

The Guide's Forecast - volume 13 issue number 7

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 18th – February 24th, 2011**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro - Although catch rates are beginning to dip, the Bonneville Pool remains the best option on the mainstem Columbia for keeper sturgeon fishing. The season is set to close tomorrow however as the quota of 2,000 keepers is likely to be achieved.

Sturgeon anglers are likely to re-focus their efforts on the lower Willamette, particularly in the Portland Harbor where the catch and keep fishery opened today. Action should be excellent, as this stretch of river has been closed for some time, enabling keepers to congregate without being targeted. One sturgeon per day may be kept every Thursday through Saturday until a 2,550 fish quota is attained.

Steelhead passage has been moderate at Willamette Falls although an increase in flow could slow migration rates further. Spring chinook fishing has slowed with the muddied water but great early season success rates indicate the predicted return should come to fruition. Late March through April will bring peak catches.

Wild trout were responding well for fly anglers using large nymphs on the McKenzie early this week.

It remains to be seen to what degree rain effects the river flow which started spiking late Monday this week.

The Santiam system took a hit from rainfall mid-week but is forecast to be dropping into the coming weekend. There is a fair number of wild steelhead in the river now.

The Clackamas, where steelheading has been slow, is forecast to rise through mid week, then drop below current levels. Accuracy aside, fresh water should boost hookups. Broodstock fish are likely to begin showing in greater numbers.

Sandy steelheading has been slow with one or two fish per day reported river-wide although there was some improvement Monday this week. Rain will provide a welcome change, but only after flows subside once again.

Northwest – Weekend steelheaders produced great catches of wild and broodstock fish with the Wilson and Nestucca predictably the best. A slight rise in river levels stimulated migration but more recent rainfall has put the river out of shape, slowing catches. The first rain after a prolonged period of dry weather typically produces excellent catches. These larger north coast streams should fish good again by the weekend, barring any oversight in the weather forecast.

Smaller streams may fish best just prior to the weekend with the Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem, Kilchis and upper Trask producing good catches of wild steelhead and a few spawned out hatchery fish as well. Larger baits should produce the best results until flows drop and clear. Use artificials, including plugs when fish begin to slow their migration rates.

The Siletz and Alsea Rivers shouldn't be overlooked when flows drop. The Alsea will become primarily a wild fish show but quality broodstock fish should remain a good option on the Siletz. Broodstock smolt releases have decreased in recent years however so don't expect the great action we saw just a few years ago but experienced anglers will produce fair to good results.

Sturgeon fishing should remain fair in Tillamook Bay but the best of this season has likely passed. The West and middle channels should remain top prospects for anglers fishing fresh sand shrimp.

Crabbing has slowed in most estuaries but remains a viable option in the lower Columbia.

Southwest – Rain was pounding the south coast earlier this week, causing river levels and flow to increase dramatically. If forecasts are accurate, anglers should see some dropping and clearing conditions during the week which is good news as winter steelhead remain widely available.

Crabbing has remained good for boaters in Winchester Bay but fresh water from the Umpqua may push Dungeness back to the ocean. While mainstem Umpqua steelheaders have been taking fish through the recent stretch of dry weather, the recent freshet will make the South Umpqua the destination of choice. Hopefully, the strong return of hatchery steelhead predicted by ODFW biologists will come to pass.

The productive South Fork Coquille, which has suffered from low and clear water conditions, should be rejuvenated this week as flows improve.

When the ocean has aid down, charter boats out of Gold Beach have been doing very well for lingcod and rockfish while offshore crabbing has been slow to fair. Even in summer-level low and clear water, the lower Rogue produced winter steelhead with side-drifting most effective. Fresh winter steelhead will be entering daily this week with precipitation. Steelheaders on the middle Rogue have experienced the most consistent results but action should shift downstream with rainfall.

Bottom fishing has been excellent out of the Port of Brookings when offshore conditions have allowed. Ocean crabbing has been fair. Rain this week is expected to have a positive effect for steelheading on the Chetco River. It should fish well whenever the level is falling although the winter steelhead season will be winding down here.

Eastern – Deschutes fly anglers scored decent numbers of redsides on the lower river over the past weekend. With few hatches evident, nymphs were effective.

