

The Guide's Forecast - volume 13 issue number 3

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 21st – January 27th, 2011**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro - Sturgeon angling on the mainstem Columbia remains slow although a few keepers are coming from the Portland to Longview stretch. The most productive reach remains the Bonneville Pool where anglers await slightly warmer water temperatures to improve action already deemed good. A mild forecast through the weekend should improve success rates.

Spring chinook fishing options have been discussed by focus groups but final recommendations are still weeks away. Managers will focus the greatest effort downstream of I-5 again to maximize a strong return to the Willamette system.

Expect to see winter steelhead passage to be negatively effected once again by high water at Willamette Falls. Plunking will be possible at Meldrum Bar as the river recovers from recent rainfall. Springer season is just around the corner.

The North Santiam will be high in level and flow for weeks to come. Water is being gradually released from Detroit to avoid downstream flooding.

The Clackamas crested on Sunday, January 16th and will be dropping throughout the week. Conditions may allow for productive fishing late in the weekend.

The Sandy River took a wallop from recent storms, creating the third-highest water event in recorded history.

Expect to see permanent changes following the flood, which will create a learning experience for Sandy fishers. Prior to the deluge, fishing for natives and a small contingent of broodstock fish was good.

Northwest – Like most streams in the NW corner of the state, high water put systems out for the week. Prior to the high water, anglers were experiencing a lull in activity but agreeing that the season was off to a good start.

Small systems are likely to fish by today with the last push of early run hatchery fish available on the North Fork Nehalem, Necanicum and Three Rivers. The Highway 30 streams should also have a few late hatchery fish arriving. The North Fork Nehalem hatchery reported nearly 400 fish entering their trap on Tuesday. Anglers are likely to find many spawned out fish this weekend as well.

Larger systems are likely to clear by late in the weekend with quality broodstock steelhead likely to be available on the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers. Fair numbers of wild fish may begin to show as well. Anglers are also reminded that wild fish collection is necessary to continue to propagate this successful program. Contact the local ODF&W office at (503) 842-2741 to sign up for collection.

Minus tides will to too late after sunset for sturgeon anglers to take advantage of but clam diggers utilizing lanterns and mindful of the surf and tides should find success along Oregon's north coast beaches and estuaries.

Southwest – Rough ocean conditions have hampered efforts of recreational crabbers although

Dungeness are in excellent condition at this time of year. High winds and seas are in the forecast for this week as well. Bay crabbing results dropped off with fresh water reducing estuary salinity.

A raging, muddy torrent Monday this week, Umpqua level and flow is dropping and should reward with fresh winter steelhead late this week. The mainstem fishes well at the forks.

Hit the South Fork Coquille for winter steelhead as it falls into shape this week. Results have been very good here and it has yet to peak.

Elk and Sixes Rivers will come into shape rapidly with the break in precipitation this week. Steelheading is expected to be excellent whenever water conditions are good.

As the Chetco swelled and ran muddy late last week, the Rogue remained fishable and was quite productive for winter steelhead. Boaters sitting on inside bends of the river enjoyed decent action while anchor fishing with plugs. Rogue water levels are falling into shape with a respite from the earlier deluge and should fish well this coming weekend. Fish the middle and lower river; summer steelheading is poor on the upper Rogue and winters are yet to arrive.

Steelheading has been very good on the Chetco between storms this season with anglers enjoying a strong return of hatchery steelhead. Dry weather this week will put the river back into shape and it should offer excellent numbers of hatchery steelhead.

Eastern – Anglers anxious to kick off the 2011 kokanee season have been checking out Green Peter but have been disappointed as it's a mud hole this week.

Lake Billy Chinook is producing fair to good catches of kokanee and bull trout.

High water from the recent warm weather pattern will put many district river systems out of shape for this week. Action should pick up again when flows subside.

Several Eastern Oregon lakes had been fishing good for trout through the ice but recent warm weather patterns have compromised the safety in these areas. Anglers are urged to use extreme caution when pursuing fish in these lakes as many are not safe until another extended period of cold weather shores up any soft spots.

SW Washington – High water will recede on many systems by early next week and steelhead fishing will resume within the district.

