns as wild fish dominate this system. Secondly, with its extensive watershed, it will be slow to clear. It may be late January before this system even fishes again. It's best to not focus on the mainstem this early in the season.

If you have to crab this weekend, Netarts Bay is really your only option and it's a poor one given the extreme tides we'll be dealing with this weekend. Keep your crab gear shelved.

Sturgeon on Tillamook Bay may be an option however cold winds will make it miserable but also keep anglers from detecting sensitive bites to the rod tip. It may be best to stick to river fishing this weekend.

Ocean fishing and crabbing is NOT an option.

Central & South Coast Reports – Winter rockfishing is generally excellent but this is a tough time of year to catch a window when launching offshore is safe.

Alsea steelheaders may be able to fish by Friday but the water should be down enough to be fishable over the weekend. Steelhead should be in with the last freshet.

The wild coho fishery at Tenmile Lake is scheduled to remain open through December. Results have been slow recently with trolled spinners taking a mix of bright and dark fish. Tenmile Creek has produced a couple of fresh winter steelhead.

Crabbing has been good at times in Winchester Bay although muddy water is washing in from the Umpqua this week. The South Jetty a good spot for rockfishing when the ocean allows safe access. while the mainstem Umpqua has started to drop, it was still over 25,000 cfs at Elkton early December 16th. It will be a while before this one is fishable. South Fork Umpqua conditions are somewhat better, flowing at 3,500 cfs on Thursday this week and dropping more quickly than the mainstem. It should fish by Friday. The flies-only stretch of the North Umpqua

has been productive at times depending on water conditions.

Crabbing has remained good for boaters in Coos Bay and is fair for those dropping rings and traps from docks. Steelheaders on the Coos River system have been catching fish which are entering after each freshet. The East and West Fork Millacoma as well as the South Coos River have been productive.

Plunkers have taken steelhead on the Coquille River but results have only been fair. The Forks may be the best place to try this week.

The Elk will continue to produce bright Chinook as winter steelhead enter through December. After that, catches will decline as steelhead numbers improve. As of Thursday this week, the level was just over five feet and the color was great. The Sixes should fish Friday or Saturday.

The lower Rogue has started to drop but levels remain too high to fish as a larger system like this one will take longer to fall into shape. The middle Rogue remains swollen and off-color although there are steelhead and coho available once conditions allow fishing. Summer steelheading has slowed on the upper Rogue due to higher flows here. Wild steelhead must be released on the Rogue until January 1st, at which time one per day up to five per year may be retained.

Plunkers have resumed efforts on the lower Chetco as the flows moderate. As of the morning of Thursday this week, it was flowing at just over 6,600 cfs at Brookings. Drift boats will start to see action when that drops to 4,000 cfs or less. Winter steelhead have started entering and there are still bright Chinook in the river with some large ones landed recently.

Central and Eastern Oregon – The Deschutes is high and muddy due to recent precipitation.

Fly anglers have been picking up some bull trout on large streamers but no winter steelhead have been reported recently. Rain this week has the water level up but the visibility is fair.

The Fall River stays in pretty good shape through much of the winter. A few rainbows are being taken on deep-fished nymphs.

with the water level extremely low at Lake Billy Chinook, caution is advised while launching a boat but it is producing some fair-sized bull trout.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report for December 2010

North Puget Sound

During the holiday season, area anglers have a decision to make: cast for steelhead in the local rivers or head out onto Puget Sound, where fisheries for crab and blackmouth salmon are under way.

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

Steve Thiesfeld, Puget Sound salmon manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), said anglers who put time in on the water could hook some nice-size fish, especially around the San Juan Islands. "Anglers fishing for blackmouth in December traditionally have had success in the San Juan Islands," he said. "The catch rates in the San Juans are some of the highest and the salmon tend to be a little larger."

Thiesfeld reminds anglers that salmon fishing in Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet) closes Dec. 1.

Crabbing also is open in some marine areas of Puget Sound. Marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu), 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 9, 10, 12 (Hood Canal) and 13 (south Puget Sound) are open for sport crabbing seven days a week through Jan. 2.