Afternoon hatches are occurring on the Metolius but nymphs have been more effective in hooking trout.

Good spring steelheading should be the rule on the Wallowa, Imnaha and Grande Ronde Rivers as long as snow levels remain low and flows stable. Some days, steelheaders are likely to average around a fish for every 4 hours of effort.

SW Washington – Prior to the high water surge, anglers were finding good success on the Kalama and Lewis Rivers. Hatchery fish are should remain a fair option on the Kalama.

The Cowlitz should see another surge of hatchery fish to the system but flows must come down before anglers can expect any measurable results. Small baits boondoggled or sidedrifted will produce the best results on this system, a technique best suited for boat fishing.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Anglers had taken a greater interest in catching an early run spring Chinook on the lower Columbia River prior to the recent weather system. Creel checks

indicated a higher presence of bank anglers but 2 spring Chinook were tallied in the weekend creel census. A muddied Willamette River is sure to quell interest.

Sturgeon effort remains focused on the Bonneville Pool but this productive fishery is slated to end on Friday. The quota is modeled to be reached and it will remain open to catch and release fishing only after Friday. It's been an excellent season in this reservoir and anglers can look for good opportunities in the near future as well. There were a couple of good recruitment years in this section but that's not always the case.

Check our archives for the detailed press release regarding mainstem sturgeon and salmon fisheries set last week. It gives all the info you need to stay legal, right out of the mouth of ODF&W.

Crabbing remains good in the lower Columbia but tides this week won't be conducive to good opportunities. More anglers get to thinking about a combo crab/salmon trip out of Astoria this time of year but few pursue the concept as great opportunities will exist a bit further upstream in the very near future.

The Guide's Forecast – Tides are fair for salmon and steelhead options in the afternoon but action seems to be better when the morning outgoing runs for these species. With the high likelihood of a muddy Willamette following this storm session, bank opportunities on the lower Columbia look to fade in the coming week.

Sturgeon anglers that had access to the Bonneville Pool still will, you'll just have to practice your catch and release technique. Not a bad option given the fish present and the effort shift to the lower Willamette. You should have the place to yourself.

Don't get too excited about crabbing opportunities in the lower river. Better tides will come along in the coming weeks. Reports indicate it may be the best north coast option however.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – As of Thursday, February 17th, flow at Willamette Falls was up to 37,000 cfs with a visibility of just over a foot and a half (although it appears muddy) while the temperature was holding at 43 degrees. Over 2,800 winter steelhead have crossed, a better showing than the past five or six years. Spring Chinook have been caught by plunkers fishing from the banks of the Willamette below the mouth of the Clackamas River. With a predicted return of 104,000 adult springers this season, anticipation is high amongst all Willamette fishers. Sturgeon retention is open on the lower Willamette starting today, February 17th for on fish per angler per day between 38 and 54 inches measured from nose to the fork in the tail. Sturgeon may be kept every Thursday, Friday and Saturday until the 2,550-fish quota is met which is expected to happen quickly. If the traffic on the Willamette on the opener is any indication, it will be a very short spring season, indeed.

The McKenzie took a minor hit from rain this week, pushing the flow at Vida from 3,200 cfs on February 12th to 4,400 on the 15th. It has been moderating since with the gauge at 3,750 cfs on Thursday this week with the water temperature dropping to 40 degrees.

Water level and flow in the Santiams is good for the winter season.

Mt. Hood Pond, West Salish Pond and Creswell Pond are scheduled for trout planting.

ODFW sez, "Several hundred brood trout ranging in size from two to five pounds will be released this week in Blue Lake and West Salish Pond near Gresham."

The Guide's Forecast – Plunking in the Meldrum Bar stretch will likely yield an occasional spring Chinook to patient anglers. Sturgeon fishing is expected to be worthwhile as sturgeon like high, off-color water. It should yield limits to patient anglers who are using the right bait in the right area but boaters are advised to keep a sharp eye upstream for drifting debris. We'll have more details on catches, effective baits and productive areas following this week's opener.

Trout fishing will resume and is expected to be good on the McKenzie as the water level and color recover from the recent freshet. It looks promising for the coming weekend.

