

The Guide's Forecast - volume 13 issue number 11

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

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

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- After several slow days of spring chinook fishing, the bite has picked up in recent days for Davis Bar anglers. Trolled green label herring is producing the best results but unusually high flows this time of year is keeping anglers from fully realizing their potential. It doesn't look like flows will subside anytime either.

With the Willamette high and muddy, the mainstem Columbia above the mouth of the Willamette may be the best bet. Anglers were reporting good catches of Chinook on Monday and Tuesday and action should continue to be steady as more fish come in. Gillnets remained dockside last week. Test netting revealed a high presence of wild steelhead and chinook in the catches. A higher portion of hatchery fish should begin showing soon.

The lower Willamette River will be on the rise and muddy this week. Spring chinook fishing will be difficult in these conditions but won't hamper catch-and-release sturgeon efforts now that retention season has closed. Summer and winter steelhead are crossing at the Falls in fair numbers. Middle Willamette trout fishing is good on bead-head nymphs.

Expect to find McKenzie flows to be in the 5,000 cfs range at Vida over the coming weekend. Nymphs will draw strikes until trout key on the recent March Brown hatches.

High but dropping water is predicted for the Clackamas this week as broodstock steelhead mingle with wild fish. Good fishing should come through April with summer steelhead beginning to show later into April.

Sandy levels are fishable but clarity is contingent upon freezing level on this glacial river. Quality broodstock fish should begin to make a stronger showing in the coming weeks.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is stocking many lakes and ponds in preparation for spring break. See <http://tinyurl.com/4c3avxg> for details.

Northwest – Most north coast tributaries remained too high for good fishing, despite healthy sighs indicating a good return. Smaller streams, namely the Kilchis and Necanicum, produced fair results up until March 17th. Another surge of rain rose rivers again but main systems should be fishing again by the weekend. Wild steelhead will dominate the catches on these systems.

The Wilson will top the districts most popular watershed but the Nestucca should also have good numbers of hatchery fish as well as wild steelhead available. Upper stretches should produce the best early and fish should be well distributed throughout the systems with the prolonged period of high water we are coming off of.

The Trask should also be a fair option although this system is primarily managed for wild fish but a few Wilson strays are checked here every year. Like other systems, the upper reaches should produce the best catches. The Trask stays productive through the majority of April.

More rough weather kept anglers from fishing sturgeon on Tillamook Bay. Effort will remain on the rivers as rough seas are once again predicted through the weekend. Crabbing on the lower Columbia should become more challenging with the tides and rainfall though the weekend.

Southwest – Depoe Bay suffered damage to Dock One from tidal surges as a result of the tsunami. Deep water bottom fishing will continue through the month of March contingent upon offshore conditions.

Winchester Bay has been fair for crabbing. The North Umpqua is a good place to catch-and-release wild steelhead while the South Umpqua holds the best chance for hatchery fish as the system recovers from the current freshet.

High and muddy earlier this week, the lower Rogue is forecast to begin dropping and clearing into the coming weekend although it may not be fishable until sometime next week. A similar scenario is predicted for fishing on the middle Rogue. With winter steelheading wrapped up here, target spring chinook as the river recovers. Springer catches will continue to improve into April. Winter steelhead are into the upper river but fishing has been slow.

Expect the Elk and Sixes to produce winter steelhead whenever these rivers drop into shape although catches will be winding down through the remainder of March.

While some boats sunk and docks were damaged or worse, the Port of Brookings is recovering from tsunami damage. As the Chetco River drops back into shape over the coming weekend, high water will limit efforts to plunking. Steelheading will be slow to spotty this late in the season for primarily spawned-out fish.

Eastern – Mid-day has been most productive for reddsides on the lower Deschutes. Blue-Winged-Olives are predominant although March Browns are appearing in greater number. Nymph fishing has produced consistent results in the absence of hatches.

Bull trout fishing was been good for trollers over the past weekend at Lake Billy Chinook.

Fishing is slow to fair for lake trout at Crescent Lake. Deep trolling is required and snow on the ground has periodically required four-wheel-drive launch vehicles.