The Cowlitz and Lewis Rivers posted good catches prior to the high water and fish should be available on the Kalama as well. These systems will produce the best results for anglers using bait in the higher flows. Fish will respond to plugs better when the river drops and clears.

Smelt typically make an appearance in the lower Columbia this time of year but low numbers are expected again this season. Sport and commercial take of smelt is prohibited however, as the species was listed in March of last year.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Sturgeon fishing remains less than exciting for anglers fishing the lower Columbia. There were some keepers retained in the Portland to Longview stretch as this fishery is often dictated by water temperatures this time of year. Ten boats posted 2 keepers and 31 shorts in the last creel check.

Serious sturgeon anglers are spending their time upriver of Bonneville Dam. Catches thus far have been good with higher expectations when water temperatures continue to warm. Anglers are observing temperatures hovering around 39 degrees with more prime temperatures in the low 40's to produce really good fishing. A keeper for every other boat was counted last weekend

Steelhead trollers in upstream impoundments are still taking fair numbers of fish but far from late fall catches. ODF&W creel reports posted this in their weekly report:

The Dalles Pool:

Weekly checking showed six unclipped steelhead released for four boats (nine anglers).

John Day Pool:

Weekly checking showed no catch for five bank anglers; and three adipose fin-clipped steelhead kept, plus six unclipped steelhead released for three boats (six anglers).

It's still too early to discuss spring Chinook options but season setting is just around the corner. One thing seems for sure, the bulk of the opportunity will take place downstream of the I-5 Bridge to take advantage of a healthy return of Willamette bound springers that is forecasted for the 2011 season.

The Guide's Forecast – Smelt should be present in the lower reaches of the Columbia River, drawing some sturgeon to the middle river around Wauna. Effort and catch will remain light however as this section of river has not produced quality results for quite some time in recent history.

Those serious about their keeper sturgeon fishing should be concentrating their efforts upstream of Bonneville Dam. Keeper fishing should only get better as water temperatures warm.

Although some recent reports from crabbers in the lower river indicate catchable numbers are still available, strong tides and a strong rush of fresh water are likely to slow catches. Couple this with a commercial presence and opportunity will slowly dwindle for recreational crabbers for this productive fishery.

Everyone is waiting on springers!

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – The lower Willamette remains very high from rain last weekend. It crested at 24.24 on Tuesday night and was still over 22 feet as of Thursday this week. Much of the bank space normally occupied by plunkers is underwater. Fortunately, sturgeon like high, muddy water and until the levels drop and clear, those will be the fish to target.

Steelheading on the Santiam system will be difficult in high water conditions.

While numbers over Willamette Falls have been less than spectacular, steelheading has been fair on the Molalla River. Keep in mind that winters upstream of the Falls are natives, requiring release, but this can be fine sport.

Sign up now for an Oregon Boaters Safety Class scheduled for Saturday, February 12th from 8 AM to 5 PM. The cost is only \$5 and will provide participants with the information necessary to acquire an Oregon Boater's Card, which is required to operate any powered watercraft 10 feet or longer. Classes will take place at the Keizer Fire Station, 661 Chemawa Road NE in Keizer. Call 503-463-4956 or 503-390-9111 for information or to register.

The Pacific NW Sportsmen's Show will be at the Expo Center from February 9th thru 13th this year.

ODFW sez, "Three Willamette Valley lakes and ponds are scheduled to receive trophy-sized rainbow trout this week from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's brood program at Roaring River fish hatchery. The big rainbows will be released Friday, Jan. 21 at St. Louis Pond #6, Sheridan Pond and Walter Wirth Lake. These fish will average about three pounds apiece."

The Guide's Forecast – Catch-and-release sturgeon fishing has been fair to good with a few keeper-sized fish coming from the stretch around the Sellwood Bridge. Keep a sharp eye upstream if you boat it as there is still a great deal of debris washing downstream.

The North Santiam is forecast to remain too high to fish for at least the week to come.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – The Clackamas is high but is gradually clearing. The recent torrential rains encouraged fresh winter steelhead to enter the system. Eagle Creek is dropping and clearing. Winter steelhead are being caught on jigs, corkies and yarn. Try scenting the yarn to increase effectiveness.