The Santiams are a decent prospect for catch-and-release fishing for wild steelhead.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – The Clackamas was at 13.3 feet at Estacada early in the day on February 17th and is currently dropping with only light rain forecast for the next couple of days. This equates to only a slight rise with little recovery to be made.

Anglers tread through snow on the Sandy mid-week, but valiant efforts in chilly weather yielded little in the way of chrome quarry. Steelheading has been slow to spotty although the low freezing level should ensure decent water color for a while.

The Guide's Forecast – If a dry period comes to pass as predicted, the coming week holds promise for winter steelheaders on the Clackamas. While the river did not rise a great deal from recent precipitation, once the water flow has stabilized, results should improve. Most of the Eagle Creek steelhead have returned but broodstock fish are just starting to enter. Those will be the fish we're targeting in the coming weeks.

There are winters in the Sandy system although most are of native origin. We are hopeful that results as well as numbers of hatchery fish will improve into March but for now, expect slow to spotty results here.

North Coast Fishing Report – While most steelheaders had their hearts and minds at the Pacific Northwest Sportsman Show, faithful anglers took advantage of the nearly ideal conditions along the Oregon Coast, particularly on the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers. After only a slight rise in river levels, levels and clarity were nearly ideal for a scenario that sent a good batch of fresh fish upstream on some of the north coast's most prized river systems.

Good fishing for both wild and broodstock fish were reported from the Wilson and Nestucca systems while expectantly, smaller streams produced both a few wild and several spawned out hatchery fish that made upstream runs earlier in December and January.

These systems came up enough to keep steelhead from a fast run upriver so anglers throughout the lower reaches produced the best results. Although most fish were produced side-drifting baits, anglers following on the footsteps of the more motivated early risers did take fish on plugs as well.

The ideal conditions stage did not last long on these systems however as another round of precipitation hit the region on Sunday, putting rivers on a sharp rise for the early part of the week. Rivers currently remain too high for productive fishing and coupled with a plummeting of temperatures, both air and water, the bite is sure to slow.

Also out of action is the mainstem Nehalem, where a productive fishery was just getting underway. This under-fished system began to produce some good catches throughout the system until recent high waters once again put it out of shape. From the predicted weather pattern, it may stay that way for a while longer.

Meanwhile, sturgeon effort on Tillamook Bay is already beginning to taper. With the series of cold fronts moving on-shore, conditions are less than ideal for those exposed to winter weather in the estuary. The best of the tides have come and gone as well so anglers will likely wait for a more opportune time in the coming weeks.

Offshore enthusiasts have remained stuck in their slips as rough weather has kept crabbers and fishers inland. That doesn't look to change in the near future either. The offshore crab fishery has not been what most expected this season.

Razor clam digging this winter has been sub-par as well. High surf hasn't helped things and late afternoon tides likely won't be an asset as well with the upcoming swell forecast.

The Guide's Forecast – Still forefront on the minds of most will be a good steelhead run that is well underway. As if the weather forecast wasn't volatile enough however, inconsistent weather patterns will make river forecasting a nightmare this week as temperature will also drive river levels with the predicted snowfall in the higher elevations well into next week.

River models currently show fishable conditions by possibly the weekend but again, that all depends on temperature and precipitation (rain or snow) fall. Even if conditions come in, don't expect as good of fishing as anglers witnessed last weekend. The prolonged period of high water will distribute fish well into the upper reaches and it was obvious that a good bunch of fish headed upstream on that last opportunity.

If you do fish this weekend, do bring bait. Sand shrimp or eggs sidedrifted will offer up an anglers best opportunity to catch some quality fish with the Wilson and Nestucca the best two options. Spent hatchery fish will remain a staple on other, earlier returning steelhead streams but as February and early March roll on, some quality wild fish steelheading should become fair options for those willing to negotiate these smaller systems. The Nestucca, North Fork Nehalem and Kilchis will be prime candidates.

With high flows predicted to remain in place for much of the following week, bait will likely remain the top prospect but plugs can become effective if everyone else on the float is pursuing fish with bait. Just fish the slower water, along current and river edges, where more territorial fish are likely to be holding.

