

The Guide's Forecast - volume 13 issue number 6

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 11th – February 17th, 2011**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Although bank anglers are catching a few keeper sturgeon in the Bonneville Pool, boat anglers continue to produce good results with nearly a fish per boat average over the weekend. Although cooler temperatures may slow the bite, it remains the best prospect for keepers in the region.

Sport caught spring chinook have been reported and officially tallied in the mainstem Columbia downstream of Portland. It's a sure sign that a good return is imminent. Anglers should continue to pursue their quarry downstream of St. Helens for the best opportunity to intercept a Willamette bound salmon which are in greater concentrations than later returning Columbia fish.

Over 2,300 winter steelhead have crossed at Willamette Falls. Plunking has been slow at Meldrum Bar.

Sturgeon retention days were announced on Tuesday with the Willamette reopening three days per week (Thursdays – Saturdays) beginning February 17th and continuing until a harvest guideline of 2,550 keepers is obtained. With the prolonged closure and given the concentration of keepers in the lower Willamette, this season likely won't last long.

McKenzie fly fishers continue to find foot-long redsides on the lower river. Trout are responding to deep-dredged nymphs as the water remains cool.

Steelheading is spotty on the Sandy where water conditions are a combination of clear and roiled depending upon river current.

Clackamas water is in fairly good shape but steelheading has been very slow.

The Pacific Northwest Sportsmen's Show runs through Sunday at the Portland Expo Center.

Northwest – A slight rise in river levels improved catches after the weekend on an already shiny season for north coast steelheaders. Broodstock and wild steelhead continue to bite best on the Nestucca and Wilson systems. Broodstock collection is ahead of last year at this time but more wild fish are needed from the Wilson and Nestucca into the month of April.

Joel Aylor of Sisters Oregon landed a mint-bright 7 pound wild steelhead on the Nestucca last week. He caught the fish below First Bridge on a K-11X Kwikfish near the head of the hole where steelhead concentrate in lower flows. This fishery should begin to peak over the next several weeks.

A stronger weather system is on tap for next week, which should really jump start late season catches on many north coast streams.

Sturgeon anglers have fared well on Tillamook Bay with another set of good tides starting over the weekend. These tides should also produce good catches of razor clams along north coast beaches if the surf cooperates.

Brief periods of calm weather has allowed for some offshore fishing to take place. Ling cod catches have been steady out of Depoe Bay and Garibaldi when weather allows. Although ocean

crabbing has only been fair, it remains one of the best options on the north coast with the exception of the lower Columbia River. Ocean conditions don't look favorable over the weekend with the next weather system bringing winds from the south.

Southwest – Crabbing has been good in Winchester Bay having improved following the freshet. The mainstem Umpqua has sufficient level and flow to maintain decent steelheading conditions and catches have been worthwhile. North and South Umpqua levels are low, the water clear and steelheading is poor to slow. Low water tacticians have been taking a few on the East Fork Millicoma.

Coos Bay is producing good catches of Dungeness. When ocean conditions have allowed, anglers have made good catches of rockfish from the jetties.

Steelhead catches have slowed on the Coquille as the water level has continued to drop.

Elk and Sixes river remain too low and clear to fish well. Rain is needed to re-fire the winter steelhead fishery here.

Catches of winter steelhead have been good on the middle and lower Rogue over the past week. With no major fluctuation in water levels, it should remain productive in the weeks to come. Winter steelhead have started entering the upper river but fishing conditions are tough. The hatchery reported several entering the facility last week. Precipitation would improve fishing conditions river wide.

Rockfish limits are being taken nearshore out of Brookings Harbor and ling cod catches are improving. Herring should be entering any time. Steelheaders skilled in low-water techniques have continued to take a few fish from the clear waters of the Chetco but overall it is slow. The river flow is forecast to drop to less than 1,000 cfs this week.

Eastern – Now that the water level has dropped somewhat, prospects for trout on the lower Deschutes have improved.

Walleye prospects improve dramatically this month with some of the largest fish of the season taken this time of year. Water temperatures will dictate technique but trophy fish are likely to fall in the coming weeks.

Kokanee anglers are anxious to fish Wallowa Reservoir which is forecast to produce the largest fish in the state and possibly yet another world record.

Steelheaders working the Umatilla have seen an improvement in steelhead catches. Pending weather changes, fishing should remain good, especially in the afternoons, when temperatures are on the rise.

SW Washington – Area rivers remain in good shape for what few steelheaders are taking advantage of. Fair catches are coming from the Kalama with steelhead also available in fair numbers on the Lewis system.

The Cowlitz remains fair but should improve in the coming weeks. The river remains somewhat turbid however.