On Sunday, January 16th, the Sandy hit the third highest level ever recorded, 21.85 feet. To put this in comparison, the record high level, set in 1964, was 22.6 feet. Sandy levels are predicted to be around 10 feet for the weekend, but it will be some time before the river is fishable. Huge amounts of sand and silt were moved downstream by the flood event along with trees, logs and stumps. Expect to find major changes in the Sandy. It will be a learning experience for all.

The Guide's Forecast – Expect the clack to be too high to fish well in the coking weekend.

Steer clear of the Sandy this coming weekend and don't be to surprised if it won't fish until February. Current Sandy level here (including gauge correction):

<http://water.weather.gov/ahps2/hydrograph.php?wfo=pqr&gage=sndo3>

North Coast Fishing Report – This will be an easy column. We're just coming off a major flood so very little fishing has taken place this week. Smaller streams were really only an option on Thursday with very little effort, even on the North Fork Nehalem on Wednesday. The North Fork was still at 54 inches on Wednesday, still carrying quite a bit of color to it. Hatchery workers reported several hundred fish in the trap and recycling was underway. It was expected to fish good on Thursday and Friday. Bring your own rock.

No other options existed on the north coast this week, that is, unless you wanted to fish on Highway 101 in downtown Tillamook or Seaside.

The Guide's Forecast – Fortunately, better options exist into the weekend with small streams a strong option by Friday or maybe even today (Thursday). On top of that list is the North Fork Nehalem with a known quantity of hatchery steelhead still available. Although there has to be a high percentage of spawned out steelhead in the system, the hatchery recorder indicated that there were fresh fish in the trap. Good numbers of fish are likely to be recycled as ample numbers are clearly going to show for an adequate egg take this season.

Other strong options include the Necanicum and Three Rivers with good numbers of both spawned out and a few fresh fish available. On good return years, the quality fish return time is

extended for a longer period of time. It's likely that a fair push of native fish will show on this river drop. Smaller numbers of fish will likely be available on the Kilchis and Highway 30 streams such as Gnat and Big Creek as well as the Klaskanine River. As a general rule, bigger baits in bigger water but at the time of this reading, flows will be dropping nicely and most of these smaller streams will become pretty clear by the weekend. This will require more stealthy techniques by Sunday.

NOTE: A slide near Kilchis Park may limit access to this quality upper boat ramp facility so check with Tillamook County Parks Department before making this trip.

Anglers looking for bigger water and brighter fish will want to concentrate on the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers. With good broodstock programs underway, by late in the weekend, some good prospects for both hatchery and wild fish should exist on these waterways. If it's just natives you seek, the Kilchis and Trask should be added into the mix as those systems will have a higher ratio of wild fish and a lower ratio of anglers. Some quality broodstock fish are likely to be caught on the Trask later this week too. The upper reaches of these larger systems will fish first and are likely to come in about a day later than the smaller systems and a day earlier than the lower reaches. Adults will also take advantage of the higher flows and make tracks on the first part of the drop. This gives bank anglers good access to fresh fish in the upper reaches too. Bait will produce best over the weekend with shrimp or eggs likely to do equally well. Save the plugs for lower flows unless you're anchored up in a strategic run or tail-out. Use lots of scent if you're employing this technique.

The Nehalem won't be fishing for a while.

Good tides are taking place right now for sturgeon but by the weekend, tides won't be quite as conducive since the peak part of the tide will take place after sunset. There should be fish available but effort remains light.

Crabbers won't do all that well either in the upcoming tide series. The strong tides will limit the most productive periods of opportunity. If its shellfish you seek, bring your lantern along and ply the beaches near Seaside for hungry razor clams. If the surf lies down, the digging should be productive.

Ocean recreation looks to be a poor option into the early part of next week. Stay safe!

Central & South Coast Reports – It's gonna be a rough weekend offshore. This probably comes as no surprise to those familiar with the ocean off the Oregon coast in wintertime ... opportunities for access are rare at this time of year. Taking advantage of those windows of opportunity when seas 'calm,' however, is rewarding. Catches of rockfish and ling cod are good and ocean crabbing will yield large, hard Dungeness. Keep an eye on offshore conditions to reap the bounty.

Steelheaders on the Alsea are seeing fresh winter steelhead entering. Results will only improve in the coming weeks.

