

The Guide's Forecast - volume 13 issue number 9

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 4th – February 10th, 2011**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

An **EXCELLENT** steelhead season clearly lies ahead. With great catches anticipated well into spring, **pro guide Bob Rees (503) 812-9036** currently has just a few openings for the rest of the season. Call Bob now or email him at brees@pacifier.com to book a day for north coast steelhead. Choose either March 7th, 15th, 18th or 20th.



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Willamette Valley/Metro- With the Willamette River blown out, motivated anglers will take to the mainstem Columbia upstream of the influence of the Willamette River at Kelly Point Park. Davis Bar and the I-5 area should continue to produce some catches of spring chinook. Gillnets will take the week off as test netting yielded more wild steelhead than spring chinook. These quality steelhead are likely destined for the Sandy and Clackamas systems.

Willamette flow continued to moderate through the end of February as winter steelhead counts tapered off. Results from last week's sturgeon retention fishery indicated lighter catch and effort but shakers kept anglers busy throughout the day. The fishery will continue Thursday through Saturday until a 2,550 fish quota is attained.

After a fair February on the Willamette for river conditions and action, spring chinook catches have tapered recently with the muddy water influence of the Clackamas River and tributaries above Willamette Falls. It may be weeks before good action returns to trollers seeking success.

Rising water levels this week will put the McKenzie out of shape for the coming weekend.

The North Santiam is fishable but that will change as snowmelt begins and rain continues this week. The first Learn the River trip will occur on Saturday, March 5th. Call 503-897-3301 for information.

Expect the Clackamas to be rising this week with prospects for winter steelhead improving as the rain moderates and water levels drop. Wild fish and broodstock keepers should begin to show in better numbers.

Sandy steelheaders have experienced slow to spotty results recently. Most of the hookups have been with wild fish although hatchery broodstock steelhead are also entering.

Northwest – Low flows challenged anglers for much of the weekend but recent precipitation has brought several systems back into fishable shape. With snow falling at relatively low elevations, some watersheds remain fishable, particularly the smaller rivers such as the Necanicum and the Kilchis. Expect mostly wild fish on these systems.

Anglers were still tallying an occasional broodstock steelhead as well as some wild fish on the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers over the weekend. River levels will fluctuate throughout the week and weekend but these two signature streams should fish well when flows permit.

With the prolonged period of high water, steelhead will be well distributed throughout north coast river systems. March is peak month for wild steelhead and the few broodstock steelhead programs on the Wilson, Nestucca, Alsea and Siletz Rivers. Use big baits and bright colors in higher flows and fish the river edges where migrating fish will take advantage of slower flows during high water periods.

Poor tides and inclement weather will keep anglers from recreating on any open bodies of water. Good bottomfishing waits for anglers when calm seas return. Crabbing remains fair in the lower Columbia when weather allows.

Southwest – Storms have been keeping boats off the ocean this week but when offshore trips have been possible, limits of rockfish have been common off the Oregon coast. Fishing for large ling cod has been excellent when conditions have allowed and will continue through March.

An eight-hour boating safety education course conducted by the U.S Coast Guard Auxiliary in Charleston on Saturday, March 12, will cost only \$15. Call 541-267-6152 for information or to

register.

Rain is expected to put a damper on crabbing this week at Winchester Bay. Steelheading has been fair to good on the South Umpqua but high water will postpone efforts for a while.

Bait has been outfishing lures on the Coquille River where steelheading is expected to be worthwhile as the river drops and clears.

Low and clear at the end of February, rain this week will improve conditions and prospects for steelhead on the Elk and Sixes river.

An 18-pound Chinook taken at Rainie Falls by Jim Mauie on Friday, February 25th is the first reported Rogue springer of 2011. Water levels on the Rogue River are predicted to be rising through the coming weekend. Steelhead returns have been promising for this time of year, so hit the river as it recovers for fresh, bright winters. Fishing has been slow on the upper river. Surf perch fishing has been good on area beaches when the ocean has calmed down.

Over the past week, Chetco steelheaders have taken decent numbers of hatchery fish. This is a pleasant surprise as it is considered late in the season for this system. Unfortunately, the Chetco is forecast to be blown out for the coming weekend but results over the past week give reason for hope as the river drops.

Eastern – The lower Deschutes has been in good condition and is providing fair to good fishing for reidsides. Results on the middle Deschutes will improve over the coming weeks.

While snow remains on the banks of Fall River, anglers using nymphs are hooking fish and as the weather improves, caddis will be hatching.

The Metolius usually fishes very well in the month of March.

SW Washington – Although steelhead fishing should be peaking about this time on many district streams, anglers remain focuses on a prime, early run spring chinook from Woodland to Vancouver. The Willamette will cause a decline in success rates downstream but positive indicators justify an effort around I-5 and upstream.

The Kalama and Cowlitz will remain some of the better options for steelhead as we enter the late season. Action should improve dramatically when flows stabilize and water temperatures rise. In the meantime, use large baits to attract biters.