Great numbers of smelt are reported from the Cowlitz River although commercial and sport dippers are not allowed to harvest this season. The glut of smelt could draw sturgeon to the area for anglers to take advantage of.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Although a handful of spring Chinook have been reported from the mainstem Columbia, stealing the show is the official season shaping of our Columbia River salmon and sturgeon seasons at this weeks compact hearing on Tuesday. Overall, we have a lot to be grateful for but we always dream for better opportunities as well.

The Willamette will provide the best options for spring Chinook and in the near future, for sturgeon as well. Here is the official press release from ODF&W:

CHINOOK SALMON

Columbia River from Buoy 10 to Bonneville Dam

Prior to March 1, permanent rules, as outlined in the 2011 Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations, remain in effect.

Boat angling will be allowed seven days per week from March 1 through April 4 from Buoy 10 upstream to Rooster Rock. Bank angling will be allowed during the same timeframe from Buoy 10 upstream to Bonneville Dam. This fishery will be managed to the available guideline of 7,750 upriver spring chinook and may be shortened or extended depending on results.

The daily bag limit is two adipose fin-clipped adult salmon or steelhead in combination, of which no more than one may be a chinook. The rules also allow retention of up to five adipose fin-clipped jack salmon per day.

Columbia River from Bonneville Dam to the Oregon/Washington border

This area is open to retention of adipose fin-clipped steelhead through March 15 under permanent rules, as outlined in the 2011 Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations.

Effective March 16, this area will be open to retention of adipose fin-clipped steelhead and adipose fin-clipped chinook through April 24. This fishery will be managed to the available guideline of 1,050 upriver spring chinook and may be shortened or extended depending on results.

The daily bag limit is two adipose fin-clipped adult salmon or steelhead in combination, and up to five adipose fin-clipped jack salmon per day.

Angling for salmon and steelhead from a boat between Bonneville Dam and the Tower Island power lines, approximately six miles down stream from The Dalles Dam, is prohibited. Bank angling is allowed in this area.

Willamette River

The Willamette River is open to retention of adipose fin-clipped adult chinook salmon and adipose fin-clipped steelhead seven days a week the entire year, and ODFW is leaving that regulation in place based on an expected return of 104,000 spring chinook, which is comparable to last year. The bag limit on the Willamette below Willamette Falls is two adipose fin-clipped chinook. Above the falls, one additional adipose fin-clipped steelhead may be retained under regulations for the combined salmon/steelhead bag limit.

STURGEON

Columbia River from Buoy 10 to Wauna power lines (River Mile 40)

Retention of white sturgeon is allowed seven days a week Jan. 1 – April 30, with a daily bag limit of one fish with a fork length of between 38 and 54 inches. This area is closed to retention of white sturgeon May 1-May 13. The season reopens seven days a week from May 14 through June 26 and July 1-4, with a daily bag limit of one fish with a fork length of 41 to 54 inches.

This fishery will be managed to the available guideline of 6,800 fish and may be shortened or extended, depending on results.

Columbia River from Wauna power lines upstream to Bonneville Dam (including all adjacent Washington tributaries)

Retention of white sturgeon is allowed three days a week on Thursday, Friday and Saturday Jan. 1 – July 31 and Oct. 8 – Dec. 31. This fishery will be managed to a harvest guideline of 3,410 fish and may be shortened or extended, depending on results. Angling for sturgeon is prohibited from the upstream end of Skamania Island at River Marker #82 upstream to Bonneville Dam May 1 – Aug. 31.

The daily bag limit is one white sturgeon with a fork length of 38 to 54 inches.

Columbia River from Bonneville Dam to The Dalles Dam

This area is expected to reach the harvest guideline of 2,000 fish around Feb. 18, 2011 and will close to retention of white sturgeon effective 12:01 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 19. Catch-and-release sturgeon angling will remain open.

Columbia River from The Dalles Dam to John Day Dam

This area is open to retention of white sturgeon seven days a week under permanent rules from Jan. 1 until the annual harvest guideline of 300 fish is met. The legal size limit for retention in this area is 43-54 inches fork length.

Columbia River from John Day Dam to McNary Dam

This area is expected to reach the harvest guideline of 500 fish by the last week of February or the first week of March. Catch-and-release sturgeon angling will remain open.

Willamette River downstream of Willamette Falls including the Multnomah Channel

Retention of white sturgeon is allowed three days a week on Thursday, Friday and Saturday Feb. 17 until the guideline of 2,550 fish is achieved. The daily bag limit is one white sturgeon with a fork length of 38 to 54 inches.

On the Willamette, angling for sturgeon is prohibited from the I-205 Bridge upstream to Willamette Falls May 1 – Aug. 31.