The Siuslaw will be dropping into shape with dry weather this week. Results for winter steelhead have been fair to good. Lake Creek has also been producing some nice steelhead.

Tenmile Creek has been productive for winter steelhead and this smaller stream will remain fishable when others are high and muddy.

Waters of the mainstem Umpqua remain too high to fish and a recovery by the coming weekend is unlikely, even without further precipitation. Try higher up on the South Umpqua for the best shot at fishable water as well as the best chance for fresh winter steelhead. The flies-only stretch of the North Umpqua has been fair when the water is clearer and the level is dropping.

Crabbing will be slow in Coos Bay following heavy rain earlier in the week. Surf perch fishing has been worthwhile on ocean beaches in the Charleston area when ocean conditions have allowed. The Coos River blew out with the deluge but steelheading should be productive in the next couple of days. Start on the forks of the Millacoma, then try the South Fork Coos as the water levels drop.

Try plunking on the Coquille system starting with the North Fork. As water conditions improve, steelhead is expected to be quite good here.

As of January 20th, the Elk River was 4.7 feet, emerald green in color with steelhead scattered throughout the system. With only light showers in the forecast this week, both the Elk and Sixes should fish well this weekend.

Water level and flow remains high but plunkers may get a chance with dry weather in the forecast. Winters are moving into the middle Rogue where weekend steelheaders may get a shot at them if water conditions improve. Winter steelhead have yet to show on the upper Rogue and with the summer steelhead fishery all but a memory, this stretch has little to offer to anglers.

As of Thursday, January 20th, the Chetco was flowing at 3,870 cfs. At this level, drift boats can successfully drift the river. With only showers in the forecast on Friday this week, barring a drop to less than 2,000 cfs, the Chetco will be a best bet for good winter steelheading this coming weekend.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Reports are hard to come by from Central and Eastern Oregon at this time of year. Readers ... any insight or information would be appreciated!

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report for January 2011

North Puget Sound

In January, weather conditions often dictate where an angler chooses to fish. "If the rivers are in shape, steelheading is a good bet," said Steve Thiesfeld, salmon manager for WDFW. "But if the rivers are blown out, blackmouth salmon fishing in the marine areas of Puget Sound is probably a better option."

Areas currently open for salmon fishing include 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). Anglers fishing those marine areas have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook salmon.

Thiesfeld said anglers should focus on the San Juan Islands, where fishing for blackmouth traditionally has been decent this time of year. Later in the month, anglers also might want to consider fishing Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet), which opens for salmon Jan. 16. "It's been slow in other areas of central Puget Sound - marine areas 10 and 11 - during the last weeks of December," he said. "But hopefully the fish will be there mid-January and the fishery will start strong."

Meanwhile, the **Puget Sound crab fishery** is winding down. The fishery closes at sunset on Jan. 2, and crabbers are reminded that they are required to report their winter catch to WDFW by Feb. 1. Reports are due for the season running Sept. 7 to Jan. 2, whether or not crabbers actually fished or caught crab. To submit catch reports, crabbers may send their catch record card to WDFW by mail or file their report on the department's licensing website. The mailing address is WDFW CRC Unit, 600 Capitol Way N., Olympia, WA 98501-1091. The online reporting system is available Jan. 3-Feb. 1 at https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/wdfw/puget_sound_crab_catch.html.

Winter is prime time to jig 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 **hatchery steelhead** fishing, including the Skagit, Stillaguamish, Snohomish, Skykomish and Snoqualmie. "As long as the weather cooperates and the rivers stay fishable, anglers should have some good opportunities to hook a hatchery steelhead," said Bob Leland, WDFW's steelhead program manager.

Freshwater anglers also might want to try fishing for **perch, cutthroat** and **smallmouth bass** at Lake Washington or Lake Sammamish. Anglers targeting perch should fish near deep ledges between 60 and 100 feet, 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 the same depth with hard baits near the bottom or around schools of smelt. "Anglers will likely have to put in some time to hook a smallmouth this time of year, but the bass that are caught are often trophy-sized fish," Garrett said.

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

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

Winter has arrived, but area anglers can still catch hatchery steelhead on several coastal streams, salmon in Puget Sound and razor clams on five ocean beaches.