As expected, spring chinook opportunities are not expected to be the same as previous years. Regardless, spring chinook will begin to show in fair numbers later in the month with the Cowlitz, Lewis and Kalama Rivers offering the best chances at catching fair numbers.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Although spring chinook fishing has slowed down recently, weekend fishing was very good for late February, further confirming speculation that a larger run than anticipated may be on tap. **Pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)** reported great action at Davis Bar over the weekend with some boats having multiple opportunities trolling herring. Davis Bar is located directly across from the mouth of the Willamette River along the Washington shoreline.

Brandon noted that river flows have come up higher than usual recently with less than ideal conditions (when cfs is greater than 180,000). Couple this with a drop in water temperatures and this could kill a bite under any circumstances.

ODF&W catch statistics show similar results with 11 adipose fin-clipped spring chinook kept and four unclipped spring chinook released for 24 boats over the weekend. With the Willamette blown out, most of the effort is taking place upstream of Kelly Point Park through Troutdale. Fourteen spring chinook have passed by Bonneville Dam now.

The mainstem Columbia above I-5 opened on March 1st but with the above mentioned conditions, fishing was less inspirational than expected. Brandon stated that the fish just didn't seem to be there, when more recently, action and fish finder indications said otherwise. For boaters, the upper deadline is Rooster Rock. For bank anglers, fishing all the way to Bonneville Dam (at the dam deadline) is permissible.

Sturgeon anglers are still struggling with only an occasional fish coming from the Portland to Longview stretch. With these flows and dropping water temperatures, it may be some time before we witness good fishing on the mainstem Columbia again for keeper sturgeon.

Upriver, there are still some steelhead trollers working The Dalles and John Day Pools. Success rates are fair for the few attempting as summer steelhead won't be in prime condition given the bulk of the fish taken are summer run fish.

Sturgeon success has also tapered in the upper river reservoirs but that could change back to favorable catches when the water temperatures warm again.

Crabbing remains an option on the lower Columbia although effort has been light recently. Given the nature of the weather so far, it's understandable why no one is all that interested.

The Guide's Forecast – It looks like we can continue to count on the same type of weather pattern for at least a while longer. This may not be all that inspirational for spring chinook anglers wanting to fish the Columbia for what remains an early option. The Columbia from Davis Bar to Rooster Rock however is likely the best option for spring chinook anglers in the Portland area over the weekend. With the Willamette blown out for who knows how many days (or weeks), this section of river should remain fishable from a visibility standpoint anyway. River flows and temperature may be another thing however.

If you do go out in pursuit of spring chinook, you'll want herring and you'll want to be fishing it close to the bottom of the river. Green label herring is what's available but it's also the preferred size for these spring run salmon. Don't be afraid to drag your lead on the bottom to catch these fish, they seem to be bottom huggers, especially in the faster flows.

Don't bother sturgeon fishing, it remains a Willamette show. There will continue to be an occasional shaker and a rare keeper caught downstream of Portland to Longview but don't count on exciting opportunities.

There are some fair tides for lower Columbia crabbing if it interests you. The weather is forecasted to even improve by the weekend. You'll want to have all your gear up by high tide (around noon) however. There's enough of an outgoing tide and freshwater movement to take your buoys underwater. Crabbing may begin to peter out as the freshwater base is on the increase.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Willamette flow increased through mid-week at the Falls but started moderating today, March 3rd. Water visibility has dropped to less than one foot. About 3,150 winter steelhead have been counted. According to totals released by the ODFW, anglers have retained 1,469 of the 2,550-sturgeon quota over the first two openers. This means the lower Willamette and Multomah Channel will be open this week, Thursday through Saturday for retention of one fish per day. Spring Chinook catches have been very few and quite far between for both recreational and guide boats. Small wonder as dirty as the water is but results are bound to improve as the water clears and certainly in the weeks to come as more salmon enter the system.

The McKenzie flow increased only slightly with recent rainfall. Conditions will be favorably effected by the increase in water temperature from just above 37 at the onset of the precipitation to about 42 degrees as of March 3rd.

ODFW sez. "Henry Hagg Lake near Forest Grove opens to fishing this week [Saturday at sunrise – ed.] and has been stocked with 18,000 legal-sized rainbow trout. Large brood trout released earlier in the year should also be available."

The Guide's Forecast – According to NOAA forecasts, the Willamette should start dropping and gradually clearing today, March 3rd, and continue to do so over the coming week. A good retention fishery on the lower Willamette this week would easily wipe out the remaining roughly 1,000 sturgeon remaining in the quota. When this occurs, there will be no further retention opportunities on the lower Willamette for 2011. Sand shrimp has been effective lately but try to have at least a couple of additional alternatives to appease the whims of these fickle, bottom dwellers; roll-mop herring, and squid along with some scents would be good choices. Most will start around St. Johns/ Portland Harbor/ Toyota Dock but wherever you try, if there are no hookups in 15 minutes, move. Keep moving until a pod of fish is located. For springers, trolling green label herring is still a good approach with Sellwood Bridge a popular spot. Try trolling 'downhill' (with the current.

With dry weather in the forecast, McKenzie flow will moderate and angling prospects pick up as hatches occur in greater number and frequency.