In other business the agencies took the following actions:

- Adopted the 2011 Winter/Spring Pre-Season Commercial Fishing Plan and General Commercial Spring Chinook Fishery Regulations, which sets gear types and season structures.

- Set commercial fishing seasons for Select Area fisheries, including Blind Slough/Knappa Slough, Tongue Point/South Channel, Deep River and Young's Bay.

Most folks are excited about the Willamette fishery, especially with the predicted number of 5-year olds due back to the fishery. Although we've learned that predictions are always volatile, most indicators point to a good return of quality fish this season.

As for actual fishing going on right now on the mainstem, the bulk of the activity remains in the Bonneville Pool stretch where keepers continue to fall. Catch rates are likely to fluctuate with air and water temperatures but if you read the above press release, you may realize that the fishery is slated to close to retention on February 19th (last day to retain being February 18th). It's been an exceptional fishery this winter and should provide good opportunities in the future along with good catch and release options for the remainder of the year.

Walleye action is likely to pick up for larger fish in the coming weeks. After a long winter hibernation, the larger fish begin to pick up their metabolism, making this one of the most opportune times to pursue this species. The reservoirs above The Dalles Pool will provide the best sport, at least until later into the spring.

The Guide's Forecast – A warming trend could improve all types of fishing on the mainstem Columbia. Although there are not a lot of springers around, what few fish there are, could respond well to slow trolled herring below the mouth of the Multnomah Channel near St. Helens. Rain is in the forecast but temperatures are expected to moderate and precipitation levels should remain somewhat mild, keeping visibility on the good side for much of the lower stretches, including the channel itself. Green label herring trolled slowly on the bottom should continue to provide some limited opportunities for the small crowd currently participating in the fishery.

Sturgeon anglers will likely only have 1 more week of opportunity in the Bonneville Pool. It's slated to close after fishing on the 18th. It's been a short but productive season. Sturgeon fishing below Bonneville Dam will remain best for sealions but anglers could intercept a few downstream of Portland. The larger smelt run rumored on the Cowlitz could draw keepers into that tributary and nearby holes on the mainstem.

Crabbing is still reported as good in the lower Columbia however, stronger tides are in the forecast, making for challenging conditions for weekend recreation.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Winter steelhead are crossing at Willamette Falls at an average of more than 30 per day with the season total around 2,500 thus far. Water temperatures are approaching the mid-40s with the visibility nearly four feet. Plunkers at Meldrum Bar have seen sporadic catches but hopes remain high as spring Chinook numbers improve. Catch-and-release results have been fair to good for sturgeon. 'Hazing' of sea lions began on February 1st below Willamette Falls and will continue through springer season.

Michael Recalls: While taking a quick sight-seeing jaunt on the lower Willamette with Ken Johnson on his 23-foot Duckworth up to the Falls during springer season a few years back, a sea lion approximately the size of a cape buffalo surfaced just a few feet off the bow. This gigantic mammal had a 25-pound bright chrome Chinook in his jaws. As we fumbled around for a camera, that porky pinnaped tipped his head back and slurped that salmon down like a 50s college freshman gobbling a goldfish. We didn't get the photo but won't forget the moment.

Regulations for the 2011 springer and sturgeon season and bag limits were finalized this week by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Two hatchery spring Chinook may be kept below Willamette Falls and one above the Falls per angler per day with retention allowed seven days

per week all year long. The spring Sturgeon season on the lower Willamette, originally scheduled to open on January 1, 2011, will start on Thursday, February 17th through Saturday, and each Thursday through Saturday until a quota of 2,550 fish are taken. Filling that quota shouldn't take long.

The McKenzie is in good shape now with the water showing just enough color to turn on fish and fishers alike.

North and South Santiam levels have dropped to allow drift boating and provide decent fishing conditions although there are still areas of turbidity and reduced visibility. Hazards from the recent high water are evident so boaters are advised to scout ahead and be prepared to portage at times.

ODFW sez: "The first trout stocking of the season takes place this week at Alton Baker Canoe Canal in Eugene, Blue Lake in Gresham and Mt. Hood Pond in Gresham.

The Guide's Forecast – While it is too early in the season to expect stellar results, there are spring Chinook in the lower Willamette. Pressure will be much lighter now which will make for more pleasant outings than later in the season when the hordes come out. Try trolling green label herring. You're chances are much better on the river than staring at that computer monitor.

Fly rodders on the McKenzie are picking up a few beautifully-colored redsides for their efforts. BWOs are showing mid-day but hatches are light so be prepared with a selection of nymphs.

