

The Guide's Forecast - volume 13 issue number 8

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 25<sup>th</sup> – March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** With the Willamette currently dirty due to recent high water, the mainstem Columbia, especially near Jantzen Beach, may start to get busy with spring chinook anglers. Springers have been caught in the I-5 region stated **pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)** and 9 spring Chinook adults have already been tallied passing Bonneville Dam. Furthermore, more chinook than sturgeon have been caught in the winter sturgeon gillnet fishery taking place below Bonneville with the majority of those harvested displaying markings of upper Columbia chinook versus Willamette bound fish.

Water at Willamette Falls is dropping and clearing. About 3,000 winter steelhead have been counted. Springers are being caught occasionally by trollers although the action has slowed from the previous week when water was running clear.

Sturgeon fishing was reported as red-hot on the first day of the retention season reported **pro guide Dan Ponciano (360-607-8511)** but foul weather and the behavior of previously hooked fish slowed the bite dramatically for the next 2 days. Fishing should remain good however but good flow was hard to come by downstream of the Portland Harbor.

March Browns are the hot ticket on the McKenzie where trout fishing has been quite good.

There are a fair number of wild steelhead in the Santiam system but anglers can't seem to connect with any of them.

Steelheading has remained slow to fair in the clear waters of the Clackamas. Boaters are fairing better than bank anglers. A stronger return of wild and late returning broodstock steelhead should begin to show in the coming weeks.

Bobber and jig fishers have picked up a few steelhead on the Sandy. Broodstock fish are beginning to arrive with more to come in March.

**Northwest –** Coming off of a nice rain freshet, steelheaders on the north coast took advantage of another nice shot of broodstock steelhead on the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers while other systems got their first good shot of wild fish.

Reports of very crowded conditions likely kept the fish from biting over the weekend on the Nestucca River reports **pro guide Kent Anderson (503-550-6303)**. Although fishing has been consistent for much of the season, heavy crowds certainly spook willing fish. Anglers fishing the Nestucca are reporting about a 50/50 ratio of broodstock to wild fish. This should remain fairly consistent throughout the season.

Smaller systems such as the Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem and Kilchis Rivers should remain fair options for wild fish if the predicted river levels jump over the weekend. Bait will always work best in higher flows but wild fish will respond especially well when river levels drop.

The mainstem Nehalem will again be out for much of the rest of the month. A prolonged period of dry weather is required to bring this system into its full potential but anglers versed in targeting fish at tributary mouths do stand a chance for some fair fishing.

The Siletz should be entering peak season now through early March. Broodstock and wild steelhead were tallied over the weekend. Sidedrifting is producing best.

Rough seas will again put ocean recreation out of reach for bottomfishers and crabbers.

Although weekend tides may be work fair for sturgeon anglers on Tillamook Bay, cold windy weather will make it difficult to detect bites. Outgoing tides are also not great for crabbing.

**Southwest** – Charters out of central Oregon ports took some dandy lingcod over the past weekend. Offshore forecasts indicate a chance for ocean boats in the week ahead. When conditions permit, limits of rockfish and lings are expected.

Admission is free to the Fly Fishing Expo on Saturday, February 26th at Reedsport High School on South 22nd Street in Reedsport. The event will run from 9 AM to 4 PM.

Crabbing has slowed at Winchester Bay with the freshet mid-month but will be improving as salinity returns to normal. Umpqua steelheaders are hooking fair numbers of fish although most must be released, as they are wild.

Steelheading is fair on the Coquille River and slow to fair on the Coos although the West Fork Millicoma produced several fish over the past weekend.

Elk and Sixes Rivers are getting low but rain just prior to the coming weekend should create steelheading opportunities.

Prospects for steelheaders are good on the lower Rogue and it is predicted to be on the drop once again by the 25th. Plunkers using Spin 'N' Glos and anchor fishers running plugs have been taking fresh, bright fish. River conditions have improved on the Grants Pass stretch and should improve further by the weekend. Pulling plugs will be effective on the middle Rogue and anglers are taking fish in the skinny waters of the upper river.

Chetco River levels hit 10,000 cfs on February 15th but it has dropped daily since. Steelheading was productive over the past weekend for plunkers and side-drifters. The river is forecast to be in the 3,000 cfs range for the coming weekend.