FREE and open to the public, Ask the Experts, brought to you by The Salem Chapter of the Association of Northwest Steelheaders – March 15th, Keizer Community Center. More information here: <http://www.theguidesforecast.com/pic/11030302.jpg>

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – The Clackamas River swelled and turned muddy with precipitation earlier this week but has started to drop and clear.

Sandy has risen from 9.15 Feet to 10.22 feet at Bull Run (accuracy aside) over the past week. This rise has done little to affect water flow although the color went to a grey-green and became more opaque the further one went downstream, despite this being a glacial tributary where the freezing level will usually have the greatest effect on the fishability.

The Guide's Forecast – Water color and flow on the Clackamas may show sufficient improvement to be considered fishable but something would have to happen to change results which have been painfully slow. Optimism, however, is surprisingly high for the coming weekend.

As of Thursday this week, reports are of decent water conditions on the Sandy. Steelheading should be worthwhile on Friday and through the weekend. The Sandy is probably the best chance in the Valley for a fresh winter steelhead.

Sandy fishers should be aware that the annual 'Frostbite Follies' will occur on Saturday, March 5th. This event, sponsored and organized by the Sandy River Chapter of the Northwest Steelheaders, is a day-long drift which starts at 7 AM. During these gatherings, solitude is at a greater-than-normal premium on the Sandy River.

North Coast Fishing Report – Like most areas on the north coast, inclement weather kept motivation levels pretty low this week for anglers that would like to get out after steelhead. Snow in the mountain passes kept many metro anglers from drifting the north coast river systems and justifiably so. It has been slick up there!

Prior to the new-found precipitation, river levels had been low and clear, presenting their own challenges to steelheaders. Bank anglers almost had the advantage as fish were well distributed in the river systems and holding in well defined holes where it would be easy to read the water they were lying in wait. I even hooked one from the bank prior to the weekend using a rag and Berkley fake eggs driftfishing a nice hole on the lower Wilson River. Did I mention that I broke it off? Don't ask for more details please but no, it didn't break at the knot.

The Wilson stayed in fair shape through the precipitation as the bulk of it fell as snow in the higher elevations. This at least kept the river green but there was definitely some flow to it. Few boats were taking advantage of the ideal conditions but water temperatures would have kept fish from responding really well, even though river height and color were pretty good.

The Nestucca got too high and by early in the week, veteran guides were canceling trips and staying home and drinking beer.

Under these conditions, smaller streams fish quite well and adventurous anglers pursuing steelhead on the Kilchis, Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem and Three Rivers were likely to find some natives and spawned out early run steelhead. Again, not much effort but there were fair reports of wild fish on the Necanicum and Kilchis systems.

Little to no sturgeon effort, little to no crabbing or clamming effort. It's all about steelhead now and don't even ask about ocean fishing. But, there was a small window of opportunity last weekend and the few taking advantage of it talked about good lingcod fishing and fair crabbing. We may not see another window like that for a while, at least when there is snow on the ground.

The Guide's Forecast – Another weekend of wild weather in the forecast meaning we're not sure which way you should go and too much is left in the hands of the creator. It doesn't look like earth shattering weather however so some north coast systems should be fishable.

The Wilson and Nestucca look pretty volatile over the weekend however. Experienced boaters willing to work the upper ends of these systems may find good fishing. Be aware however there are likely still sweepers that can take out boats on these floats. USE EXTREME CAUTION!

In years past, this time-frame has been one of the most productive times for wild and broodstock steelhead. It should be no different on this freshet. The time is ripe and the run is clearly successful this year. Use large baits and bright driftbobbers to get the job done. Targeting softer water will be key in these higher flows. Don't be afraid to hit slow moving cut banks that carry 2 to 3 foot of water alongside of them. Fish should not only be well distributed throughout the

system, but they will be well distributed across a range of bottom types. Any part of the river that is deeper than 12 inches is fair game under these conditions. With prolonged periods of high flow and the fact much of the rise in river level will be attributed to snow melt versus rainfall that erodes way hillsides, rivers should run more clear than normal for these water heights.

Smaller systems should produce the best results as these rivers remain more readable in higher flows. Top bets will remain the Necanicum and Kilchis Rivers with the North Fork, Three Rivers and the upper Trask fair alternatives this weekend. You'll still want to use big, colorful driftbobbers and big baits however. Be mindful of windfall and potential boating hazards still.

Not great tides for sturgeon fishing but crabbing may be a fair option. The lower Columbia will be the best candidate but Netarts Bay may also produce some limited catches but they should be good size anyway. The ocean will remain a poor option for offshore recreation but there are a lot of hungry lingcod out there. Good fishing is waiting you when weather permits.

Central & South Coast Reports – Those who temper the excitement of fishing or crabbing in the Newport area with a little sight-seeing should be advised that the Yaquina Head Lighthouse will be closed from Monday, March 7th through Saturday, March 12th. The BLM is providing a fresh coat of paint to the interior of the historic landmark.

While steelheading has been spotty on the Siuslaw, steelhead resumed entering the hatchery trap on Whitaker Creek mid-week with decent returns resuming.