Don't bother with the sturgeon fishery this weekend although some limited opportunities may exist for anglers willing to work with the limited times of the tide this weekend. Low slack, the prime time of the tide to target sturgeon, will be after daylight hours. Clamming won't be a great option either as high surf is likely to keep feeding bivalves hunkered down.

Although an east wind influence is due to hit ocean beaches on Friday, the short-lived pattern likely won't afford most offshore anglers much of a chance to produce good catches. It's best to wait for a longer period of opportunity and a softer tide series for better results. The ocean won't be a place for anglers to get stuck across the bar in the coming days.

Alder Lake, Big Creek Reservoirs 1 & 2, Cleawox Lake, Dune Lake, Munsel Lake and Olalla Creek Reservoir are scheduled to be planted with hatchery trout this week.

Central & South Coast Reports – Large ling cod are being taken on deep water trips out of Depoe Bay. Rockfish and ocean crabbing results have been fair to good. Results will be worthwhile but opportunities are limited by wind and wave at this time of year.

Herring jiggers are looking forward to finding some bait in Yaquina Bay. While these little fish haven't shown yet, the first spawners of the year are expected to arrive any time now. Crabbing has been slow to fair in the bay, fair to good outside in the ocean with the bonus of a pretty good ling cod bite.

Results for rock and jetty anglers will improve as ling cod move into the shallows to spawn. Keep an eye on weather reports to plan a trip and an eye open to wave action once on the rocks. Cabezon, greenling and rockfish will remain the staple for rock anglers. "We are expecting a good return of hatchery fish that will be available to anglers for harvest." Let us hope this becomes a reality. The South Umpqua, which will be in good level and color for fishing this coming weekend, is the best bet to nail hatchery fish. No unclipped steelhead may be retained anywhere on the Umpqua system.

Fresh, bright steelhead started entering the Siuslaw once again with rainfall. Hundreds of bright winters entered the Whittaker Creek hatchery facility on February 15th and more are on the way. Catch the river at the right stage and there's a decent chance of a hookup.

Crabbing has been spotty at Winchester Bay. Rock anglers are taking fair to good numbers of rockfish from the South Jetty when ocean conditions allow safe access. Despite anglers' reports that the vast majority of steelhead in the Umpqua system are wild, the ODFW once again assured steelheaders that

While crabbing from docks at Coos Bay has been yielding little in the way of keeper Dungeness, boaters are doing well. Winter steelhead which had been holding in deeper pools in the Coos River are now scattered with the recent freshet. This means fair to good prospects for a mix of bright and more colorful winter steelhead. Hardware has been particularly effective here. Steelhead will likely reach the upper Rogue with this week's freshet but downstream prospects are a better bet. Anglers may continue to retain one wild steelhead 24 inches or better per day up to five per year through April 30th.

Look for an improvement for winter steelhead on the Coquille as fish get on the move with the freshet this week.

Elk and Sixes Rivers are in decent shape and great color but keep in mind that these small ocean tributaries are volatile and will go low and clear quickly without additional rainfall.

A large river like the Rogue will be slower to recover from heavy rainfall as the south coast experiences earlier this week. Cresting at over 20,000 cfs and 10 feet at Agness, the water has been dropping and once in shape should provide good prospects for winter steelhead in the lower river. Plunkers will be the first to reap this bounty with boats taking fish a day or two later. The Grants Pass stretch will definitely be fishable by the coming weekend and has a good number of withers available to target.

Cresting at nearly 13,000 cfs at Brookings on Tuesday this week, flow at the Chetco is moderating. As of mid-day on February 17th, it was 4,790 cfs. There was snow at Icebox on Wednesday this week so use caution. Prospects for the weekend are good despite the fact that Chetco winter steelheading is considered to be winding down now. There are still fish to be

caught here with the last bearing the local term 'bluebacks' for their azure hue. Once these start being taken, the end is near.

Trout stocking is scheduled for Lake Selmac and Agate Lake.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Waters of the Deschutes have returned to normal winter level and flow with a visibility of about 15 feet. Caddis and BWOs are in evidence in the early afternoon.

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/>.

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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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GOOD LUCK!