SW Washington – Like many Oregon river systems, high water has plagued steelheaders looking for opportunities in district rivers. Anglers reported good catches on the Kalama prior to the high water but the Cowlitz and Lewis systems may also kick in when the water clears.

Spring chinook should be available when rivers clear although the peak is still several weeks away. The Cowlitz and Kalama should produce fair results this spring.

Forty-seven spring chinook have passed Bonneville Dam now; hardly enough to satisfy a target fishery around the Wind River but this fishery should produce fair results in another month.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Coming off of a slow period, action finally picked up recently with fair numbers of Chinook landed in the I-5 area earlier in the week. **Pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)** reported light effort and good catches early in the week with double digit catches for about as many boats. Davis Bar and the I-5 area were producing the best results as turbid water continued to influence success rates downstream of the mouth of the Willamette. Effort has jumped in recent days with the good reports and all. As it was last year, with fewer other options and an anxious angler population, the I-5 area is the go-to place for those looking for their best chances.

Brandon also reports the water has warmed recently but flows continue to be high for this time of year. The high water does effect angler success but catches were good enough to still justify a

decent effort by anglers. Most would agree that high water typically makes fishing (and success) more challenging for trollers. Given the fact we're still early in the season, ideal conditions would be producing better results.

Recent results from the "test" net fishery in the lower river reveal more "white-faced" springers entering the system. Good enough as a matter of fact to warrant a mainstem fishery which would be prosecuted on Wednesday if the commercial fleet themselves choose to participate. The catch was expected to be between 1,000 and 1,200 fish and the expectation was for less than 50 wild steelhead to die in the fishery.

Sturgeon action picked up near Kelly Point Park recently but by far, the bulk of the catch were comprised of shakers with very few keepers in the bunch. Both bank and boat anglers reported fast action using smelt and sand shrimp for the willing little fish. One boat reported action almost as fast as you baited the hooks. With the Willamette catch and keep fishery closing, look for more interest in this area but keepers will still be hard to come by.

Upstream, a few die-hard steelheaders are still trolling for fish in the John Day and The Dalles Pool. Most fish are summer run fish and therefore, not in the best condition for tablefare. This action will likely remain fair into early April.

The Guide's Forecast – This same section of the Columbia River will remain the best bet for anglers interested in seeking out an early spring Chinook. The fact of the matter is however, it's getting to the point in the run where it's not so late anymore. Anglers also have to take into account that the season is modeled to only last until April 4th. It's too early to tell but with the slow fishing the last week and a half, we may get an extension for sportanglers in this fishery. It's important to note however that many of the fish taken already this season were mainstem "black-faced" Chinook instead of the expected Willamette bound "snow-bellies" that typically show this time of year.

Water levels are expected to remain high which may pose its own set of challenges for herring trollers working downstream. Anglers should consider working shallower edges, even as shallow as 5 feet, along islands and sandbars as migrating adults. Although herring is the best option for early season fish, plugs may become effective in the higher flows and with water temperatures on the rise, fish may respond better to plugs in the very near future.

Herring trolling will remain the best bet however and the Airport to Davis Bar stretch will continue to produce the best results. In this fishery, anglers shouldn't be afraid to also fish in shallower water. Under these conditions, fish take the path of least resistance. If air and water temperatures remain stable, this should be a good week of fairly decent fishing.

Look for sturgeon fishing to remain fair as well but shakers will make up the bulk of the catch. Kelly Point Park and slightly upstream will remain the hot spots with much slower action in the Portland to Longview stretch. If you value your smelt, you may want to be conservative with what bait you use in this area. Sand shrimp seems to be working equally well.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Hundreds of wild steelhead crossed at Willamette Falls over the past 10 days and are now upstream. Spring Chinook catches have been spotty and have slowed as water conditions deteriorated and flow increased in the owner Willamette this week. During the last three-day period which ended March 12th during which sturgeon fishers were allowed to keep fish, 138 legals were taken which the ODFW extrapolated to be sufficient to have filled the 2,550-fish quota. The keeper fishery started February 17th. As we reported earlier this week in the Fisheries Forecast, the retention of

sturgeon is no longer allowed in the lower Willamette. Here's the official version of that announcement from the ODFW:

"OREGON CITY, Ore. – The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife announced today that the sturgeon retention season on the lower Willamette River downstream from Willamette Falls, including Multnomah Channel and the Gilbert River, is now closed.