With the Santiams in good condition, there should be sufficient numbers of winter steelhead in the system to provide a fair chance of hooking one. as the winter which cross the Falls are wild, this is a catch-and-release fishery.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Level and flow at the Clackamas has stabilized with the river in excellent condition for winter steelheading. Recent rain showers improved water color and flow at Eagle Creek which has provided additional opportunities to land steelhead.

Sandy water conditions are fair to good with results for winter steelhead similar. With improved water conditions, pressure have increased as well.

From the Oregon Dept. of Transportation: "While ODOT has finished removing the logjam of trees, root balls and other debris that were trapped by temporary piers in the Sandy River at the Interstate 84 bridge, boaters should be aware of submerged hazards and logs that remain in the river.

"The western channel under the bridge is open. Watch for piers marked by buoys in the waterway and use the marked navigation channel near the west bank. River debris may have damaged some pier caps and buoys marking construction hazards. Steer clear of the eastern channel, which remains closed due to construction activity. Approach the bridge area with caution and watch for floating debris, submerged hazards and changing conditions. Be aware of the weather and winter river conditions as either can change without warning."

The Guide's Forecast – Anglers are experiencing fair to good results for steelhead on the Clackamas. Broodstock are just starting to enter with numbers improving through February in to March. Catches are fair to good at Eagle Creek with bobber and jig effective here as are drifted

corkies. Catches have slowed at Eagle Creek this week although there are bright fish available to persistent anglers. Rain will help.

Expect spotty results for steelhead on the Sandy. There are winters in Cedar Creek but, as usual, there are plenty of anglers aware of this fact. Spinners are effective but tailor size and finish to water conditions for best results. Cured eggs have taken a few fish recently.

North Coast Fishing Report – Steelheaders have had consistent water conditions over the last week, enabling anglers to take advantage of almost any north coast stream they see fit. Even better news is the fact that fair numbers of wild and some hatchery steelhead are available on most of these systems.

The Nestucca and Wilson Rivers continue to provide fair opportunities for the bulk of the north coast interest. Anglers have been working the lower reaches of these systems and coming up with fair results. We floated from First Bridge to Three Rivers on Thursday of last week, hooking and landing 2 steelhead, both in great condition. One was a broodstock steelhead (buck) that we retained, while the other was a wild hen. Both fish hit K-11x Kwikfish and both fish were located at the head of the hole where they feel more protected in the deeper water. It's also difficult for side-drifters and drift fishermen to effectively fish these short pockets of productive water as they are deeper and swifter than the traditional haunts that most steelhead reside in during the upstream migration. There were quite a few driftboats on the float so the fish were holding down.

The Nehalem also came into fine shape last week and catches were fair but likely not up to what this rivers capability is. We drifted that river (Beaver slide to Roy Creek) on Saturday, only hooking 2 fish and landing one of them. Both fish hit a K11X Kwikfish (metallic red/brown back) in more traditional water on this stretch. There were a few other boaters on the float with most anglers reporting limited success.

Smaller streams continue to put out spent early run hatchery fish but a few wild fish should begin to show in the coming weeks. The quality hatchery season on these systems is all done.

Sturgeon anglers this week were not out in force. Although the fishing has been fair, most were waiting out better tides. And there are some good tides coming up.

Limited offshore opportunities came about last week. Predictably, good lingcod and rockfish action was good but maybe not as good as most would have hoped for. There is certainly a lot of season left but some vessels headed farther west to take advantage of the deep reef options not open for the bulk of the season.

Crabbing remains fair, but only fair, on Netarts Bay and not much better on other north coast estuaries. Tides aren't conducive to good opportunities in the coming weekend either.

The Guide's Forecast – Weekend anglers will again look to focus their efforts on the larger rivers of the north coast. The Nestucca and Wilson will remain the best bets for late-run hatchery fish as long as fishers focus their efforts in the lower reaches. Plugs should be effective but those side-drifting small baits should also produce results.

As is often the case when flows are low, first run anglers will have a good shot at prime holding water but those patient enough to wait until air temperatures rise and a more mild approach to working the water should reap benefits as well. You will likely have to employ an edge if you want results because anglers are likely to be out in good numbers this weekend.

Another good storm surge is due following the weekend, which should put smaller streams on the options list when flows subside. Anglers are still likely to come across a good number of spawned out hatchery fish but wild fish should begin to make a stronger appearance in the coming weeks. The Necanicum and Kilchis should be fair to good prospects by early next week.

As a general rule, larger baits in higher flows and smaller baits when flows subside. Eggs and shrimp should be fairly effective in the coming weeks.

Good tides begin on Sunday for anglers still looking for a Tillamook Bay sturgeon. Fresh sand shrimp should post results in the west channel and Bay City. Strong winds however will expose estuary anglers and make it hard to detect a bite.

