

The Guide's Forecast - volume 12 issue number 51

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 24th – December 30th, 2010**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro - Although sturgeon fishing in the mainstem Columbia remains slow, there is some effort for sturgeon taking place below the mouth of the Willamette River. Fishery managers will suggest that a small slough section of the river near Rooster Rock remain closed to all fishing for much of the year. This highly productive section was responsible for a large portion of the harvested quota in 2010, crimping other options for consumptive users from Wauna to Bonneville Dam.

The lower Willamette is high and murky. In a decision this week, ODFW officials decided to delay sturgeon retention on the lower Willamette. Originally scheduled to open January 1st, a determination as to when sturgeon may be kept will be made in the first week of February.

Fly fishers have been scoring on the McKenzie whenever the water level is fishable.

Clackamas levels were on a steady drop through Tuesday this week. Pressure has been high with results poor on Eagle Creek.

Winter steelhead are being taken in the Sandy whenever water conditions allow. Expect fish to be scattered. Steelhead will make a much stronger showing by late February.

Huddleston Pond and Junction City Pond are scheduled to be planted with hatchery trout.

Northwest – North coast streams have been without significant rainfall lately, enabling driftboaters to work their favorite waterways such as the Wilson and Nestucca River. Despite the river being in ideal condition success rates were less than ideal for those working the water early in the week. The Wilson did produce a handful of early returning Alsea stock fish but not what most had anticipated, given the good returns on many smaller systems in the same district.

Those smaller streams did produce well in the higher flows. The Necanicum was good on Sunday with some boats reporting double digit opportunities, landing a mix of both semi-colored fish as well as fresh chrome ones. Drifters reported numerous wild coho digging nests in the tailouts of this system.

Despite limited bank access, the North Fork Nehalem produced good catches for anglers fishing near the hatchery over the weekend. With dropping and clearing conditions, success rates will once again fall until the next rain freshet.

Like the North Fork Nehalem, Three Rivers, a Nestucca River tributary will also produce fair to good results near the hatchery at Cedar Creek. As these smaller systems drop, the most productive time of the day will be at daybreak. Smaller baits will be necessary in the lower flows.

The Nestucca itself will be hit or miss as small pods of hatchery fish make their way upstream. The better fishing on the mainstem Nestucca will happen later into February and March, when wild and broodstock fish make their appearance.

High winds have kept anxious sturgeon anglers from testing the waters of Tillamook Bay. Keepers are likely present but the weather forecast will likely continue to discourage effort. Crabbing will remain challenging given the weather forecast as the ocean won't be an option for

recreation through the weekend.

Southwest – Rough seas have curtailed recreational crabbing effort although results have been good when conditions have allowed ocean access. Ocean forecasts for the coming week favor larger, commercial vessels.

Winchester Bay crabbing results have yet to decline due to freshets. The Umpqua system was very high and rising early this week.

Crabbing remains good in Coos Bay despite recent rainstorms. Coos River steelheaders have been doing well recently although, as usual with winters, there have been a far greater number of hookups than landings.

Coquille steelheaders have been experiencing fair to good results when the water level is dropping.

Elk River anglers have caught chinook and fresh winter steelhead recently with precipitation less than expected. The Sixes blew out early this week but will fish a couple of days after the Elk clears.

Rising river levels from weekend rainfall have kept anglers off the Rogue. Although levels were falling early this week, any precipitation will rapidly shut down fishing opportunities.

The Chetco came into shape for plunking late last week and delivered for steelheaders. Spin 'N' Glos were the lure of choice for fresh fish, half or better were of hatchery origin. Storms over this past weekend pushed the Chetco over 10,000 cfs this week but it will fish again for plunkers whenever it's 8,000 cfs and dropping. Look for the 4,000 cfs range to drift it.

Eastern – Summer steelheading is nearly done on the Deschutes with winters on their way.

Cold water angling enthusiasts should enjoy some good results on the Fall River at this time of year. Try fishing nymphs in deep slots.

Most eastern Oregon streams saw a surge in flow and turbidity last week. Prior to the muddy water, fishing was good on the John Day, Wallowa, Umatilla and Imnaha. Fishing should once again improve when snow levels drop and flows subside.

