

The Guide's Forecast - volume 12 issue number 52

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 31st, 2010 – January 6th, 2011**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro - A new 2011 license and tag is required beginning Saturday. Don't forget to get it before your next fishing or hunting excursion. Licenses and tags are now available from the ODF&W web site.

With a new year comes a renewed quota for sturgeon. One of the better bets will be the Bonneville Pool where anglers can often score good results targeting keepers just upstream of Bonneville Dam. A quota of 1,400 fish has been established for this fishery.

Anglers fishing from Bonneville Dam downstream to the Wauna Powerlines will also have a renewed but reduced quota beginning January 1st. Anglers are reminded however that the area near Rooster Rock Park that was so productive the last 2 years is not closed until the end of April. Check regulations for detailed information. Angling will remain poor in this stretch until spring however.

Flows over Willamette Falls have moderated and should be dropping in the coming days. Steelhead are once again on the move. The sturgeon quota for the lower Willamette appears destined for a reduction from 3,600 fish in 2010 to 2,550 in 2011 due to a decline in keeper-sized fish populations. A decision on the opener, scheduled originally for January 1, will be made in a meeting on February 5th.

Trees are a likely hazard in the North Santiam from recent heavy rain. For those trying it, use large baits or lures for catch-and-release wild winter steelheading.

The Clackamas and Sandy Rivers were on the rise earlier this week but should drop, clear and fish well with the dry, cold weather that's in the forecast.

Share ideas, comments and concerns about Oregon fisheries at the ODFW Open House on Jan. 4, 2011 from 6 PM to 9 PM at the ODFW Headquarters, 3406 Cherry Avenue NE in Salem.

Northwest – The North Coast continues to get pounded by rain storms but weather models indicate a moderating pattern which should give anglers good access to most systems over the weekend. Smaller systems will fish first and hatchery fish should be plentiful on streams receiving plants.

The North Fork Nehalem should produce well as should the Necanicum, Three Rivers, Big and Gnat Creek and the Klaskanine River near Astoria. Look for those to fish by this afternoon or tomorrow.

Larger systems such as the Wilson, Trask and Nestucca produced good results before the steady rise so fish are available on these systems. The upper reaches will fish best by the weekend and all stretches should be fishing good late in the week if weather models hold. The Vanderzanden launch on the upper Wilson has been repaired.

Chinook were caught prior to the last high water but will close on December 31st on the north coast.

Bait always works best in the higher flows when fish are moving. Eggs or shrimp will produce the

best but use hot colors along with your favorite bait. Hardware and plugs will come on stronger when flows drop.

Anglers should find a mix of darker fish and this will likely be the last good push of fresh hatchery fish on the early producing streams. Rivers with broodstock programs like the Nestucca and Wilson should produce well into April.

Good sturgeon tides begin today for anglers interested in pursuing keepers on Tillamook Bay. A calming weather pattern may afford cold-blooded anglers some good opportunity through the weekend. Sand shrimp should produce some results in the west channel.

Strong morning incoming tides will limit productive crabbing on Netarts Bay and the lower Columbia River. East winds may make the lower Columbia hazardous to boaters.

Southwest – Rough seas have prevented recreational crabbers from making much of an effort recently but when it has been possible to drop posts and traps, ocean crabbing has been good.

The mainstem Umpqua was high but stable earlier this week and should fish if rainfall moderates as predicted. A few winter steelhead have been taken on the North Umpqua but many here are wild. Steelheading was worthwhile in the South Umpqua prior to the last storm.

Coos Bay has continued to produce good catches of Dungeness between storms.

Coquille anglers enjoyed good results with winter steelhead over the past weekend until rain pushed the river out of shape on Sunday.

Chinook as well as winter steelhead have been caught whenever the Elk and Sixes have come into shape. Conditions were deteriorating mid-week but can improve quickly on these small rivers.

Water level and flow was on the rise as of December 28th and will take some time to return to decent shape. Plunking with Spin 'N' Glos has been effective on the lower Rogue in lower flows. Summer steelhead are biting whenever the water has dropped on the upper river.

Flows on the Chetco River dropped over the past weekend to allow plunking. Steelheaders were successful but rain again pushed the level up early this week. With moderating precipitation forecast for this week, fishing should be good as the levels drop. Steelhead are well distributed throughout the system and this is historically one of the best times of year for winters.

Eastern – Deep trollers scored large Mackinaw at Crescent Lake over the past weekend in chilly weather.

Steelheaders willing to brave frigid weather should find success when flows drop on the Grand Ronde, Umatilla and John Day Rivers. Cooler weather will slow flows but river ice may form if the weather pattern persists.