The daily catch limit in Puget Sound is five Dungeness crab, males only, in hard-shell condition with a minimum carapace width of 6¼ inches. In addition, fishers may catch six red rock crab of either sex per day, provided those crab measure at least 5 inches across. Additional information is available on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/shellfish/crab/>.

For a change of pace, anglers in the region may want to venture out in the evening and try jigging for **squid** in Puget Sound. Good spots include the Elliott Bay Pier in Seattle and the Edmonds Pier. More information on squid fishing is available on the department's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/shellfish/squid/>. Information on fishing piers is available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/piers/>.

In freshwater, several rivers are open for **steelhead** fishing, including the Skagit, Snohomish, Skykomish, Snoqualmie and Green (Duwamish). "Fishing for hatchery steelhead really gets going around mid-December, when we traditionally see the peak of the run," said Bob Leland, WDFW's steelhead program manager. "As long as the weather cooperates and the rivers stay fishable, anglers should have some good opportunities to hook a steelhead."

Leland reminds anglers that Whatcom Creek, and portions of the North Fork Nooksack, North Fork Stillaguamish and Samish rivers close Dec. 1. For details on the early closures, check the rule changes at <https://fortress.wa.gov/dfw/erules/efishrules/>.

Rainbow trout are another option for freshwater anglers, who might want to try casting for lunkers at Beaver Lake near Issaquah. About 2,300 hatchery rainbows - averaging 2 to 3 pounds each - were released into the lake in early November. Beaver Lake, which is one of several westside lowland lakes open to fishing year-round, is best fished by small boat, although anglers also can be successful fishing from shore.

Other good bets during December are Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish, where anglers can hook **perch**, **cutthroat** and **smallmouth bass**. Anglers targeting perch should fish near deep ledges, said WDFW fisheries biologist Danny Garrett, who recommends using nightcrawlers. "Perch are generally caught within a couple feet of the bottom," he said. For cutthroat or smallmouth bass, try trolling deep, 30-100 feet or more. "Anglers will likely have to put in some time to hook a smallmouth, but those that do could catch a big fish," Garrett said.

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

The holiday season has arrived and with it comes opportunities to hook hatchery steelhead on several coastal streams, crabbing and salmon fishing in Puget Sound and razor clam digs on five ocean beaches.

An early December **razor clam** dig has been approved at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks and Kalaloch. Opening dates and evening low tides are:

- Dec. 3, Fri. - 4:43 p.m., (-0.8 ft.), Twin Harbors
- Dec. 4, Sat. - 5:29 p.m., (-1.2 ft.), Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Dec. 5, Sun. - 6:14 p.m., (-1.3 ft.), Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Dec. 6, Mon. - 6:56 p.m., (-1.2 ft.), Twin Harbors

Later in December, razor clammers will have another opportunity. Tentative opening dates and evening low tides for that dig are:

- Dec. 31, Fri. - 3:40 p.m., (0 ft.), Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Jan. 1, Sat. - 4:31 p.m., (-0.4 ft.), Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Jan. 2, Sun. - 5:18 p.m., (-0.7 ft.), Twin Harbors

Clam diggers are reminded that they should take lights or lanterns for the nighttime digs and to check weather and surf forecasts before heading out. No digging will be allowed before noon on any of the five razor-clam beaches. Harvesters are allowed to take no more than 15 razor clams and must keep the first 15 they dig, regardless of size or condition. Each digger's clams must be kept in a separate container.

All diggers age 15 or older must have an applicable 2010-11 fishing license to harvest razor clams on any beach. Licenses, ranging from a three-day razor clam license to an annual combination fishing license, are available on WDFW's website at <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov> and from license vendors around the state.

Meanwhile, **winter steelhead** fisheries are under way in the region, where more and more hatchery fish are expected to move into rivers as the month progresses. During the last week of November, anglers were catching large hatchery steelhead on some rivers, said Kirt Hughes, regional fishery manager for WDFW. "December and January are prime months for hatchery steelhead fishing, and should be productive for anglers as long as the weather cooperates and the rivers stay in shape," he said.