SW Washington – A few coho are still present on the Cowlitz but most are dark and attention has switched to steelhead. Catches have slowed recently as anglers focus efforts on other systems nearby or the west side of the Olympic Peninsula.

Both the east and north forks of the Lewis River are options with hatchery fish present early and wild fish coming later in February. Plugs are a good option in the dropping flows.

The Kalama has slowed and so has interest. Anglers are still working the Washougal as hatchery fish should remain present for the next few weeks.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Fishing options continue to get weaker as this time of year wears on. Salmon are absent and sturgeon become lethargic in the cooling water temperatures. To top things off, we're getting indications for future constrictions on dwindling sturgeon populations and a salmon run forecast on the mainstem Columbia that won't be as meaningful as we've seen in recent years.

The lonely reports we're getting this week show a slowdown in the John Day steelhead fishery. Not helpful in this week's scenario was the drop-down in freezing levels, leading to increased flows and turbidity on many of the systems that produce good catches this time of year. Only a few bank anglers were tallied in the John Day Pool with no catch to show for their effort.

Mainstem sturgeon anglers will still have to deal with the Rooster Rock closure this season as that fishery was responsible for a large take of the above Wauna quota last year. We'll continue to look for additional necessary conservation measures in our sturgeon fisheries on the mainstem as the population trend continues a downward slide.

The Guide's Forecast – Not much to look forward to this week on the mainstem Columbia. Sturgeon anglers may still want to explore the Bonneville Pool for keepers after the first of the year. Until then, it will likely remain one of the best options for catch and release fishing.

Although the steelheading in the John Day Pool may not be over, it could be on a definite downturn. The action may pick back up a bit this week however if freezing levels continue to drop and river systems clear a bit from last week. This fishery typically does see a slowdown for several weeks about this time of year however.

With the weather forecast on the north coast, coupled with the tide structure, crabbing on the lower Columbia doesn't look to be a great option either. It may be a good week to steer clear of the mainstem Columbia.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – The lower Willamette remains high and muddy. ODFW fishery managers announced on December 17th that the scheduled January 1 opener for sturgeon retention on the lower Willamette won't happen due to a decline in keeper-sized fish and a concern that the opener would take a big bite out of the 2011 quota. Lower Willamette and Multnomah Channel fishers can still catch and release, or as we call it, pre-fish. The determination as to when we can catch-and-keep will (possibly) be determined at a February 4th meeting. That's a lot of pre-fishing. Be safe out there.

Waters of the McKenzie have been too high to fish.

The North Santiam is high and is forecast to remain that way.

Looking for activities to entertain the youngsters over the holiday weekend? Try Junction City Pond where 100 trout weighing one pound or better have been planted this week or Huddleston Pond which was stocked with 350 pounders. Use Power Bait and enjoy the smiles.

The Guide's Forecast – With winter steelhead starting to move despite crummy water conditions, plunkers along the bank of the Willamette below the mouth of the Clackamas are likely to pick up a few. Keep offerings bright and make short casts. Don't hesitate to talk to the old-timers here if this fishery is new to you. For those interested, C&R sturgeon fishing has been pretty good. Boaters should remain cautious as debris will continue to wash downriver in the high water.

When the McKenzie drops to fishable levels, a winter trout fishery is available to entertain cold-weather fly fishers.

Despite high flows, the water clarity is good on the North Santiam. With the coho and summer steelhead fishery about over and the catch-and-release fishery for wild winters yet to come,

about the only thing this system offers is solitude.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Water levels near flood stage chased steelheaders off the Clackamas last week but the river has since dropped and cleared.

Winter steelheading was worthwhile on the Sandy prior to the last deluge although many of the fish hooked were wild, requiring release.

The Guide's Forecast – Any time the Clackamas is dropping, steelhead will be caught. The early return of hatchery winters will reward Holiday steelheaders. Fishing will continue to improve in the last week of December and into January. It's too early in the season for Eagle Creek to be a hotspot but not too early for the crowds to form.