SW Washington – The Cowlitz will likely remain the best option for steelheaders but fish should also be available on the East and North Fork of the Lewis as well as a few fish on the Kalama. The Washougal should also harbor a mix of spent and fresh fish.

Many anglers will turn their focus to other parts of the state after the first of the year.

Razor clam digging should be good on the upcoming opener near Long Beach and north.

Opening dates and evening low tides for the upcoming 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

No digging will be allowed on any beach before noon.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Sturgeon fishing on the Columbia remains slow. New quota's go into effect on January 1st but that won't improve the fishing below Bonneville Dam. Although anglers above Bonneville will also receive a new quota beginning January 1st, action isn't likely to pick up before February but it may still be the best bet in western Oregon for sturgeon in the coming weeks. The Rooster Rock closure will again take hold beginning January 1st where hoards of sturgeon have been congregating in recent years. You can't even catch and release in this area.

Steelhead fishing in the John Day Pool and John Day Arm should improve slightly this week although we're past the peak for this fishery.

Extreme tides won't help the crabbing on the lower Columbia. Fresh water rain freshets won't be an asset either and commercial crab gear has been working the lower river with varying degrees of success.

The Guide's Forecast – Not a lot of opportunities on the mainstem this week. With a cold east wind in the forecast, it won't be a pleasant place to recreate for more than one reason. If one does have to sturgeon fish, target keepers in the Bonneville Pool as retention is allowed beginning January 1st.

Steelhead are also an option in the John Day Pool but wind and frigid weather will not make for fun conditions, even with a top up and a propane heater running.

Crabbing won't be a great option either. The east wind coupled with commercial effort will put the lower river on hold for a while.

When are spring chinook arriving?

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Rain this week will have the lower Willamette high and muddy for a while. Online data hasn't caught up but the water level will probably stall steelhead passage at the Falls for a week or so.

The McKenzie approached bank full on Wednesday this week but is rapidly dropping with the current dry weather. The river closes above Leaburg Lake on January 1, 2011.

Torrential rain has blown out the North Santiam.

Mentioned in the Fisheries Forecast, here's the official ODFW Open House announcement"

ODFW invites anglers to an open house in Salem on Jan. 4

December 27, 2010

Salem, Ore. – Oregon anglers will have a chance to share their ideas, comments and concerns about the state's fisheries with top ODFW managers at an Open House on Jan. 4, 2011 in Salem. The meeting will go from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the ODFW Headquarters, 3406 Cherry Ave. NE in Salem. The agenda will be set, in large part, by the questions and concerns raised during the meeting.

"This open house meeting is a good way to start the new year," said Rhine Messmer, ODFW Recreational Fisheries Program manager. "It's a chance for us to hear what issues are on the minds of anglers so we can take appropriate action."

The meeting is being held in conjunction with a meeting of the Inland Sports Fishing Advisory Committee, which provides public perspectives and input on implementation of ODFW's 25-Year Angling Enhancement Plan. The plan is available on the ODFW website at <http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources...ent%20Plan.pdf>.

Twice a year the fishing advisory committee meetings are open to the public as a forum for interested anglers to bring their fishery management issues, thoughts and ideas to ODFW fishery managers and administrators.

In addition to the open-forum, ODFW staff will provide an update on changes to the public process for developing new angling regulations. The department is looking for ways to improve the public process and still retain its value to the public and the department.

"We've heard from the public and from the Fish and Wildlife Commission that the current process is too cumbersome and too much time is spent on proposed regulations that would never be adopted," Messmer said.

"We are interested in hearing what anglers think of some of the key changes we're proposing to the process," he added. "The public plays an important role in the development of our fishing regulations and we want to ensure that we don't diminish the public benefits from this process." "Revisions of the public process are underway, and will be adopted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission next August. The revised process will be used for the development of the 2013 Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations.

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Contact:

Rhine Messmer (503) 947-6214

Jessica Sall (503) 947-6023; cell (503) 931-6858

Coffenbury Lake and Vernonia Pond have been stocked with surplus hatchery winter steelhead while 'trophy-sized' rainbow trout seven to 15 pounds have been planted in Junction City Pond and Timber Linn Lake.

The Guide's Forecast – Catch-and-release sturgeon fishing has been worthwhile in the lower Willamette but keep an eye out for debris

coming downstream this week. Plunking off Meldrum Bar should be a possibility as soon as the water level allows access.

Deep-fished nymphs will take trout on the McKenzie when it falls back into shape, which should occur by the weekend.

It is unlikely the Santiam system will be fishable by the weekend.

Here's that reminder that as of January 1 we'll all need 2011 licenses and tags. See **Random Links**, below, to buy yours (or a gift for someone else) online.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – As with all waterways in the Willamette Valley and much of Oregon. The Storm Tuesday night and early Wednesday morning this week blew out the Clackamas.