Anglers fishing the Quillayute and portions of the Bogachiel, Calawah, Hoh, and Sol Duc rivers have a daily limit of three hatchery steelhead. In the Grays Harbor area, anglers fishing the Chehalis, Humptulips, Satsop and Wynoochee have a daily limit of two hatchery steelhead.

Bob Leland, WDFW's steelhead program manager, reminds anglers that they will not be allowed to catch and keep **wild steelhead** on eight Olympic Peninsula rivers until mid-February. Earlier this year, the annual opening date for wild steelhead retention was changed from Dec. 1 to Feb. 16 on eight rivers with fisheries for wild steelhead.

That change, adopted by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission last February, applies to fisheries for wild steelhead on the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc rivers. Those eight rivers are the only waters in Washington where wild steelhead retention is allowed.

The change was made to protect the early portion of the run, said Leland. He noted, however, that anglers will still have an opportunity to catch and keep a wild fish during the peak of the return. "Making this change will help to maintain the diversity of the run - including a range of late and early returning fish - that is important in preserving the wild steelhead population," Leland said.

Rather catch **salmon**? Anglers can find **late-run coho** salmon in some of the region's rivers, including the Chehalis and Satsop, where "nickel bright" fish have been hooked. For **winter chum** salmon, anglers should try fishing the Nisqually River. The late-chum run doesn't hit full stride until mid- to late December and generally remains strong until at least mid-January, said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "The Nisqually is a good fishery and the chum are typically bright and in good shape," he said. The Puyallup River also is a good option for anglers looking to hook South Sound chum.

Portions of Puget Sound also are open for salmon. Anglers fishing marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon Island) and 13 (South Puget Sound) can keep one chinook as part of a two-salmon daily limit. On Hood Canal (Marine Area 12), anglers have a daily limit of four salmon, but only one of those fish can be a chinook. Anglers are reminded that marine areas 5 (Sekiu) and 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca) are closed for salmon fishing.

Crabbing also is an option in some marine areas of Puget Sound. Marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu), 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 9 (Admiralty Inlet), 10 (Seattle/Bremerton), 12 (Hood Canal) and 13 (south Puget Sound) are open for sport crabbing seven days a week through Jan. 2.

The daily catch limit in Puget Sound is five Dungeness crab, males only, in hard-shell condition with a minimum carapace width of 6¼ inches. In addition, fishers may catch six red rock crab of either sex per day, provided those crab measure at least 5 inches across. Additional information is available on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/shellfish/crab/>.

An ADA-accessible fishing site is now open at the Bingham Creek Hatchery to persons with disabilities who permanently use a wheelchair, have a reduced fee license and/or who have a designated harvester card. More information is available at <http://bit.ly/b5PLcy>.

Before heading out, anglers should check the rules and regulations for all fisheries on WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/>.

Southwest Washington

This year's **winter steelhead** season got off to a promising start around Thanksgiving, when the first wave of fish started taking anglers' lures in several tributaries to the lower Columbia River. With decent river conditions, catch rates should continue to improve in the weeks ahead, said Joe Hymer, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

"Despite cold weather, that first jag of winter steelhead was definitely on the bite," Hymer said. "So long as the rivers don't rise too high or fall too low, we could be looking at a darn good fishery this year."

Best bets for winter steelhead include the Cowlitz, Lewis, Kalama, Grays, Washougal, Elochoman and White Salmon rivers, and Salmon Creek in Clark County. All have a two-fish daily limit, but Hymer cautions anglers to check the Fishing in Washington rules pamphlet <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/> for other rules specific to each river.

As with all steelhead fisheries in southwest Washington, only hatchery fish with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar may be retained. All wild steelhead must be released.

Water conditions, often highly variable at this time of year, can make a big difference in angler success, Hymer said. "If the water is too low, the fish get spooky - if it's too high it can be dangerous to be out there," he said.

As basic preparation for a steelheading trip, he recommends checking the Northwest River Forecast (<http://www.nwrfc.noaa.gov/>) or other sources before heading out. "Most anglers do best when water levels are rising or dropping," Hymer added. "It's a lot harder to catch steelhead in the peaks and troughs."