A **razor clam** dig has been approved at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks and Kalaloch. Opening dates and evening low tides 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 hatchery steelhead** fisheries are in full swing at a number of the region's streams. "If the weather cooperates, steelhead fishing should be good throughout January," said Kirt Hughes, regional fishery manager for WDFW.

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. Hughes reminds anglers that they will not be allowed to catch and keep **wild steelhead** on eight Olympic Peninsula rivers until mid-February. In early 2010, the annual opening date for wild steelhead retention was changed from Dec. 1 to Feb. 16 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, adopted by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission last February, was made to protect the early portion of the run, said Hughes. He noted, however, that anglers will still have an opportunity to catch and keep a wild fish during the peak of the return.

Freshwater anglers looking to hook salmon also have opportunities in January. Anglers can find **late-run coho** salmon in some of the region's rivers, including the Humptulips, Naselle, Satsop and Willapa, said Hughes. "The Skookumchuck also is a good bet for anglers fishing for late-run coho, as well as steelhead," he said.

For **winter chum** salmon, anglers should try fishing the Nisqually.

On Puget Sound, Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound) remains open for **salmon**. However, regulations for Marine Area 13 change Jan. 1, when anglers will have a daily limit of one salmon. Anglers should be aware that salmon fisheries in marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon Island) and 12 (Hood Canal) close Jan. 1. Before heading out on the Sound, anglers should check the regulations on WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/>.

The **Puget Sound crab fishery** closes at sunset on Jan. 2, and crabbers are reminded that they are required to report their winter catch to WDFW by Feb. 1. Reports are due for the season running Sept. 7 to Jan. 2, whether or not crabbers actually fished or caught Dungeness crab. To submit catch reports, crabbers may send their catch record card to WDFW by mail or file their report on the department's licensing website. The mailing address is WDFW CRC Unit, 600 Capitol Way N., Olympia, WA 98501-1091. The online reporting system is available Jan. 3-Feb. 1 at https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/wdfw/puget_sound_crab_catch.html.

Opportunities to dig **clams** at Hood Canal increase Jan. 1, when Belfair State Park in Mason County opens for littleneck, butter, manila and other clams. Recent surveys indicate that the clam population will support a fishery at the park. For more information on clam-digging opportunities in Hood Canal and elsewhere, visit WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/shellfish/beaches/>.

Southwest Washington

Winter steelhead are still the name of the game in the Columbia River Basin, although several other fisheries are beginning to compete for anglers' attention. **Sturgeon** fishing reopens Jan. 1 from the mouth of the Columbia to McNary Dam, and state hatchery workers have begun planting dozens of regional lakes with thousands of **rainbow trout**.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has also scheduled an evening **razor-clam** dig to run over New Year's weekend. Digging will be allowed after noon on Dec. 31 and

Jan. 1 at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks and Kalaloch. On Jan. 2, digging will be allowed at Twin Harbors only.

Meanwhile, anglers continue to reel in adult hatchery-reared **winter steelhead** - along with some late-run **coho salmon** - from a number of Columbia River tributaries. The Cowlitz River is still the best bet for steelhead, although the Lewis, Kalama, Grays, Washougal, Elochoman and White Salmon rivers, and Salmon Creek in Clark County are also producing fish, said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist.

"As usual, river conditions basically determine success at this time of year," Hymer said. "Most anglers do best when water levels are rising or dropping. It's a lot harder to catch steelhead in the peaks and troughs."

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. The daily limit on all area rivers is two hatchery steelhead.

Starting Jan. 1, anglers may also retain up to two adult hatchery **chinook salmon** per day on the mainstem Columbia from the I-5 Bridge downstream and in the Cowlitz and Deep rivers. The daily limit is one chinook per day in the Lewis and Kalama rivers. While the bulk of the spring chinook run isn't expect to arrive until March, Hymer said some lucky anglers will likely start catching early-arriving fish by late January or early February.

"It's a good to keep the chinook regulations in mind, even if you're fishing for steelhead," he said. "Somebody has to catch the first springer of the year, and it could be you."

WDFW recently released preliminary forecasts of Columbia River salmon and steelhead returns for 2011, predicting an upriver run of 198,400 adult spring chinook compared to an actual return of 315,300 last spring. However, the upper Columbia summer chinook run is expected to be significantly higher than in 2010.