Winter steelhead are available in the Coquille. As waters drop and clear in the coming week, steelheaders would be wise to concentrate efforts upstream of Powers.

Winchester Bay crabbers have been taking fair to good numbers of legal Dungeness from boats but dock anglers are struggling to find only a few. Rock fishers have taken limits off the South Jetty recently but this is not a pursuit to attempt if it is windy which is often the case here. Now that the Umpqua has given up a couple of springers in the Scottsburg stretch, most anglers here are anticipating Chinook hookups, particularly as catches of spawned-out steelhead returning to sea are increasing. There should be some fresh winters in the system, however, which came in on the recent freshet.

The latest report indicates waters of the Elk and Sixes dropping and clearing. These volatile rivers will be in shape one day, low and clear the next, so get there when you can as fishing should be decent when conditions are good.

At mid-week, the Rogue was rising with the water temperature increasing and getting a some color. Fish should be moving now and, in addition to winters, some spring Chinook should start nosing into the system. Now that the first springer of the season has been landed (see Fisheries Forecast, above), the possibility of a springer hookup and the season ahead will be on the minds of most Rogue fishers. Steelhead catches had been improving on the middle Rogue earlier this week but it remains to be seen how rainfall will effect the bite. Winter steelhead are into the upper river and have started to take angler's offerings.

When the ocean allows a little nearshore fishing out of the Port of Brookings (early mornings recommended), limits of rockfish are likely to be taken. This week is looking promising on Friday and Saturday, March 4th and 5th, with wave height picking up through the day on this coming Sunday. When boats are able to access deeper water, there are jumbo ling cod out there which are most willing to cooperate with anglers. Whether fishing rocks or jetties or plying deeper waters from a boat, the most tantalizing offering for ling cod is a live kelp greenling although

these toothy critters will gladly latch onto a large, curly-tailed plastic grub on a jig. The Chetco River is dropping at this writing will continue to do so through Friday but, uh-oh, there's a problem for the coming weekend: the Chetco will begin rising on Saturday and continue until the deluge ceases sometime during the coming week.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Fall River is producing decent numbers of rainbows as well as the occasional cutthroat to fly anglers.

The Grande Ronde has received a good shot of steelhead this season and it has been fishing has been very good when the water is not too high. It's on the rise this week but once it crests and begins to drop, it will be well worth the trip. Drift corkies, yarn, eggs or a combination thereof.

According to the latest creel report, steelheaders are fishing an average of 3.7 hours per fish on the Willamette. The river is currently on the rise, however, so anglers are advised to keep an eye on the level (here: [*http://waterdata.usgs.gov/usa/nwis/uv?site_no=13333000](http://waterdata.usgs.gov/usa/nwis/uv?site_no=13333000)) in order to catch it on the drop.

Lake Billy Chinook is producing fair numbers of small kokanee to trollers.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report for March 2011

North Puget Sound

With the region's rivers closed to steelhead fishing, anglers' attention has turned to blackmouth salmon in the marine areas of Puget Sound.

Anglers fishing marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands), 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 closed to salmon fishing.

While there have been a few reports of anglers hauling in some nice blackmouth, salmon fishing in Puget Sound has been slow the last couple of weeks of February. "Anglers that have put in their time on the water have been most successful," said Steve Thiesfeld, fish biologist with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "It looks like that will continue to be the case as we head into March. But hopefully fishing will improve as spring approaches."

Anglers looking for some competition might want to participate in the **Everett Blackmouth Derby** on March 19. Prizes include \$3,000 for the largest fish, \$1,500 for second place and \$500 for third place. For details, visit the [derby's website](#).

Meanwhile, numerous rivers are closed to fishing for **steelhead** and other game fish, including the Skagit, Sauk and Samish. The three rivers, usually open in March, closed early to protect wild steelhead that are returning in low numbers this year.

Freshwater anglers, however, can wet a line at some 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 Washington and Lake Sammamish continue to produce 14-18 inch cutthroat trout with the occasional lunker over 20 inches," he said. "Fishing for bass, perch, and **crappie** in all lakes should improve in March as water temperatures increase and fish move shallower."

Looking forward to the **summer salmon fishing** season? There's still time to provide input on proposals for this year's fisheries. Several public meetings have been scheduled throughout March as fishery managers continue to develop the 2011 salmon seasons, which will be finalized in mid-April. For more information on the meetings, visit WDFW's [North of Falcon website](#).

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

More wild steelhead are moving into rivers on the Olympic Peninsula, blackmouth salmon fisheries are under way in Puget Sound and the lingcod season opens March 12 in ocean areas south of Cape Alava.

In addition, WDFW plans to open several ocean beaches for a razor clam dig in March if marine toxin tests show the clams are safe to eat. The results of those tests will be announced about a week before the dig is scheduled to start.

The dig is tentatively scheduled to get under way after noon Saturday, March 19, then switch to morning hours March 20-22. Under that plan, digging will be allowed at four beaches – Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis and Mocrocks – March 19-20, then continue at two beaches – Long Beach and Twin Harbors – March 21-22.