In deciding where to fish, it may also help to know how many smolts were planted in specific rivers and how many adult fish have returned to area hatcheries, Hymer said. In the first case, he recommends checking WDFW's smolt-planting schedule for 2009, available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/plants/steelhead/>. WDFW posts hatchery returns on a weekly basis at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hatcheries/escapement/>.

While winter steelhead are the main attraction right now, **late-stock coho** will continue to bite through December. Most of those fish are too dark for consumption, but some bright fish will make their way into anglers' creels, Hymer said. Best bet is the Cowlitz River where over 70,000 fish have returned this year.

Hymer also flagged several new fishing regulations that take effect Dec. 1 on specific rivers:

- **Grays River** - Opens to fishing for hatchery steelhead, hatchery coho, and adipose and/or ventral fin clipped chinook from the Highway 4 Bridge to the South Fork. The open area on the West Fork also expands from the hatchery intake/footbridge to the mouth that day.
- **Green River, North Fork Toutle River, and mainstem Toutle** from mouth to forks - Fishing is closed for hatchery steelhead and hatchery salmon.

- **South Fork Toutle River** - Fishing for hatchery steelhead is closed from the 4100 Bridge upstream. Fishing remains open under selective gear rules from the mouth to the bridge.
- **Lewis River** - The night closure and anti-snagging rule is lifted from Johnson Creek to Colvin Creek, although anglers may not fish from any floating device in that area until Dec. 16.
- **Blue and Mill Creeks (tributaries to Cowlitz River)** - Blue Creek opens to fishing for hatchery steelhead and sea-run cutthroats while Mill Creek opens to fishing for hatchery steelhead.
- **Wind River** - Catch-and-release fishing is closed for game fish above Shipherd Falls.
- **Klickitat River** - Closed to fishing for trout, hatchery steelhead and salmon, except for salmon fishing from the Fisher Hill Bridge downstream. The salmon season from the Fisher Hill Bridge downstream remains open through January.
- **Swift Reservoir** - Closed to fishing.

Meanwhile, a **razor clam** dig has been approved early this month at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks and Kalaloch. No digging will be allowed on any of those beaches before noon. Opening dates and evening low tides are:

- Dec. 3, Fri. - 4:43 p.m., (-0.8 ft.), Twin Harbors
- Dec. 4, Sat. - 5:29 p.m., (-1.2 ft.), Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Dec. 5, Sun. - 6:14 p.m., (-1.3 ft.), Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Dec. 6, Mon. - 6:56 p.m., (-1.2 ft.), Twin Harbors

WDFW has also scheduled a second dig this month, subject to the results of another round of marine toxin tests. Tentative opening dates and evening low tides for that dig are:

- Dec. 31, Fri. - 3:40 p.m., (0 ft.), Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Jan. 1, Sat. - 4:31 p.m., (-0.4 ft.), Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Jan. 2, Sun. - 5:18 p.m., (-0.7 ft.), Twin Harbors

Rather catch a **sturgeon**? Winter conditions have chilled catch rates from Bonneville Dam downriver to the Wauna power lines, but new seasons will open Jan. 1 from Bonneville to McNary Dam.

Fishery managers from Washington and Oregon will seek public comments on issues affecting Columbia River white sturgeon management and fisheries at meetings in early December in Longview and two locations in Oregon. The three meetings are designed to share information on developments that will shape sturgeon management starting next year. The meetings are scheduled at the following times and locations:

- **Longview:** Dec. 6, 6 - 8:30 p.m. Cowlitz Co. Public Utility District, 961 12th Ave.
- **Clackamas:** Dec. 7, 6 - 8:30 p.m. ODFW Northwest Region Headquarters, 17330 S.E. Evelyn St.
- **Astoria:** Dec. 9, 6 - 8:30 p.m. Holiday Inn Express, 204 West Marine Dr.

The news for **trout** anglers is that WDFW plans to plant thousands of rainbows averaging a half-pound apiece in five area lakes this month - weather permitting.