The preliminary forecasts, along with currently anticipated fishing seasons, are posted on WDFW's website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/reports_plants.html . Current fishing rules are described in 2010-11 **Fishing in Washington** pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/>) and the Northwest River Forecast is available at <http://www.nwrfc.noaa.gov/> .

Ready to catch some **sturgeon** ? All fishing areas will open to anglers Jan. 1 from the mouth of the Columbia River to McNary Dam, except for a small area in Sand Island slough upstream from Beacon Rock as outlined in the current regulation pamphlet. Fishery managers from Washington and Oregon are scheduled to meet Feb. 8 to consider changes to current catch quotas, but Hymer said that won't affect the fishery until later in the season.

"The main concern right now is the cold weather," Hymer said. "A warming trend would likely improve the bite when the season gets under way."

But there will be no fishing of any kind for **eulachon smelt** this year, he said. Once abundant in the Columbia River Basin, eulachon were listed for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act last May. Since then, Washington and Oregon have closed all sport and commercial dipping in the Columbia River system. In addition, Washington has closed all marine and freshwater areas statewide for eulachon smelt.

Anglers can, however, still use any frozen smelt they have in their freezer as bait, said Capt. Murray Schlenker, WDFW enforcement chief for southwest Washington. "There's no law about possession," he said. "You just can't fish for them."

As an alternative, anglers might consider spending a winter's day fishing for **trout** on a local lake. Throughout January, WDFW plans to stock more than two-dozen lakes in southwest Washington with thousands of rainbow trout ranging from 8-12 inch "catchables" to 5-8 pound broodstock.

"There's a lot of interest in trout fishing in winter," said John Weinheimer, another WDFW fish biologist. "During breaks in the weather, people come out to fish for them like crazy." The timing of the fish plants will vary according to the weather and the availability of tanker trucks, but Weinheimer said last year's stocking plan is a good indication of which lakes will fish. That stocking plan is posted at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/plants/region5/> on WDFW's website. "All of these lakes are ice-free in winter," he said. "Given weather conditions, we don't encourage anyone to fish through the ice in southwest Washington. It just isn't safe."

Eastern Washington

Lake Roosevelt is the region's hot spot for January fishing, says WDFW eastern regional fish program manager John Whalen. The huge Columbia River reservoir off Grand Coulee Dam provides winter fishing opportunities for big net-pen-reared **rainbow trout**. Boat and shore anglers can take up to five trout a day, although only two over 20 inches can be retained. Roosevelt also has **kokanee, walleye, smallmouth bass, burbot, lake whitefish** and **yellow perch**, but the **rainbows** star at this time of year.

Four winter-only rainbow trout lakes - Stevens County's Williams and Hatch and Spokane County's Fourth-of-July and Hog Canyon - have been producing well since opening Dec. 1. Access and style of fishing, through the ice or open water by boat or from shore, vary with winter conditions.

No agency or organization is responsible for measuring ice thickness on area lakes, so there are no guarantees that fishing through the ice is safe, said WDFW central district fish biologist Chris Donley. 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.

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. Ice depths vary throughout a waterway due to underwater structures, springs, geothermal activity and water movement.

Donley suggests following these winter fishing tips:

- Don't fish alone. Let others know 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. Also, avoid dark-colored ice; it may be weak.

- Spread out. Too many people congregated in one area may be too much for the ice to 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 opportunity through the winter at several large year-round waters, including Rock in Whitman County, Sprague Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line, and Waitts Lake in Stevens County.

In Lincoln County, WDFW Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area manager Juli Anderson reports shoreside openings in Z Lake, thanks to an aeration system. "I don't know how many folks are trekking in to Z Lake to fish those rainbow trout, but they're available," she said.

The Snake River **steelhead** catch season continues, but according to WDFW fish biologist Joe Bumgarner, it's been one of the slowest in the past decade. He guessed that those who brave the elements on the river will likely average no better than 25 hours of fishing per steelhead caught. "Lately angler effort has been so low, and checked fish so few and far between, that it's really hard to say what an average catch rate is," Bumgarner said.