No digging will be allowed before noon March 19 or after noon March 20-22.

"We're planning this opening at the time of year when the best tides for digging razor clams switch from the evening to the morning," said Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager. "It's a little tricky from a scheduling standpoint, but it does provide an opportunity for back-to-back digs the evening of Saturday, March 19, and the morning of Sunday, March 20."

The fifth annual Ocean Shores Razor Clam Festival, which includes a chowder cook-off, is also scheduled March 19. Information on the festival is available at <http://www.2011clams.com/>.

Wild Steelhead fishing on the northern peninsula is a good bet right now, said Kirt Hughes, regional fishery manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "This is peak season for wild steelhead," he said. "Anglers need to keep an eye on river conditions, but fishing is good right now."

As in years past, anglers may retain only one wild steelhead per license year on the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc rivers. On all other rivers, anglers may retain only hatchery-reared steelhead marked with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar.

Anglers looking to hook a **hatchery steelhead** should try fishing rivers in the Chehalis River Basin. "During the last weeks of February, fishing slowed in the basin," Hughes said. "But the Satsop, Skookumchuck and Wynoochee rivers still offer the best opportunities for hatchery steelhead in March."

For more information on steelhead fishing regulations, check the [Fishing in Washington pamphlet](#).

As water temperatures begin to warm, freshwater anglers also might want to try fishing at one of the region's lakes. Popular lakes open year-round include Thurston County's Saint Clair Lake for **rainbow** and **brown trout**, American Lake in Pierce County for **kokanee** and Kitsap Lake in Kitsap County for rainbow trout.

Rather catch a **blackmouth salmon**? Several areas of Puget Sound are open to fishing for resident chinook. Anglers fishing marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon) and 12 (Hood Canal) have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook.

Those fishing the Strait of Juan de Fuca – marine areas 5 (Sekiu) and 6 (eastern Strait) – have a daily limit of one salmon. “During the last weekend of February, anglers fishing for blackmouth at Coyote and Partridge banks in the eastern Strait had success,” said Steve Thiesfeld, Puget Sound salmon manager for WDFW.

Anglers fishing for salmon in Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound) continue to have success hooking resident **coho**, said Larry Phillips, regional fish biologist for WDFW. Best bets include the Tacoma Narrows, the Squaxin Island area and in Eld Inlet off Evergreen Beach. Anglers fishing Marine Area 13 have daily limit of one salmon.

Another option is **lingcod** fishing, which gets under way March 12 in marine areas 1-3, south of Cape Alava. The minimum size for lingcod in these areas is 22 inches, with a daily limit of two fish per angler. For lingcod fishing regulations, check the [Fishing in Washington pamphlet](#). Looking forward to the **summer salmon fishing** season? There's still time to provide input on proposals for this year's fisheries. Several public meetings have been scheduled throughout March as fishery managers continue to develop the 2011 salmon seasons, which will be finalized in mid-April. For more information on the meetings, visit WDFW's [North of Falcon website](#).

Southwest Washington

Spring chinook fever is beginning to take hold on the Columbia River. More than 50 boats were counted on the lower river one day in mid February when only a few fish had been counted at Bonneville Dam. By late March – when the bulk of the run is expected to arrive – that number is expected to grow to nearly 2,000 per day.

“At first, the fish usually arrive in fits and starts, then eventually start moving upriver in a steady flow,” said Joe Hymer, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). “Through March, we expect to see the number of boat and bank anglers on the river to increase week by week.”

According to the pre-season forecast, 198,400 upriver spring chinook will return to the Columbia River this year, close to the 10-year average. While that prediction is well below last year's banner run of 315,345 fish, the number of large five-year-old chinook is expected to be up significantly over last year.

The forecast anticipates the return of more than 100,000 five-year-old fish to the upper Columbia and Willamette River this year, Hymer said. By comparison, only about 26,000 of the fish that returned last year were in that age class.

“We're already seeing a high number of large fish in the early catch,” Hymer said. “Those five-year-olds generally run 18 to 30 pounds apiece.”

Through Feb. 28, spring chinook fishing is open to boat and bank anglers on a daily basis from Buoy 10 near the mouth of the Columbia River upstream to the Interstate 5 Bridge under rules described in the 2010-11 *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet.

From March 1 through April 4, the fishery will be expanded 22 miles upriver to Rooster Rock, under new rules approved by fishery managers in Washington and Oregon. Bank anglers will also be allowed to fish from Rooster Rock up to the fishing boundary below Bonneville Dam during that time.

Above Bonneville Dam, the fishery will be open to boat and bank anglers on a daily basis from March 16 through April 24 between the Tower Island powerlines six miles below The Dalles Dam and the Washington/Oregon state line, 17 miles upriver from McNary Dam. Bank anglers can also fish from Bonneville Dam upriver to the powerlines during that time.

As in years past, anglers may retain only hatchery-reared fish, marked with a clipped adipose fin. All unmarked wild spring chinook must be released unharmed.

Anglers fishing downriver from Bonneville Dam may retain one hatchery-reared adult chinook per day as part of their catch limit. Above the dam, anglers can keep two marked hatchery chinook per day.