The ocean doesn't look like a good option through the weekend. Crabbing should remain fair at best with Netarts still the best bet on the north coast, with the exception of the lower Columbia River.

In the first stocking of hatchery trout for 2011, Alder Lake, Buck Lake, Carter Lake, Cleawox Lake, Dune Lake, Elbow Lake, Erhart Lake, Georgia Lake, Lost Lake (Lane County), Munsel Lake, North Georgia Lake, Perkins Lake, Siltcoos Lagoon and Thissel Pond are scheduled for trout planting.

Central & South Coast Reports – Charter boats launching out of Depoe Bay recently have been taking limits of large ling cod in deeper water offshore although rockfish catches have been spotty. Boats launching for nearshore rockfish have limited anglers and have also taken lings although the later have been smaller than those further offshore. Ocean crabbing has been slow to fair.

Rock and jetty fishing has been fair when ocean conditions have allowed. Anglers are catching rockfish, cabezon and a few ling cod. Surf perch fishing is spotty on south coast beaches.

Rock fishers are doing well from the South Jetty in Winchester Bay. Umpqua anglers have been frustrated this season as the majority of winter steelhead taken have been natives which require release here. A surprising number of fishers have taken no hatchery keepers at all this winter and only six fin-clipped fish were taken during the Umpqua Fishery Enhancement Derby over the past weekend. The South Umpqua has good numbers of winter steelhead and is productive but there are very few keepers although the ODFW states that most hatchery fish return to the South and estimate the numbers at 30%. Anglers on the river would disagree. Water conditions are best for steelheading in the mainstem.

Crabbing has been fair to good for those dropping rings and traps from boats. Coos River steelheaders are taking the occasional fish on small baits and lures but the entire system is too low to fish well. It is hoped that upcoming showers will be sufficient to entice some fresh winters into the system as many of those present are well past their prime.

Steelheading on the Coquille is slow due to low, clear water conditions. Fish holding in deep slots are occasionally hooked but most are not of keeper quality.

There has been no change in the skinny, gin-clear water condition on the Elk and Sixes, a situation which has all but shut down fishing on these ocean tributaries which are ordinarily winter steelhead factories. Relief may be on the way as varying amounts of precipitation are in the long-range forecast starting this coming Saturday and continuing daily for the foreseeable future. A decent freshet will revitalize these productive hatchery steelhead fisheries.

Level and flow of the lower Rogue has continued to decrease over the week with the latest reading 2,980 at Agness at mid-day on Thursday this week. Steelhead are being occasionally but rain will surely improve conditions and prospects. Steelheaders on the middle Rogue are experiencing fair to good catches of winter steelhead on various baits and lures now that the water temperature has risen a few degrees. While winter steelhead have made it into the upper Rogue in modest number, low water and off-color conditions have resulted in little effort for them. The bag limit on the Rogue is two hatchery fish 16 inches or better per day and one wild steelhead 24 inches or longer up to five per year.

For boater launching out of the Port of Brookings, ocean conditions look friendliest Friday and Saturday this week according to offshore predictions. Chetco River water levels have continued to drop with the flow as of mid-day February 10th a mere 1,210 cfs at Brookings. Suffice to say, steelheading is at a slow but a few bright fish are being taken daily, mostly by guides, on the lower stretches. Small plugs fished in water which is showing a little color has been most effective. Side-drifters are also seeing success. Precipitation over the coming weekend and continuing during next week will reinvigorate this fishery.

This Email announcement came in from **SalmonTroutSteelhead.com Forums**, "Well the Votes are in, the 2011 Hawg Fest salmon Championships will be on the Coquille River, dates coming soon but are looking at the middle of Sept. or the first part of Oct. Put a team together and join on in.

"Stay tuned for the date!"

Alder, Buck, Cleawox, Dune, Georgia, North Georgia, Perkins and Siltcoos Lagoon will receive legal and trophy-size rainbow trout. Carter Lake will receive a plant of barely legal trout. Elbow, Erhart, Lost and Munsel lakes will be stocked with trout in the one-pound class, with Erhart also receiving legal-sized rainbows.

Central and Eastern Oregon – With water level and flow improved, the lower Deschutes continues to provide fair trout fishing. sippers may be spotted during the warmer parts of the day but nymphs will be effective otherwise.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report for February 2011

North Puget Sound

With fishing for steelhead and other game fish scheduled to close early on several rivers in the region, the focus is shifting on the marine areas where blackmouth salmon fisheries are under way.

"The San Juan Islands are the best bet for **salmon** anglers as we head into February," said Steve Thiesfeld, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "Fishing has been good for blackmouth in the San Juans, and hopefully that will continue throughout the month."