Northcentral Washington

WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff of Twisp says **steelhead** fishing in the upper Columbia River is usually slow at this time of the year, but there are exceptions. "There have been reports of fish being caught within the mainstem Columbia, as well as the Okanogan and Methow rivers," Jateff said. Anglers should keep a close eye on air temperatures, because anything over 32 degrees keeps the rivers fishable and free of ice."

Jateff reminds anglers of the mandatory retention of adipose-clipped hatchery steelhead from Priest Rapids Dam upstream including the Wenatchee, Entiat, Methow, Okanogan, and Similkameen rivers.

As a change of pace from steelheading, Jateff suggests that anglers try fishing the Methow River for its sizeable population of **mountain whitefish**. "These fish can be caught readily on flies," he said. The daily limit is 15 whitefish, no minimum size, with selective gear rules in effect for whitefish in all areas that are currently open for steelhead.

Winter **rainbow trout** lakes in the Okanogan are usually in good shape for ice fishing in January. Jateff recommends Davis Lake in the Winthrop area, Big and Little Green lakes in the Omak area, and Rat Lake near Brewster. For anglers seeking **yellow perch**, Patterson Lake near Winthrop has a good population of six to 10-inch perch, as well as a few **kokanee** and **rainbow trout**.

Other popular ice fishing lakes in Okanogan County are Sidley, located east of Oroville, and Bonaparte, located east of Tonasket. Sidley has rainbow trout and Bonaparte has **eastern brook trout** and kokanee.

Jateff warns anglers to be aware that ice conditions can change at any time and become unsafe. 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. The ice can reach these standards 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. 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, this approach provides only 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 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. Also, avoid dark-colored ice; it may be weak.
- Spread out. Too many people congregated in one area may be too much for the ice to 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.

Southcentral Washington

Anglers continue to reel in hatchery **steelhead** from portions of the Columbia and Snake Rivers, although the lure of bigger fish will undoubtedly prompt some to switch gears. Starting Jan. 1, Lake Umatilla - also known as the John Day Pool - will reopen for retention of **white sturgeon** that measure 43 to 54 inches from their snout to the fork in their tail.

Anglers planning on taking part in the fishery should be aware that the annual sturgeon quota for Lake Umatilla is 165 fish, said Paul Hoffarth, a regional fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "In recent years, the quota has been reached in a couple of months, so I'd advise anglers to get out early if they want to take a sturgeon home for dinner," he said.

Another option is Lake Wallula (McNary Pool), including the Snake River below Ice Harbor Dam, which will reopen for sturgeon retention Feb. 1.

Meanwhile, **steelhead** fishing has been up and down, typical of the winter fishery, said Hoffarth, who noted that some of the best catches on the Columbia River have been reported in the Ringold area. In the Tri-Cities area, the fishery is open for retention of hatchery steelhead from John Day Dam upstream to the wooden power line towers at the old Hanford town site through March 31, 2011.

Another section of the Hanford Reach is open to fishing for hatchery steelhead from the Highway 24 bridge (Vernita Bridge) upstream to Priest Rapids Dam. Fishing in that area, which opened Dec. 8, is one of a number of angling opportunities funded by the Columbia River Salmon and Steelhead Endorsement Fee.

The lower Snake River is also open for the retention of hatchery steelhead through March 31. The daily limit in the Snake River is three hatchery steelhead and barbless hooks are required. **Walleye** fishing can get slow in winter, but there's always a chance of catching a lunker. Hoffarth said some of the largest walleye of the year are boated during the winter months near the Tri-Cities - including the 19.3-pound state record taken in Lake Wallula in 2007.

TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail

Subscriber '**lady**' wrote this week, "You never made mention of sturgeon fishing on the Willamette River I see a lot of boats coming and going are they fishing for sturgeon"

TGF co-editor Michael Teague responds, "We do report on sturgeon fishing in the lower Willamette though not as frequently when it's all catch-and-release (as it is now). There is a report this week, however, and we'll try to keep you abreast of the latest in weeks to come. Updates will come weekly when the Willamette re-opens to retention in February."

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com

Michael Teague: Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com

Random Links

River Recon: Reading Water Video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NqWK23tT6SM>

Big trout ice fishing:

http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=54a_1295294204

GOOD LUCK!