The early return of winters to the Sandy has been a pleasant surprise to all and a substantial percentage have been fin-clipped broodstock. With only showers in the forecast and lower snow levels, the Sandy is expected to be in good shape for fishing in the coming weekend. Jig & bobber combos will take fish and winters have been smacking spinners recently as well. Hatchery steelhead numbers will improve in weeks to come.

North Coast Fishing Report – The long awaited drop in river levels finally came for Wilson River lovers this week. After a prolonged period of high water, flows finally came to within reason for driftboaters to justify a trip down a stream larger than the smaller systems such as the Necanicum or Kilchis Rivers.

Results were not what anglers had hoped but that's not uncommon after a prolonged period of high water. Fish are still likely to move when flows are subsiding, even if the clarity isn't what most would deem "migrational". (Don't bother looking that word up, you won't find it....) **Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** put in a day's effort on Tuesday, only to come up with one Alsea stock fish, losing another hooked one and a few other opportunities. Talking to other anglers on the float, he didn't get the feeling there were a lot of other success stories out there. He also sought input on anglers targeting Chinook but found little to write home about.

As I previously mentioned, fish are likely well scattered with all the high water the district has been witness to. That's why smaller streams were the better option over the last few weeks and reports coming from those areas confirm this level of detail.

Pro guide Andy Betnar (503-791-4094) reported good action on the Necanicum on Sunday. Floating with friend John Weed, the two had double digit opportunities, landing 7 fish with a mix of both fresh and coloring steelhead. The fact that nearly half of their catch was showing signs of their freshwater characteristics indicates that they've likely been in the river for several weeks already. The Necanicum run closely mimics that North Fork Nehalem as that run has been underway for several weeks also.

And speaking of the North Fork Nehalem, reports of good fishing over the weekend were common with the best fishing taking place near the hatchery. Bank anglers were doing best in the higher flows, taking fair numbers of fish on big, bright floating drift bobbers and clusters of eggs or shrimp. River flows had dropped by mid-week and success rates have fallen as quickly as the flows on this system.

Three Rivers has been the other go-to spot when flows began to subside. Over the weekend, conditions were ideal for a good butchering.

Further north, the Highway 30 streams produced good prior to the weekend with Big and Gnat Creek strong options while the South Fork of the Klaskanine was producing good catches as well. Like the other small streams mentioned, the great fishing didn't last long as low, clear water puts fish on the defensive. The action on these streams will slow until the next rain freshet.

The Nestucca and Trask are now options but don't expect to find good numbers willing to sacrifice themselves, even for Christmas dinner. You'll be hunting down small pods of fish making their way back to their liberation points; mostly at the hatcheries where they were reared for most of their young lives.

More rough weather kept anglers from recreating on larger bodies of water in search of crab, sturgeon or bottomfish. It doesn't look to get much better either. If the weather ever calms down, it should provide some pretty good harvest opportunities.

The Guide's Forecast – Overall, it may not be an impressive week of opportunity despite folks that may want to exercise their Christmas vacation time to head out steelheading. With dropping flows for much of the week, larger systems will be the best bets but only small pockets of fish will be available to lower river boaters. Bank anglers targeting fish in the higher reaches of the Wilson and to a lesser extent, the Nestucca, may find some fish as they should be well distributed throughout the systems.

Most anglers will have a higher degree of confidence on smaller streams however, with the Necanicum, Three Rivers and North Fork Nehalem the best options and the Kilchis a distant third. Throw in the Highway 30 options and there are some good opportunities but anglers will have to target concentrated fish at first light in the deeper pockets until the next rain freshet moves through.

There is another rise in river levels in the forecast but since it is still days out, it's too distant to expect it to be accurate. If it does come to fruition, the smaller systems mentioned above should have another shot of fish coming into them. Realistically however, we've seen the biggest push of fresh fish on these systems that we're going to see for the season. From here on out, it will be a mix of a few really fresh fish, along with a bulk of fish colored in varying degrees. Bait will be the best bet, especially if the flows come up again. Once they drop, fish will become more territorial as they near the spawning cycle of their life history.