Anglers fishing Marine Area 7 (San Juan Islands) - as well as marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) and 9 (Admiralty Inlet) - have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook salmon. Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) is only open for salmon through Jan. 31.

Thiesfeld said there also have been reports of some nice-size blackmouth caught in Marine Area 9, especially around Possession Bar off the southern tip of Whidbey Island.

Another option is jigging for **squid** . Winter is prime time to fish 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/> .

Fishing for **steelhead and other game fish** is closing early in several river systems in Puget Sound and along the Strait of Juan de Fuca to protect wild steelhead. The early closures will affect the Nooksack, Snohomish, Stillaguamish and Skagit river systems, as well as several streams along the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Most rivers will close Feb. 1, although some waters near WDFW fish hatcheries will remain open through Feb. 15 to provide anglers an opportunity to catch and keep hatchery steelhead. "We're closing these rivers early because of conservation concerns," said Jim Scott, assistant director for WDFW's Fish Program. "With low numbers of wild steelhead expected back, we need to take this action to protect those wild fish that do return."

Anglers are reminded that the lower Green River (King County) and the White, Carbon and upper Puyallup rivers closed to fishing for steelhead and other game fish Jan. 16. The upper Green River closes Feb. 1. For more information on all the closures, check the emergency rule changes on WDFW's website at <http://bit.ly/eWIYg3> .

With several of the region's rivers scheduled to close, freshwater anglers might turn their attention to local lakes. Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish are good spots to fish for **perch, cutthroat** and **smallmouth bass** , said WDFW fisheries biologist Danny Garrett. "Lake Sammamish has been producing consistent angling action for cutthroat trout that range from 14-18 inches," he 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/> .

The **Puget Sound crab** fishery is now closed, 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 .

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

Several areas of Puget Sound open to blackmouth salmon fishing in February, more wild steelhead are moving into coastal rivers and another razor clam dig is tentatively scheduled for mid-month.

If tests are favorable, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) will proceed with an evening **razor clam** dig at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks and Kalaloch. Tentative opening dates and evening low tides are:

- Feb. 17, Thursday - 5:53 p.m. (-0.9 ft.); Twin Harbors
- Feb. 18, Friday - 6:33 p.m. (-0.9 ft.); Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks and Kalaloch

- Feb. 19, Saturday - 7:13 p.m. (-0.5 ft.); Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks and Kalaloch

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, anglers can find **hatchery steelhead** at some of the region's rivers. "Fishing for hatchery steelhead is winding down in the north coast streams, but anglers should continue to find fish in the Chehalis River Basin," said Kirt Hughes, regional fishery manager for WDFW, who recommends the Satsop, Skookumchuck and Wynoochee rivers.

Beginning Feb. 16, **wild steelhead-retention rules** go into effect 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. Anglers will be allowed to retain one wild steelhead per license year on one of the eight rivers.

For more information on steelhead fishing regulations, check the *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/>.

Elsewhere, fishing for **steelhead and other game fish** will close early in several river systems in Puget Sound and along the Strait of Juan de Fuca to protect wild steelhead. The early closures will affect the Nooksack, Snohomish, Stillaguamish and Skagit river systems, as well as several streams along the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

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On the other hand, saltwater **salmon** fishing opportunities will expand Feb. 1, with the opening of marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon) and 12 (Hood Canal). In addition, salmon fisheries also get under way in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, where marine areas 5 (Sekiu) and 6 (eastern Strait) open Feb. 16.

Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist, recommends trolling Coyote Bank, located about 13 miles north of the Washington shore between Port Angeles and Dungeness Spit. "Coyote was one of the more consistent producers last year, and hopefully that will continue this season," he said. "But make sure you keep your eye on the weather if you're heading out that way."

Salmon fishing is already under way in Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound), where anglers have had some success hooking resident coho. Best bets include the Tacoma Narrows, the Squaxin Island area and in Eld Inlet off Evergreen Beach, said Larry Phillips, regional fish biologist for WDFW.

Anglers should check the regulations for salmon fisheries on WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/>.

Looking for some competition? Anglers can take part in the **Olympic Peninsula Salmon Derby** over Presidents' Day Weekend near Sequim. Prizes include \$10,000 for the largest fish, \$5,000 for second place and \$1,500 for third place. Details are available at <http://gardinersalmonderby.org/>.

Puget Sound 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.

Southwest Washington

Ocean bright **spring chinook salmon** will be moving into the Columbia River in increasing numbers in the weeks ahead, setting the stage for one of the state's most popular fisheries. Anglers typically start landing early-returning "springers" in early February, but the fishery usually doesn't catch fire until March.