In Clark County, LaCamas Lake is scheduled to receive 8,000 fish early this month; Battleground Lake, 5,000, in the middle of the month; and Kline Pond, 5,000, distributed between the middle and end of the month. Icehouse Lake in Skamania County will also receive 1,500 fish in the middle of the month.

Anglers should also be aware that Merwin Park and the Yale Park boat ramp will be closed through December while PacifiCorp stabilizes the shoreline and extends the boat ramp at Yale Park. Additional docks will also be installed at Yale Park and the parking area will be reconfigured to include a route for the disabled.

Eastern Washington

The region's four winter-only **rainbow trout** lakes open to fishing Dec. 1 and WDFW fish biologists say they all are at top production. "Catch rates in our pre-season test fisheries averaged greater than five fish per hour," said central district fish biologist Chris Donley. "That means there are thousands of eager biters in all of these winter lakes."

Southwest Spokane County's Hog Canyon Lake, 10 miles northeast of Sprague, has rainbows ranging from 10 to 15 inches, with most around 12 to 13 inches. Hog Canyon was treated in the fall of 2009 to rid the lake of tench and brown bullhead, and re-stocked this spring with 10,000 catchable-size rainbows and 5,000 rainbow fry. "Fishers need to remember the catch limits at both Hog Canyon and Fourth of July lakes," said WDFW Enforcement Sergeant Dan Rahn. "They can have a total of five trout, but only two can be over 14 inches."

Compliance with that rule will be especially critical at Fourth of July Lake, two miles south of Sprague in Lincoln County, where Donley reports the bulk of the fish are running 12 to 15 inches, with several up to 17 inches. Fourth of July Lake was also rehabilitated in the fall of 2009 to rid it of fathead minnows. The lake was restocked with 15,000 catchable rainbows and 40,000 rainbow fry.

The other two winter season trout lakes are in Stevens County - Hatch Lake, about five miles southeast of Colville, and Williams Lake, which is 14 miles north of Colville. Both were treated in the fall of 2008 to eliminate yellow perch (and goldfish in Williams), and both were restocked this past spring and in 2009.

Hatch Lake received 850 catchable rainbows and 10,000 rainbow fry in 2009, and 6,000 catchable rainbows this year. Those fish are now ranging in size from 10 to 16 inches, with most 12 to 14 inches. Williams Lake received 950 catchable rainbows and 20,000 rainbow fry in 2009, and 10,000 rainbow fry this year. They now range from 10 to 14 inches, with the bulk of the fish around 11 to 13 inches.

Whether any of the four winter trout lakes will provide safe ice-fishing early in the season depends on the weather. According to U.S. Coast Guard guidelines, no one should venture onto lake ice unless it is at least four inches thick, clear and solid. As much as nine inches may be needed to safely support snowmobiles or other vehicles. Such ice depths can form after at least a week of below freezing temperatures, both day and night.

Ice depths vary throughout a waterway due to underwater structures, springs, geothermal activity, and water movement caused by flows, wind, or waterfowl use. Rivers and streams rarely have safe ice because of constant currents. Thawing and re-freezing can create air pockets that leave ice "honeycombed" or porous and significantly weakened.

Drilling a hole in the ice from a safe, near-shore location can give anglers an idea of ice depth. However, drilling only provides an estimate of the ice depth because shallow water near shore freezes quicker than deeper water in the middle of a lake, where springs may slow the freezing process.

WDFW does not measure ice on fishing lakes and cannot guarantee ice fishing safety. But here are a few tips to help keep an outing safe:

- Don't fish alone. Let others know exactly where you and your fishing partners are going and when you plan to return.
- Keep fishing holes small and few. When drilling fishing holes with an ice auger, keep the diameter under eight inches. Bigger holes are not necessary to land fish and can create a safety hazard for others.
- Watch your step. Avoid ice fishing near feeder streams or known springs; brush, logs, plants or docks; multiple ice cracks or ice that is popping or otherwise audible; and dark-colored ice that may be weak.
- Spread out. Too many people congregated in one area may be more than the ice can safely support. Disperse weight and fishing holes.
- Be prepared for weather conditions. Dress in layers and wear thermal underwear, fleece or wool, and wind and waterproof outerwear, especially for feet, hands and head. Take extra clothes, food, water, sand for on-ice traction, and a sled for easy on-ice transport of all equipment.
- Be prepared for emergencies. Carry equipment such as ice picks or awls, rope, and personal flotation devices. Also pack a first-aid kit and matches for starting a fire.