**Eastern** – The Deschutes is in good shape and color. Dark caddis and stonefly nymphs have been successful for redsides recently. Deep jigging is yielding decent numbers of fair-sized kokanee at Wallowa Lake.

Deschutes fly anglers scored decent numbers of redsides on the lower river over the past weekend. With little in the way of hatches evident, nymphs were effective.

**SW Washington** – Anglers anxious to fish the Cowlitz River may have to wait a bit longer before the water clears again. More precipitation may put the river further out of shape although fishers were reporting a few quality fish in the colored water over the weekend. Late February through April should produce some large hatchery steelhead on the system with spring chinook taking over after that.

The Kalama had been producing well but crowded conditions over the weekend put fish down. Better fishing should return when flow stabilize with several more weeks of broodstock and wild steelhead available.

The East Fork Lewis has been void of wild fish and only an occasional one coming from the North Fork. Overall, anglers are leaving these systems disappointed.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – Although it seems a bit early for good fishing, those few participating in the fishery on the lower Columbia are secretly calling it “pretty darn good fishing”. Several reports have come into The Guide’s Forecast this week telling of multiple fish per boat for a tides effort. **Pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)** reported going 3 for 4 in a 6-hour effort near I-5 on Tuesday, February 22<sup>nd</sup>. Brandon trolled green-label plug cut herring on the bottom, taking advantage of the travel lanes that most Chinook are likely to take on this stretch of the Columbia. If there’s one thing we’ve learned in this fishery, it’s that the biters are most likely to be on the bottom and trolling downstream with the current draws the most strikes.

As for the areas to fish, opportunities above I-5 haven’t been all that prevalent in recent years. That isn’t the case this year as the Washington and Oregon commissions both adopted larger areas to sportfish this season. Upstream of I-5, anglers most often utilized the Washington side of the river from the I-205 Bridge to an area just downstream of the 42<sup>nd</sup> street boat ramp on the Oregon side. This is the stretch due north of the Portland Airport. Another popular spot was just upstream of the I-5 Bridge on the Washington side, trolling downstream from the red can to the I-5 Bridge itself. From the I-5 Bridge on the Washington side, we have found it quite productive to cut immediately to the Oregon side of the river just below the I-5 Bridge to the Oregon side, enabling anglers to continue to fish water in the 24 to 28 foot depth range. The Washington side of the river drops off pretty significantly a little ways downstream of the bridge.

Davis Bar has also produced fish recently. This bar is just across from the mouth of the Willamette River on the Washington side. By the lower end of the bar, the water should begin to get turbid, with the influence of the Willamette River coming in. Although fish will certainly still bite in the brown flows of the Willamette, confidence begins to fade along with visibility when too much Willamette water mixes with the mainstem Columbia. Until the Willamette returns to clearer conditions, this should be the place to target early returning springers.

Effort is light downstream of the mouth of the Willamette River but anglers will soon take advantage of the Tenasillahe Island/Puget Island fisheries that are much more relaxing than the Portland/Vancouver areas.

Sturgeon fishing on the mainstem isn’t all that impressive right now. As expected, the bulk of the effort is taking place on the lower Willamette below Oregon City. There was light effort and catch in the Portland to Longview stretch with just 2 legals and 27 shakers landed for 24 boats. Most of the fish are opting for warmer water in the lower Willamette and will continue to do so for the next several weeks.

Sturgeon effort in the Bonneville Pool has slowed as expected. Anglers typically want to take advantage of the catch and keep opportunities, leaving catch and release options wide open for Bonneville Pool anglers.

**The Guide’s Forecast** – With the recent reports coming from the Columbia mainstem near I-5, look for increased motivation by sportanglers in the coming weeks. Early indications point to a stronger than anticipated return with these early fish the larger 5-year olds which make up only a small fraction of the Columbia run. I may be so bold as to say that the run already seems under-predicted to me which may lead to better than anticipated returns and an early closure. I know, pretty bold of me to say such things this early in the run.....so don’t hold me to it, just yet.