To guard against overestimating the run, the states will manage the fishery with a 30 percent buffer until the forecast is updated in late April or early May, said Cindy LeFleur, Columbia River policy coordinator for WDFW. "If the fish return at or above expectations, we will look toward providing additional days of fishing on the river later in spring," she said.

Initial seasons announced today allocate 7,750 upper river spring chinook to the sport fishery below Bonneville Dam, 1,650 to anglers fishing above Bonneville and 2,100 to the commercial fleet. Those guidelines do not include the catch of spring chinook returning to tributaries flowing into the Columbia River below Bonneville Dam or into the Bonneville Pool.

The Cowlitz River is currently open to fishing for spring chinook, with a daily limit of two adult chinook salmon. On the Kalama and Lewis rivers, the limit is one adult chinook salmon per day. Above Bonneville, the Wind River and Drano Lake are scheduled to open for spring chinook March 16 with a limit of two chinook per day.

All of those rivers are also open to fishing for **hatchery steelhead** under rules outlined in the 2010-11 [Fishing in Washington](#) pamphlet. Hymer said fishing for late-run hatchery steelhead is still going strong, particularly on the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers, noting that summer-run steelhead will start coming in right behind them later in the month. Although spring chinook start arriving on the Cowlitz in early March, hatchery steelhead usually make up the bulk of the catch until later in the month, he said.

In other waters, anglers should be aware that March 15 is the last day to fish for steelhead on Abernathy, Cedar (Clark Co.), Germany, Mill (Cowlitz Co.), Rock (Skamania Co.), Salmon (Clark Co.) creeks and on the Coweeman, Elochoman, Grays, East Fork Lewis and Washougal rivers. **Sturgeon** anglers should also be aware of new joint fishing seasons and catch guidelines established for 2011. Concerned about the decline of legal-size sturgeon in the lower Columbia River, fishery managers from Washington and Oregon agreed to reduce this year's total catch by 30 percent. As in years past, 80 percent of the allowable catch will be allocated to the sport fishery and 20 percent to the commercial fishery.

"In practical terms, this year's action is expected to reduce the amount of time sturgeon fisheries in the lower Columbia River will be open at the end of the season," said Brad James, another WDFW fish biologist.

Fishing seasons approved for 2011 in the lower Columbia River are as follows:

- **Buoy 10 to the Wauna powerlines:** Retention of white sturgeon is allowed daily from Jan. 1 to April 30; May 14 through June 26; and July 1-4. From Jan. 1 to April 30, sturgeon must measure between 38 inches and 54 inches (fork length) to be retained. From May 14 through the end of the season they must measure 41 inches to 54 inches

- (fork length) to be retained. Catch-and-release fishing is allowed on days when retention is prohibited.
- **Wauna powerlines to Bonneville Dam:** Retention of white sturgeon is allowed three days per week (Thursday through Saturday) from Jan. 1 through July 31 and from Oct. 8 until Dec. 31. Sturgeon must measure between 38 inches and 54 inches (fork length) to be retained. Catch-and-release fishing is allowed on days when retention is prohibited. All fishing for sturgeon will be closed from May 1 through Aug. 31 in the sturgeon sanctuary downriver from Bonneville Dam described in the *Fishing in Washington* rules pamphlet.

At a previous joint state hearing, the two states took action to close the Sand Island Slough near Rooster Rock to fishing at least through April 30.

Bucking the trend in the lower river, monitoring and fishery data show that sturgeon populations are growing above Bonneville Dam, James said. In response, catch guidelines were increased from 1,400 fish to 2,000 fish in the Bonneville Pool and from 165 fish to 500 fish in the John Day Pool. The 300-fish guideline in The Dalles Pool remains unchanged.

Despite the higher quota, the Bonneville Pool was closed to sturgeon retention at the end of the day Feb. 18. Anglers are advised to watch the [WDFW website](#) for updates on The Dalles Pool and the John Day Pool.

While sturgeon fishing has been slow in the lower river, the **walleye** fishery has been picking up above Bonneville Dam. By mid February, boat anglers fishing The Dalles Pool were averaging a walleye per rod.

Rather catch **trout**? WDFW plans to plant a total of 10,000 half-pound rainbows in Kline Pond, Battle Ground Lake and Lacamas Lake – all in Clark County – in March. In addition, Lacamas Lake is expected to receive 5,000 browns of similar size. Anglers fishing Kline Pond averaged nearly two fish apiece in mid February after a previous trout plant. See the [trout-stocking schedule](#) on the WDFW website for more information on winter trout stocking.

Eastern Washington

March may start off a bit slow for fishing in the region with the recent return of wintery weather and iced-over waters that will keep anglers home, limit their access, or slow fish stocking.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Lyons Ferry and Tucannon fish hatchery crews have been working to get “catchable” size (about one-third pound) and “jumbo” size (one-plus pound) **rainbow trout** stocked in several lakes and ponds in the southeast end of the region that open to fishing March 1 or are open year-round.