"This is a good time to dust off your gear, prepare your boat and maybe do a little prospecting," said Joe Hymer, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "You want to be ready to go when the bulk of the run arrives."

According to the pre-season forecast, a total of 198,400 upriver spring chinook will return to the Columbia River Basin this year - well below last year's run of 315,345, but close to the 10-year average. Then again, 40,000 of this year's fish are expected to be five-year-olds, compared to 7,855 last year. In addition, 62,400 of the 104,000 fish headed back to the Willamette River are projected to be five-year-olds.

"We're definitely expecting more big fish this year," Hymer said. "Five-year-olds can run from 18 to 30 pounds apiece."

Fishery managers from Washington and Oregon are scheduled to meet Feb. 8 to work out fishing seasons and regulations for both the spring chinook fishery and white sturgeon fishery below Bonneville Dam. In the meantime, seasons and regulations listed in the 2010-11 *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/>) will remain in effect.

As in previous years, only hatchery-reared fish marked with a clipped adipose fin and a healed scar may be retained. All wild spring chinook, identifiable by an intact adipose fin, must be released unharmed.

Fishing for spring chinook is currently open on the Columbia River below the Interstate 5 Bridge, where the limit is two adult fish per day. Anglers may also retain two adult springers per day on the Cowlitz and Deep rivers, but are limited to one adult fish a day on the Lewis and Kalama rivers.

"The Cowlitz River and waters near the Willamette River are probably the best bets early in the season, because spring chinook usually start showing up there first," Hymer said. Meanwhile, anglers continue to reel in **hatchery steelhead** from waters ranging from the Cowlitz River to the John Day Pool and beyond. In general, the steelhead in the lower tributaries are winter-run fish, while those above Bonneville Dam are left over from last year's summer run, Hymer said.

"Hatchery-reared late-run winter steelhead are still moving up the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers and should be available to anglers for weeks to come," he said.

Columbia River anglers can also retain one **sturgeon** per day in the lower Columbia below the Wauna powerlines or in the Bonneville, The Dalles or John Day pools. Anglers can also retain a fish per day Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays from the Wauna powerlines to Bonneville Dam. Fishing strategies vary from area to area. Hymer said boat anglers fishing the Bonneville Pool have done well by anchoring above the deeper holes and plunking with smelt, squid, sand shrimp, or roll-top herring. In the lower river, anglers have had some success fishing for sturgeon that gravitate toward the warmer waters flowing from the Willamette River. Fishing for smelt (eulachon) is closed to humans, but sturgeon still follow them up the Cowlitz River as far as Castle Rock, where anglers are waiting for them.

Fishery managers are scheduled to set new seasons for sturgeon Feb. 8. Until then, most seasons and regulations listed in the 2010-11 Fishing in Washington pamphlet will remain in effect until then. The exception is that angling is closed on the mainstem Columbia at Sand Island near Rooster Rock State Park through April 30. Until then, all angling is prohibited from a line between the upstream end of Sand Island to a marker on the Oregon shore, downstream to a line between the lower end of Sand Island and a marker on the Oregon shore.

Trout anglers should be aware that Battle Ground Lake and Kline Pond are both scheduled to be stocked with 2,000 half-pound rainbows from Vancouver Hatchery in February. But fishing could be just as good on 13 other regional lakes that were stocked with tens of thousands of trout in January.

"Those fish - particularly the bigger ones - tend to stick around for a while when the weather is cold and anglers don't spend as much time on the water," Hymer said. "That will change once the weather breaks and fishing picks up."

The weekly trout-stocking schedule is available on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/plants/weekly/>.

Eastern Washington

Of all the mid-winter fishing opportunities now available in the region, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) fish biologist Chris Donley recommends fishing Lake Roosevelt - the huge Columbia River reservoir off Grand Coulee Dam.

"Lake Roosevelt's **kokanee** fishery is usually pretty good at this time of year," Donley said. "Large kokanee, measuring 20 inches and more, are caught near the surface by trolling small flies and plugs in four-to-six feet of water. It's also the start of the lake's fishing season for **walleye**, which are starting to stage at the mouth of the Spokane River to make their annual spawning run up the river."

Anglers also continue to pull **rainbow trout** out of Lake Roosevelt, Donley said. Night fishing for Roosevelt's three-to-five-pound **burbot** should be productive, too.

Even bigger burbot, up to 10 pounds, can be caught in Sullivan Lake in Pend Oreille County. Burbot are nocturnal predators, so night fishing is most effective, said Donley, noting that burbot are now gathering to spawn. "If you find one you usually find others," he said.

Depending on temperature fluctuations, ice fishing should remain good at several winter-season or year-round fisheries in the region. Spokane County's Hog Canyon Lake and Stevens County's Hatch and Williams lakes should continue to provide **rainbow trout** catches through the ice. Action at Lincoln County's Fourth of July Lake seems to have slowed, and ice conditions may be questionable.