Troll herring in the I-5 area and troll them on the bottom. This is the path of least resistance and the likely route most Chinook will take upon their return this spring. Green label herring are the most abundant but red label herring should work well too. If you have the rods available, try both whole trolled and plug-cut varieties (but you had better have the anglers available too...)

There is a rare fish crossing Bonneville Dam too so anglers may want to get familiar with water above the I-205 Bridge as well. There was some pretty good fishing around Camas a few years back, when this fishery was open because of a more liberal catch share.

Sturgeon anglers will continue to focus on the lower Willamette where the bite is better and the chance for keepers is greater. If the Columbia continues to flow high, plan on fishing upstream of the Portland Harbor, that's where the flows will remain adequate enough to draw fish to your baits.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – With the level and flow dropping at Willamette Falls, water in the lower Willamette is clearing somewhat. Spring Chinook are being taken daily by trollers who are primarily using herring although catches remain in the single digits this early in the season. Sturgeon fishing was great on the opener a week ago Thursday, fair on Friday and, with heavy participation on bank and in boats, slow on Saturday. Officials are guessing anywhere from 1,000 to half the 2,330 quota were kept on the opening weekend to which is easy to guess what anglers who were actually there replied.

Most of the winters crossing at the Falls are bound for the Santiam system. These are wild steelhead which create a catch-and-release fishery here as well as the Molalla River.

The Santiam system is in excellent shape for fishing although results have been slow.

On the trout planting schedule this week are Alton Baker Canal, Cottage Grove Pond, Cottage Grove Reservoir, E. E. Wilson Pond, Junction City Pond, Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Over 3,000 winter steelhead are upstream from Willamette Falls which is the highest count in several years. Sturgeon retention will continue Thursday, Friday and Saturday this week with any further extension to be determined. When the quota fills, it'll be all over for any chance of keeping a lower Willamette sturgeon for the remainder of 2011.

According to locals who fish the North Santiam, drifting downriver from Green's Bridge is without challenges or hazards and will out anglers over the greatest number of fish. That said, results here have been slow despite strong winter steelhead counts at Willamette Falls.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – The level, flow and color of the Clackamas River are good although steelhead remains slow. Fishing is likely to improve as the weather warms a little.

The Sandy is in good condition with most of the sand which had been causing problems following the January flood cleared out although there is still debris and hazards of which boaters should be aware.

**The Guide's Forecast** – With the hatchery fish bound for Eagle Creek about done for the season and broodstock steelhead just starting to enter, the Clackamas is a bit between runs now. As Dog Creek broodstock numbers improve and the water temperature rises a couple of degrees, results are expected to follow.

Steelheading has been improving on the Sandy over the past week and with it, pressure from anglers anxious to connect. Steelhead are everywhere on this river at this time of year. Cedar Creek has been producing some winters but the crowds have been thick.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – North coast anglers have had pretty good steelheading conditions recently except for the sudden drop in air and water temperatures over the last few days. Following the most recent rain freshet, all north coast streams had a new flush of fish from the Necanicum north to the Siletz to the south.

Necanicum anglers reported good steelheading for wild fish just prior to the weekend when flows came into ideal conditions recently. Fish were responsive to both bait and hardware, enabling all types of gear anglers to take fish for catch and release opportunities.

Highway 30 streams have limited returns of wild fish but a few spent hatchery fish remain in the system. The North Fork Nehalem, Three Rivers and especially the Kilchis River offer up some of the better options for wild steelhead seekers.

The Nestucca and Wilson Rivers will remain focal points for sportanglers for the remainder of the steelhead season with side-drifters scoring best results recently. Good returns of both wild and hatchery broodstock fish will remain available well into April. **Pro guide Kent Anderson (503-550-6303)** reported good action prior to the weekend. Kent reported 4 to 6 opportunities per day last week but by the weekend, the river was crammed with driftboats wall-to-wall. Although steelhead were still being caught, action obviously dropped off, likely due to all the pressure on the river with angler after anglers casting to the same water. Kent reiterated consistent action after the weekend but still not what one would expect for a season that's been off to a good start.

The Wilson closely mirrors the Nestucca, both from a crowded standpoint and for production. It's already been a good season on the Wilson with the best fishing occurring just after each rain freshet. Fishing was good late in the weekend but fish distributed well into the upper watershed in the higher flows. Most recently, the lower stretches are producing the best catches as smaller pods of fresh fish enter with each tide swing. Plugs have become more effective in the lower flows but small baits and stealthy presentations will continue to take fish for side-drifters.