High, muddy and unfishable Tuesday, it has started to drop and clear but was still a little high, swift and off-color the morning of Thursday this week.

The Guide's Forecast – Water level and flow are improving on the Clackamas along with the water color.. There are good numbers of winter steelhead in the system and more are entering daily. It should be fishable by the weekend. Eagle Creek will come into shape before the river but it will also get very heavy pressure.

Early winter steelhead returns made for some decent catches over the past weekend but rain this week pushed the levels way up. The good news is that cold weather and low snow levels will have the Sandy recovering in time for fishing in a day or two. Steelhead will continue entering the river in greater numbers through January and February.

North Coast Fishing Report – Well, the perfect storms have rolled through and it'll be harvest time when flows subside on the north coast. And in some cases, that day has already come! Although at the time of this writing reports were scarce due to near-flood stage rivers, some of the smaller systems were already fishing by Thursday.

The North Fork Nehalem hotline reported cloudy water conditions still on Wednesday morning but the trap had the most steelhead that they've seen so far this year. It will likely be one of the early options and action should be rollin' red hot by Friday.

Reports from last week were encouraging with the Wilson, Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem all producing good catches. Reports were consistent with early indications for a good return this year to most north coast systems.

Chinook were still available on the Wilson at mid-week of last week with one guide reporting taking 2 good quality fish on K-11 Kwikfish when targeting steelhead. The season closes on December 31st for chinook on the north coast.

Although there has been a skeleton crew fishing for sturgeon on Tillamook Bay, reports have been scarce. Surely some fish are being taken but effort has been low due to poor weather conditions. That may change this week.

Offshore weather conditions have also been miserable. This is why you're not seeing a glut of crab on the open market right now. Weather is even keeping the commercial fleet off the high seas.

The Guide's Forecast – Well, we get to put some effort into this segment of the forecast since we're coming off a big high water event this week. As I've done in the recent weeks, we'll take a river-by-river look at what your steelheading options are, in order of favor:

- 1) Highway 30 systems (Gnat and Big Creek, Klaskanine River) should all be equally productive. Being the smallest systems on the north coast, these rivers are already fishing as you're reading this newsletter. Big and Gnat Creek have steep, short drainages so they'll clear quickly. Like most hatchery fish systems, fish will move quickly to their site of liberation so the best action, along with the most people, will be closer to the hatcheries. The lower the flow, the slower the migration so downstream anglers stand a better chance when flows begin to subside.
- 2) North Fork Nehalem Hatchery- the closer to the hatchery you are, the better the results. With little access along most of the river, the hatchery area provides the best option for bank access. There isn't much boat access on this system either. Use large baits and bright colored drift bobbers until the water drops and clears. This system will fish best on Friday and Saturday with Sunday being a noticeable drop-off in success. This will likely be the best week of the year however but you'll need to bring your own rock!
- 3) Three Rivers – same goes for this system, the closer to the hatchery, the better. In high water, fish will migrate quickly to the weir but you still have to obey the deadlines. Overall, the action hasn't been over the top here but it still remains the best south Tillamook County option this week. The upper Nestucca is a close second with some broodstock fish available. The upper Nestucca will fish best in higher flows, especially on Friday, Saturday and maybe still Sunday.
- 4) Necanicum River- Good reports already coming from this system and by Friday, it should be full steam ahead, albeit for only another day or two. Good bank access on this system and boaters should find success in the lower stretches. Like other systems, use baits as it first begins to drop but plugs and hardware will work well when it begins to clear. Fish should be well distributed throughout this system.
- 5) Kilchis River- not as many hatchery plants and a more extensive system for fish to hide. Hatchery fish should be available in the lower reaches (Kilchis Park and downstream) and even though it receives fewer hatchery plants than other systems, there should be catchable numbers present.
- 6) Wilson River- will be fishable by the weekend and steelhead should be well distributed in the system for both bank and boat anglers to take advantage of. Flows will still be strong by the weekend so work the edges and soft water with bait until flows drop. Vanderzanden's and Siskeyville should be your first floatable stretches (Vanderzanden's is fixed by the way) and don't be afraid to anchor and work slots in higher flows. Fish will be moving with regularity in the more turbid waters.
- 7) Trask River- a few hatchery steelhead strays, maybe a late winter chinook. Try the Dam Hole in higher flows, only accessible to bank anglers. The lower stretches won't fish until flows subside. The hatchery itself should provide some decent opportunities for bank anglers and one of the better options for intercepting a stray hatchery fish, maybe even a quality broodstock fish!

What else would one target with conditions like these coming up? Well, sturgeon is still an option and tides are right beginning today. Late afternoon minus tides should produce some fair fishing in the west channel or middle channel if you know that area. If the east wind keeps its cool, it may not be a great place to recreate.