Six of the seven March 1-opening impoundments off the Tucannon River on WDFW’s Wooten Wildlife Area in Columbia County are getting some of their annual allotment of hatchery rainbows, with others stocked later in the season. Big Four Lake is scheduled to receive a total of 2,000 catchables and 300 jumbos; Blue Lake will receive 23,000 catchables and 400 jumbos; Deer Lake gets 3,400 catchables and 50 jumbos; Rainbow Lake gets 15,000 catchables and 325 jumbos; Spring Lake gets 11,000 catchables and 325 jumbos; and Watson Lake gets 21,300 catchables and 325 jumbos. Beaver Lake has water depth and quality issues that preclude it from viable fish stocking this year.

Also opening March 1 for stocked rainbow fishing is Fishhook Pond in Walla Walla County, which is scheduled to receive a total of 5,000 catchables and 150 jumbos this season, and Pampa Pond in Whitman County, which will receive a total of 6,000 catchables and 200 jumbos.

Two year-round-open small impoundments off the Snake River near the bottom of Alpowa Grade west of Clarkston in Asotin County are also being stocked at this time. Golf Course Pond will get a total of 22,000 catchables and 475 jumbos, and West Evans Ponds will get a total of 22,000 catchables and 475 jumbos.

Orchard Pond, a year-round impoundment off the Snake River in Columbia County, will receive a total of 2,000 catchables and 50 jumbos.

In Walla Walla County, two year-round fisheries are scheduled to receive some of their annual allotment of trout – Quarry Pond will get a total of 25,000 catchables and 400 jumbos, and Bennington Lake will get a total of 20,500 catchables and 625 jumbos.

Anglers can check [Catchable Trout Plant Reports](#) to see when WDFW hatchery crews will complete trout stocking.

Other waters opening March 1 in the region will likely provide action on a variety of fish later in the month when ice melts and access is easier. Most of these waters are not dependent on catchable fish stocking, but have fish populations that carry over through the winter.

Chris Donley, WDFW central district fish biologist, said that Liberty Lake, in eastern Spokane County, will be “fantastic” for carryover **brown trout** that run 16 to 25 inches. Liberty will also yield some of the earliest **yellow perch** and **crappie**, he says, “but not on the first of March this year.”

When warmer weather returns, Downs Lake in southwest Spokane County might be the best place in the region for the first **smallmouth bass**. Downs also has yellow perch, crappie, and carryover rainbow trout. Medical Lake, near the town of the same name in southwest Spokane County, has brown and rainbow trout.

Amber Lake in southwest Spokane County opens for catch-and-release of rainbow and **cutthroat trout** on March 1. Coffeepot Lake in Lincoln County opens on the first, under selective gear rules, for rainbows, perch and crappie. When conditions improve, both of these special rule fisheries should provide excellent fly-fishing opportunities.

Bill Baker, WDFW northeast district fish biologist, reports Deer Lake in southern Stevens County is still iced over. “If anglers attempt to fish it on the March 1 opener they need to be very cautious about safe ice depth,” he said. Deer Lake has bass, crappie, perch, rainbow and **lake trout**, and **kokanee**.

Baker also notes that northern Stevens County’s two winter-season rainbow trout lakes – Williams and Hatch – are still producing catches of fish measuring 13 to 14 inches. “The bite seems to be best in the early morning,” he said. Both lakes remain open through the month of March, but Baker warns anglers to be cautious about quickly changing ice conditions this late in the season.

WDFW police Sgt. Dan Rahn said fishing action has slowed at the central district’s two winter-season (December through March) lakes – Hog Canyon in Spokane County and Fourth of July in Lincoln County. In February, many anglers checked were taking limits of rainbows, he notes, but changing conditions may be keeping anglers at home. “There’s still plenty of nice fish to be caught at these lakes,” he said. “But anglers do need to be careful about marginally safe ice.”

Baker also said Lake Roosevelt kokanee and rainbow trout fishing has been good and should continue through March. In the Spring Canyon area of the big Columbia River reservoir, both species are being caught near the surface.

Other year-round fisheries in the region that continue to provide good fishing include Sprague Lake for rainbows, and Rock Lake for rainbow and brown trout.

Another kind of fishing is available at the Inland Northwest Wildlife Council's 51st annual [Big Horn Outdoor Adventure Show](#), March 17-20, at the Spokane County Fair and Expo Center. Some 5,000 trout are stocked in three huge indoor lakes for kids to catch at "Fishing World," and there's a "Virtual Reality Fishing Simulator," fishing demonstration tank, lots of fishing seminars by experts, and hundreds of fishing equipment and charter service vendors. The show also offers a rifle range, archery range, laser shot shooting simulators, and of course the origins of the event – "Trophy Territory," where hundreds of hunter-harvested antlered and horned animals are displayed and judged by Boone and Crocket scorers.

Northcentral Washington

At least 18 **rainbow trout**-stocked waters in the northcentral region open to fishing on March 1, but only a few will likely be fishable early in the season. Only two lakes in Grant County – Martha Lake just east of the town of George and Upper Caliche Lake just west of George – were at least half-open from ice, reports Chad Jackson, a district fishing biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

"Fishing at Martha Lake should be good for 11 to 13-inch trout that were stocked late last fall," Jackson said. "There is also a good number of catchables at least 14 inches to be caught in Martha."