The Nehalem continues to be a poor option with the higher flows contributing silty water throughout the column. That doesn't look to change anytime soon.

The Siletz River remains a good option as well. This river doesn't run as colored as the Nehalem with the lower reaches producing best right now, given the fact we've been a while without precipitation input into the system. Most precipitation right now is falling as snow and temperatures are forecasted to remain the very cool range, keeping much of the snow from melting off and contributing to river flows.

Offshore recreation has been nil recently with the unsettled weather. Most folks are even reluctant to target crab or sturgeon in north coast estuaries as inclement weather isn't conducive to a jolly good time.

**The Guide's Forecast** – If the weather forecast holds, steelheaders likely won't find many changes in store for the weekend other than colder than usual temperatures and wildly dangerous roads to navigate to your best steelhead locations. It's not a steelheaders ideal scenario for a good time.

None-the-less, some steelheaders will brave the weather and action should be fair at best under these conditions. Steelheaders would do themselves a favor in both safety and satisfaction by waiting out early morning frigid temps and start later when air and water temperatures begin to rise.

The Wilson and Nestucca will remain top bets for quality fish but count on encountering wild fish as well as broodstock for the next several weeks. With the cold weather onset, fish will bite more tentatively so wait longer on bait bites and extend your hooks back a bit if you are using plugs. The lower drifts will produce the best as fish will be slow to enter these systems with the cold weather and low flows. Anglers may even venture into tidewater sections of these two favorites as fish may be quite reluctant to migrate under these conditions.

Other north coast systems will likely be too low and clear to expect bang-up results with one exception, the Nehalem River. While this river rarely gives up double digit days, it does fish best when other systems are low and clear, presenting their own set of challenges. When temperatures warm up on a more consistent basis, this should be a fishery that gets underway in a good way.

No good tides for sturgeon but crabbers may still want to explore options on the lower Columbia. The estuary out of Hammond is still rumored to be putting out good catches of keeper Dungeness in good quality. Soft tides may even be conducive to trolling for springers if you feel so motivated. Be cautious of the weather however as winds are forecast to blow.

Don't bother clamming. It's been a poor season so far and the tides are not good anyway.

Big Creek Reservoir #1 & #2 and Olalla Creek Reservoir are scheduled for trout stocking this week.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – Offshore conditions on Saturday, February 26th, look promising for an ocean foray. For those who have gotten out over the past week, rockfishing has been good and large ling cod are being bagged.

The Yaquina Bay jetty has been producing rockfish and ling cod to anglers tossing herring. Crabbing has been very slow in the bay with nets and traps yielding mostly smalls and females.

Alsea steelheaders have been hooking up with some regularity but the fish are a mix of wild and hatchery.

Water conditions are good at the Siuslaw River although steelheading has been spotty. Fish are returning in good number to the hatchery trap on Whitaker Creek.

Crabbing has been spotty at Winchester Bay although rock fishing has been worthwhile off the South Jetty. Low water temperatures on the Umpqua mainstem have caused steelhead to become lethargic and slow to take bait or lure. Steelhead has been fair at best on the North Umpqua but fair to good on the South Umpqua although that "good return of hatchery steelhead" that the ODFW has been promising this season has yet to materialize. Most of the hookups are with wild fish which must be released here.

Another reminder to attend the free Fly Fishing Expo on Saturday, February 26th at Reedsport High School on South 22nd Street in Reedsport. The event will run from 9 AM to 4 PM and is for those who fly fish as well as those who are thinking they might like it.

Coos Bay is producing fair to good numbers of Dungeness for those in boats but dock crabbers are getting little result for their efforts. Rock fishers are catching a few rockfish and greenling but no ling cod have been reported. While there are good numbers of winter steelhead which are, for the most part, hunkered in the deep runs, the majority of these are in less than desirable condition. It's worthwhile to stay at it, however, to hook one of the bright fish which are still available. There are good numbers of winter steelhead available in the Coos system although it is too low and clear to fish at its best. Small lures or baits fished on light lines in deeper pools should turn some fish.