Donley says there's also good trout fishing opportunities through the winter at several large year-round waters, including Rock, Sprague and Waitts lakes. Net-pen-reared rainbows are usually a good bet at Lake Roosevelt, the huge reservoir off Grand Coulee Dam.

Northcentral Washington

Three Okanogan County **rainbow trout** lakes switch from catch-and-release fishing to catch-and-keep fishing on Dec. 1. WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff says Big Green, Little Green, and Rat lakes offer a daily trout catch limit of five fish that can be caught on bait.

Jateff notes that year-round Patterson Lake near Winthrop can be good for **yellow perch** during the winter. Bait can be used and there is no daily limit on perch. "In fact, anglers are encouraged to retain as many perch as possible regardless of size in order to better balance the fish populations in the lake," he said. Jateff reminds anglers using the Patterson Lake access site to have a valid WDFW vehicle permit displayed.

Fish and Roses lakes in Chelan County provide good fishing during December and throughout the winter. Yellow perch and trout are the main species in Fish Lake and trout is the main species in Roses.

Jateff cautions anglers at any fishing lakes about ice that is just starting to form during the month of December. According to U.S. Coast Guard guidelines, no one should venture onto lake ice unless it is at least four inches thick, clear and solid. As much as nine inches may be needed to safely support snowmobiles or other vehicles. Such ice depths can form after at least a week of below freezing temperatures, both day and night.

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Jateff said that **steelhead** fishing in the upper Columbia River tributaries slows down as air temperatures continue to drop during December. However, boat anglers on the mainstem Columbia above Wells Dam should have better success on the open water. Areas to try would be just upstream of Wells Dam and at the mouth of the Methow River in Pateros. Selective gear rules are in effect, except bait is allowed in the mainstem. There is a mandatory retention on adipose-fin-clipped hatchery steelhead, and a night closure.

Steelhead fishing on the mainstem Columbia picked up at the end of November with reports of fish being caught below Wells Dam, at the mouth of the Entiat River, and in the area across from the Eastbank Hatchery. Selective gear rules are in effect for the mainstem and bait is allowed.

Southcentral Washington

Catch rates for **hatchery steelhead** have picked up in the Hanford Reach, and should stay on course through the month of December, said Paul Hoffarth, a regional fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). The question, though, is whether anglers will brave the elements to catch those fish as they move upriver.

"Angler participation definitely drops off as we head into the winter months," Hoffarth said. "Also fishing tends to get spotty - good one day, bad the next. But the fish are still out there for those who want to catch some."

As with all area steelhead fisheries, only hatchery fish with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar may be retained. All wild steelhead must be released.

The Yakima River Basin is closed to steelhead fishing, but the **whitefish** season opens Dec. 1 on both the Yakima and Naches rivers. As before, the catch limit is 15 fish per day, but anglers are required to use one single-point hook, measuring no more than 3/16 inch from point to shank (hook size 14).

Anglers fishing the Yakima River above Roza Dam may use bait, as noted in the Fishing in Washington rules pamphlet. Trout fishing is catch-and-release.

Trout anglers should be aware that Mattoon Lake got 120 broodstock rainbows in late November, as did Fio Rito Lake. But WDFW fish biologist Jim Cummins cautions against trying to fish through the ice on any lake in the region in the coming weeks. "It's not safe," he said. "Most lakes are only partially frozen and the chances of falling through the ice are just too great."

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Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com

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Random Links

The McKenzie River Trust Protects 217 Acres of Freshwater Wetland on the Siuslaw River:
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The Flower Pot Smoker:

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GOOD LUCK!