It doesn't look great for other species that anglers like to pursue this time of year. Sturgeon anglers will have more gale force winds to deal with and so will crabbers. If you are motivated for holiday crab, Netarts Bay will be your best option but it may only produce for short periods of time during the high and low slack periods. That's assuming, the crab fleet isn't working the mouth of the estuary when working the offshore grounds.

Don't look for offshore recreational opportunities in the very near future.

Central & South Coast Reports – Water level will be the key to holiday chrome this weekend. Pretty much any coastal river will produce chromage if the levels are falling.

Although bottom fishers remain restricted to 20 fathoms or less, catches of rockfish and ling cod have been excellent whenever boats have been able to get out. The ocean doesn't look friendly in the coming weekend, however.

Steelheading has been slow on the Siletz but it may improve as levels drop.

Crabbing has been poor in Yaquina Bay except for fans of red rock crab in which case it's excellent.

Alsea Steelheaders have been picking up some winters. This season is just starting and will improve into January. Watch out for a downed tree below Campbell Park.

Another system which is just starting to be worthwhile for steelhead is the Siuslaw where action will also improve in the coming weeks.

Rock fishers are scoring decent catches off the South Jetty at Winchester Bay whenever the ocean allows safe access. Crabbing has been hot and cold depending on how much mud the Umpqua is pushing downstream. The Mainstem has been dropping this week but was still well over nine feet at Elkton as of Thursday this week. The North Umpqua has also been high. The best bet for the holiday weekend is the South Umpqua which is expected to fall to fishable levels and has good numbers of fresh winter steelhead available.

Coos Bay has been producing good catches of hard Dungeness to crabbers in Coos Bay which, due to its large size, has not been effected by rain storms. Steelheaders on the Coos River system have been doing well for bright winters which are entering with every freshet. The East Fork Millicoma, West Fork Millicoma, and the South Coos River have been most productive.

Steelheading has been worthwhile and is improving on the Coquille River although it has been a plunking show this week. Winters are well into the North and South Fork Coquille.

As of December 22nd, the Elk River was running a little high but had great color. Without a lot rain in the forecast, this one should fish well for the holiday weekend. Fresh winter steelhead have come in with rain this week and there are still bright Chinook in the system. For updates on river conditions, call the Elk River Hatchery at 541-332-0405. Go get 'em.

The lower Rogue has been too high to fish. High water is also hindering efforts on the middle river although steelhead and a few late coho are in the system. The upper Rogue is providing late summer steelhead fishing although action has slowed and high water has created some challenges here as well. With Big Butte Creek spewing mud, the best conditions are upstream to the hatchery deadline.

The Chetco has been on the drop for a couple of days and, at 5,900 cfs the morning of December 23rd, is in good condition for plunkers. Whether or not the flow will crack the magic 4,000 cfs mark, allowing drift boats to fish, remains to be seen.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Holiday steelhead will be available on the Deschutes although with numbers dwindling until winters show up, anglers will have to work for them. Pelton to the North Reservation boundary closes December 31st.

Metolius fly fishers should find some cooperative winter trout which are susceptible to Blue-Winged Olives.

Although levels are seasonably high, Crooked River anglers are finding some willing trout and whitefish. Dress for cold weather.

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, Humpulips, 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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- 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.

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."

TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail

Reader Donald T. wrote to ask, " am enjoying the fishing report, but I see no one reporting on the coquille river. Near Bandon."

TGF co-editor Michael Teague responded. "We're glad to hear that you're enjoying The Guide's Forecast. We honestly enjoy creating it.

"With regard to reports on the Coquille (or any other particular system), we relay recent reports which we believe to be accurate. If none are forthcoming, we never guess.

"If you fish this system, please help us (and our readers) out; send us a report! You needn't be specific other than to mention the river.

"In the meantime, we promise to share Coquille information as we receive it."

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

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com

Michael Teague: Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com

Random Links

Last-minute gift ideas from out ODFW buddies:

<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/licenses/holiday.asp>

Vicarious Holiday Adventure - Oregon fly fishing blog: Best of 2010:

<http://oregonflyfishingblog.com/2010/12/22/oregon-fly-fishing-blog-best-of-2010/>

GOOD LUCK!