"Upper Caliche Lake will fish well, too, but the trout will be smaller, running eight to ten inches," he said. "We were unable to plant fish late last fall when the lake was iced over with that early winter weather in November."

Two other popular March 1-opening waters – Quincy and Burke lakes on WDFW's Quincy Wildlife Area southwest of the town of Quincy – were mostly iced over and unfishable at last check.

"When they do open up, I expect them to fish well since they received pretty hefty catchable plants last spring and fall," Jackson said. Burke Lake was stocked with 18,000 rainbows weigh a third of a pound and Quincy received 16,000.

Other Columbia Basin lakes opening March 1 on the Quincy Wildlife Area include Upper, Lower and West Caliche lakes, southwest of George; Dusty Lake, a selective gear rule fishery south of Quincy; and several small "walk-in" lakes, including Cascade, Cliff, Crystal, Cup, Dot, George and Spring.

Three other lakes – Lenice, Nunnally and Merry on WDFW's Crab Creek Wildlife Area in southwest Grant County just east of Beverly – open under selective gear rules March 1. Lake Lenore, north of the town of Soap Lake in Grant County, opens for catch-and-release trout fishing March 1. The fishery there for two to four-pound **Lahontan cutthroat trout** usually catches fire there by April.

In Okanogan County, lake fishing is an option on several stocked year-round waters, including Patterson Lake near Winthrop and Sidley Lake near Oroville. **Yellow perch** are usually caught at Patterson and rainbow trout are the predominant species at Sidley.

WDFW Okanogan district fish biologist Bob Jateff reminds **steelhead** anglers fishing the upper Columbia River and its tributaries that they are required to retain any hatchery-origin adipose-fin-clipped steelhead they catch up to the limit of four fish per day. The Wenatchee and Icicle rivers remain open to steelhead fishing until further notice. Anglers may retain hatchery steelhead with a clipped adipose fin and a circular (hole) punch in their caudal (tail) fin on the Wenatchee and Icicle rivers, along with other waterways in the upper Columbia.

Southcentral Washington

Spring chinook salmon are moving up the Columbia River and steelhead fishing should pick up soon, but **trout** fishing in area lakes is probably best bet for catching fish over the next few weeks.

"We start stocking year-round lakes in late February and continue right through June," said Eric Anderson, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "This fishery is really our bread and butter, and anglers look forward to it all year."

By mid-March, about a dozen lakes and ponds in Yakima, Kittitas, Franklin and Benton counties are scheduled to receive thousands of "catchable size" rainbow trout, along with hundreds of jumbos and triploids. For a complete list, see the [stocking schedule](#) for southcentral Washington on the WDFW website.

But anglers should also be aware that **steelhead** fishing usually picks up in March on the Columbia River and its tributaries. Paul Hoffarth, another WDFW fish biologist, notes that some of the highest catches of the season occur in March near the Ringold Springs Hatchery.

"A lot of steelhead that have been hanging out all winter will make their final spawning runs," Hoffarth said. "That's when catch rates start rising again."

The daily limit is four hatchery steelhead per day from the Columbia River from Priest Rapids to Chief Joseph Dam and all tributaries in between. Under rules now in effect, anglers are required to retain the first four adipose-fin-clipped steelhead they catch. See the WDFW [fishing rule](#) issued Feb. 9 for details on that rule and other new regulations.

Meanwhile, the **spring chinook** fishery opens March 1 above Bonneville Dam with a two-chinook daily limit. The area open for spring chinook fishing has been extended upstream of McNary Dam to the Washington-Oregon border, 17 miles upstream from the dam.

Spring chinook probably won't start showing up in the catch that far upriver until mid April, while walleye are already starting to make a good showing, Hoffarth said. "We're are starting to see a few walleye in the creel, including some good-size fish running over 10 pounds. Walleye fishing should continue to improve for the next few weeks as these fish get ready for their early spring spawn."

White sturgeon are also still an option. The sturgeon fishery above McNary Dam (Lake Wallula) is scheduled to run through July 31, and the catch guideline for the John Day Pool (Lake Umatilla) was recently increased from 165 to 500 fish. "That increase should allow us to keep the fishery open for retention on into March," Hoffarth said.

TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail

Write to the TGF staff:

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Random Links

Washington/Oregon Coast Guard Bar Cameras:

http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/pqr/marine/bars_mover.php

Chilean Chinook weighs 75 pounds:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10150097767191699&set=a.352130946698.151948.186754246698&theater>

Income opportunities or exploitation of natural resources? Decide for yourself then choose to move forward on one of the following - or not - but please don't shoot, bash or flame the messenger.

ODFW to hold lottery for one brine shrimp permit:

<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/news/2011/february/022311.asp>

ODFW to award sea urchin diving permits:

<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/news/2011/february/022411.asp>

ODFW to issue one dive bay clam permit:

<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/news/2011/february/022511.asp>

GOOD LUCK!