But check out this offshore weather forecast:

Fri...SE wind 20 to 25 kt. Wind waves 5 ft. NW swell 8 ft.

Fri Night...E wind 15 to 20 kt...easing to 10 to 15 kt after midnight. Wind waves 4 ft...subsiding to 2 ft after midnight. NW swell 7 ft.

Sat...E wind 10 to 15 kt...easing to 5 to 10 kt in the afternoon. Wind waves 2 ft. NW swell 7 ft.

Sat Night...NE wind 5 to 10 kt. Wind waves 1 foot. W swell 10 ft.

Sun...S wind 5 to 10 kt. Wind waves 1 foot. NW swell 10 ft.

Mon...NE wind 5 to 10 kt. Wind waves 3 ft. NW swell 8 ft.

Could that be an offshore option over the weekend. It's one of the most friendly forecasts I've seen in a while. Think of the possibilities. There are some strong tide exchanges in the forecast however so bar crossings may be a bit sketchy. If the bar and the ocean are safe to recreate in, fishing and crabbing should be excellent. Log onto: <http://forecast.weather.gov/MapClick.php?minlon=-125&maxlon=-120.8&minlat=43.39&maxlat=46.91&mapwidth=354&site=pqr&zmx=1&zmy=1&map.x=124&map.y=105> for up to date offshore weather forecasts.

If you're going to crab inshore, Netarts Bay will be your best option. There's too much fresh water in all the other coastal estuaries.

Central & South Coast Reports – Offshore bottom fishing has been excellent on those rare occasions when conditions have allowed recreational boats to launch. Starting January 1, 2011, the 20-fathom restriction will be lifted so that anglers seeking rockfish and ling cod may fish all depths.

Steelheading has been slow to fair on the Siletz. The water level is expected to be fishable by the weekend.

Alsea has been fair but is improving for winter steelhead.

Steelhead have started entering the Siuslaw system where anglers are experiencing slow to fair catches. The water level is dropping and should be fine by Saturday.

Crabbing will be off the activity list for a while at Winchester Bay as high water from the Umpqua has flushed mud into the bay. Rockfish and surf perch are being caught off the South Jetty but this should only be attempted when the ocean is laying down a little. Steelheading won't be a possibility on the mainstem Umpqua this coming weekend as it will take several days for it to recover from the storm.

Steelheading has been good in the Coos system with the West and East For Millicoma tributaries particularly productive. High from rain, it's looking good to fish this weekend. The latest freshet is likely to slow crabbing in Coos Bay for a while.

Catches of fresh, bright winter steelhead have been good on the Coquille River with some of the best action occurring near the city of Coquille. Steelhead have been caught above the forks as well.

Chinook numbers are dwindling but additional winter steelhead are entering Elk and Sixes. The Elk was coming into shape nicely on the morning of December 30th. Sixes steelheaders should expect it to fish by Saturday.

The Rogue took a major hit from the storm front passing through this week. The upper Rogue will fish the earliest although winter steelhead catches have been very good on the lower river, it was running 25,000 cfs the morning of December 30th. The Applegate River opens to steelheading on January 1st.

Just as winter steelheading was getting underway in earnest on the Chetco, torrential rain hit and put an end to fishing efforts. As of Wednesday this week, the Chetco was completely out of shape. Although it's dropping as of the morning of December 30th, it was still over 10,000 cfs.

The good news is that plunkers will be catching fish this weekend and driftboaters will reap the rewards shortly thereafter. As this is just the beginning of the winter steelhead season here and action will improve into January and continue through February. Keep an eye out for trees that have fallen into the river from the storm this week.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Yeah, the storm even hit rivers on the east side. As of mid-day December 30th, the Deschutes was blown and brown.

Crooked River will usually fish well even after a deluge.

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.

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.

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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

Avid angler and TGF subscriber George B. writes. "Needed some fresh air after returning from Christmas with family, so I spent a couple of hours at Mills Bridge fishing to burn off some Christmas cookies. Landed and released a 12lb native, hard fighting fish. Had to work it up through the tayout for over 10 minutes after it took off downstream by keeping my rod tip in the water and slowly working it up.

Then 15 min later, this heavy hatchery hen absolutely hammered the pink pearl corkie I was drifting through a slot a bit upstream on the opposite shore. Battery powered scale at home didn't work, but I'm estimating 15lbs. It looked like a seal grabbed this fish by the dorsal fin because it was almost entirely ripped off, pretty recently. this fish also put up a great fight and did not want to come in for quite awhile."



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

ODFW Online License Sales:

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/online_license_sales/index.asp

2011 Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations:

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/docs/2011_Marine_Zone_Fish_Regs.pdf

GOOD LUCK!