Yellow perch fishing through the ice should continue to be good at Spokane County's year-round Eloika and Silver lakes and Stevens County's Waitts Lake, which closes Feb. 28. Sprague Lake might be a good bet for rainbows, but reported "iffy" ice conditions in late January are a reminder that anglers need to be cautious. Look for ice-fishing safety tips at http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/ice_fishing/. Whitman County's Rock Lake provides open water fishing on rainbow and **brown trout** for the hearty angler who can brave the wind chill. Snake River tributaries, like the Grand Ronde, Tucannon, and Touchet rivers, are usually the place to target **steelhead** in February. Joe Bumgarner, WDFW fish biologist, said the Grand Ronde in particular is improving, although more creel checks will just be getting under way during the month of February to determine actual catch rates.

WDFW fish hatchery crews are gearing up to get catchable **rainbow trout** stocked this month in waters that open March 1, mostly in the southeast corner of the region.

Northcentral Washington

With warming air and water temperatures, **steelhead** fishing picks up a bit at this time of year on the upper Columbia River, said Bob Jateff, a district fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Most of that action is above Wells Dam on the mainstem Columbia River and in sections of the Methow River.

Steelheading also picks up with warming trends on the Entiat River, where a few fish are usually caught at the mouth. The Wenatchee River has been slow, but fish can still be caught in the mainstem Columbia River between Rock Island and Rocky Reach dams.

Fishing for **whitefish** on both the Similkameen and Methow rivers also can be good, said Jateff, noting that fly anglers using small weighted nymphs under a strike indicator seem to do best. The whitefish daily limit is 15 with no minimum size requirement. Selective gear rules are in effect for whitefish in areas that are currently open for steelhead.

Ice fishing for **rainbow trout** has been good at several Okanogan County lakes, including Big and Little Green, Davis, Rat, and Sidley.

Sidley Lake, near Molson and the Canada border, is the scene of the 7th annual **Northwest Ice Fishing Festival** on Feb. 19. The day-long event is hosted by Molson Grange and sponsored by the Oroville Chamber of Commerce. Ice fishing is conducted from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., with registration fees of \$20 per adult and \$10 for youth 14 years of age and under. Prizes are awarded for biggest and heaviest fish caught. Food, music, skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling and dog sledding are also available. For more information contact Robin Stice at Eden Valley Guest Ranch, (509) 485-4002, or info@edenvalleyranch.net.

Another popular ice-fishing spot in Okanogan County is Patterson Lake near Winthrop, where anglers can hook rainbow trout and **yellow perch**. Palmer Lake north of Loomis is producing 10-

14-inch perch through the ice with an occasional kokanee or rainbow in catches. In Chelan County, ice fishing for rainbows, perch and other fish at Roses Lake near Manson was good earlier in the winter but warming trends have reduced ice thickness and safety.

Chad Jackson, WDFW Columbia Basin district fish biologist, said most lakes in the south end of the region that are open were either treated last fall and have no fish in them yet, or are covered with unsafe ice. "Stay tuned for more fishing coming to the Basin in March," Jackson said.

Southcentral Washington

Anglers continue to reel in hatchery **steelhead** from portions of the Columbia and Snake Rivers, although the prospect of catching **sturgeon** close to home will undoubtedly prompt some to switch gears. Starting Feb. 1, the McNary Pool - also known as Lake Wallula - will reopen for retention of white sturgeon that measure 43 to 54 inches from their snout to the fork in their tail. Centered near the Tri-Cities, it draws anglers from throughout the region, said Paul Hoffarth, a regional fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Open waters extend from McNary Dam to Priest Rapids Dam, and into the lower Snake River upstream to Ice Harbor Dam.

"From the Tri-Cities, you can reach the fishery in 20 minutes in either direction," he said. Hoffarth said the opening at Lake Wallula should take some pressure off the fishery under way at Lake Umatilla (John Day Pool), where anglers have been chiseling away at a 165-fish annual quota. "That quota has been reached very early in recent years, so anglers should go soon - and keep an eye out for updates - if they plan to fish Lake Umatilla."

For additional information, see the 2010-11 *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet, available online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/> .

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

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 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.

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Random Links

Watch the Sportsman's Show on the ifish.net webcam:

<http://67.23.201.29:8080/>

Information on the Saltwater Sportsmen's Show Seminars:

<http://oceaned.org/seminars.html>

2011 Launch Permits for the John Day River:

<http://www.blm.gov/or/resources/recreation/johnday/permits.php>

GOOD LUCK!