Elk and Sixes are fairly low and clear with another round of rainfall in the forecast early next week.

The lower Rogue has dropped and cleared over the past week with the flow about 5,300 at Agness. It will be less than 4,000 by the coming weekend. While plug-pullers and side drifters are connecting with bright winter fish, conditions in the middle Rogue are more conducive to positive results. At this time of year there are plenty of fish in the river. Steelhead have started nosing into the upper river but better results will come from downstream.

At 2,370 cfs at Brookings as of mid-day on February 24th, the Chetco is quite fishable although anglers should expect to find it fairly clear. Winter steelhead are well distributed throughout the river. Unfortunately, the river level and flow are forecast to drop through Friday and continue that trend through the weekend. If the prediction is accurate, it will be lower than the three-foot level and flowing under 1,500 cfs by Sunday. Not unfishable but those are tough conditions for the Chetco. Relief is on the way in the form of the next round of precipitation but it's not supposed to arrive until the middle of next week or so.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – Fly anglers on the Deschutes are reporting redsides responding to deep-fished nymphs with little in the way of hatches recently.

The ODFW announced mid-week that the Deschutes and Hood rivers will open for the retention of spring Chinook starting April 15th. Deadlines, bag limits and other pesky details will appear in TGF once that date nears.

The Wallowa River has come into excellent shape and color with the water temperature in the high 30s to low 40s. Fly fishers have been enjoying some good days on the water with several reports of multiple hookups. Wallowa Lake jig fishers are taking fair to good numbers of kokanee averaging 14 inches. Everyone who fishes here inevitably thinks about the possibility that the next bite could yield a world record.

**ODFW sez:** "The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife will award one commercial brine shrimp permit on April 22, 2011.

"Brine shrimp are harvested from only one place in Oregon -- Lake Abert in the southeast part of the state. In order to retain a permit, the holder must harvest at least 5,000 pounds of brine shrimp in Oregon during the prior year. Only adults can be harvested; the harvest of immature shrimp (cysts) is not allowed.

"The commercial brine shrimp fishery in Oregon is limited to three permits," said DeAnna Erickson, license services manager for ODFW. "If the number of permits falls below three we hold a lottery to bring the number back up."

"To apply for the permit lottery the applicant must be at least 18-years-old and cannot currently hold a permit.

"Only one application per individual will be accepted. Applications must be received in the ODFW Headquarters office in Salem no later than April 15, 2011. Applications are available from the Salem office only, and applications will be mailed upon request. There is a \$102 fee to apply. The fee will go towards the permit cost if the applicant is successful. Unsuccessful applicant fees are refunded.

"For more information on applying for a permit please contact ODFW's licensing services, 3406 Cherry Avenue NE, Salem, OR 97303 or call (503) 947-6101 or (800) 720-6339 ext. 76112."

### **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](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.

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 the closures, check the emergency rule changes on WDFW's website at <http://bit.ly/eWIYg3>.

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](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/](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](mailto: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.

### **TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail**

We welcome our latest recreational angler and TGF field reports, **Robert S.** who writes this week, "the ODFW report says anglers are reporting success on hood river, kinda funny I fished another 5 hours last Saturday from the mouth and below punchbowl falls...saw about 5 other fisherman conventional style and no one pulled a fish. 3 of us around the mouth and under the highway bridge slots without success, eggs, bobber and jig, and bobber and bait. I have a spot where I can sight fish and saw no fish moving up and the weather was perfect....hmmm the ODFW report for hood river has been word for word identical for weeks though so...next trip is Columbia springer down in the Cathlamet neighborhood on the Washington side."

### **Write to the TGF staff:**

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### **Random Links**

Options for 'Mount NOAA':

[http://www.newportnewstimes.com/v2\\_news\\_articles.php?heading=0&page=72&story\\_id=26451](http://www.newportnewstimes.com/v2_news_articles.php?heading=0&page=72&story_id=26451)

Tailout Tactics from Dave Schamp:

<http://www.salmonandsteelheadjournal.com/ArticleDisplay/tabid/87/smId/423/ArticleID/35/reftab/66/t/Tailout-Tactics/Default.aspx>

**GOOD LUCK!**