"ODFW closed the season following creel survey analysis that indicated harvest was at or near the pre-season guideline of 2,550 sturgeon following the last fishing day on March 12. The season had been open three days a week since Feb. 17.

"Catch-and-release sturgeon fishing is still allowed on the lower Willamette River, and retention is still allowed on the Columbia from the mouth of the river upstream to Bonneville Dam and from The Dalles Dam to McNary Dam.

"Anglers are reminded that all sturgeon fishing, including catch-and-release, is prohibited between the I-205 Bridge and Willamette Falls from May 1 through Aug. 31 because that section of the river has been designated as a sturgeon spawning sanctuary."

McKenzie levels will remain too high to fish through the coming weekend. The river is closed above Leaburg Dam until 'opening day' on April 22nd.

Water levels are high and hazardous on the Santiams although there is hope for improvement with a break in the weather in the coming week. Trees that had blocked the North Santiam below Green's Bridge are reported to have been cleared with thanks to the volunteers who did so. Caution is advised from Shelburn to Green's Bridge, however, as problems in this stretch have not been addressed but will be in anticipation of the next "Learn the River" trip from Stayton to Green's Bridge on April 2nd. Call 503 897 3301 for information.

Spring break occurs next week for most Oregon students. The ODFW has anticipated the potential for idle hands, stocking many of the local lakes, ponds and reservoirs with catchable and larger rainbow trout. Now that biologists have figured out the effect of a shrimp-based diet on these fishes, even freshly-planted hatchery raised specimens will be found to have pink flesh which is much more appealing to the eye than white-fleshed trout of seasons past.

Scheduled for planting in the Willamette Zone this week are Benson Lake, Bethany Pond, Blue Lake, Canby Pond, Commonwealth Lake, Dorman Pond, Huddelston Pond, Mt. Hood Pond, Sheridan Pond, Cottage Grove Pond, Dexter Reservoir, Dorena Reservoir, E. E. Wilson Pond, East Freeway Lake, Junction City Pond, Roaring River Park Pond, Walling Pond, Walter Wirth Lake and Waverly Lake

The Guide's Forecast – Spring Chinook catches are expected to improve along with water clarity on the lower Willamette and Multnomah Channel. Trollers should continue to drag plug-cut herring, preferably against the current, until water temperatures warm at which time hardware will be more effective. The YTD winter steelhead total at Willamette Falls exceeds 4,500, most of which should be in the North Santiam and Molalla systems. The one lonely spring Chinook which crossed the Falls back on February 25th has yet to pick up any brothers or sisters to accompany its upstream journey.

Look for March Brown hatches on the McKenzie as it drops and clears in the coming week. Chances are that trout will not yet be keyed on them in which case a well-presented nymph should draw some attention from redsides.

Water levels will be dropping on the Santiam system over the next seven days. While there has been a surge in winter steelhead counts at Willamette Falls, as most steelheader are aware, these are natives which can create a decent catch-and-release fishery here. The rare hatchery fish would be either a very early summer fish or a stray.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – The Clackamas is high and swift at this writing on Thursday, March 17th. Effort and catches have been light over the past week as the river has been out of shape and the water level fluctuating.

Sandy levels are high but exhibited fair color mid-week. Drift boaters should keep an eye out for downed trees and debris in the river. Catches have been as poor as the water conditions with the latter contributing negatively to the former. Results were no better at Cedar Creek although the number of steelheaders trying made it appear to the contrary.

The Guide's Forecast – The Clackamas has started dropping and is expected to continue well into the coming week. This will offer a window of opportunity for steelheaders to attempt an encounter with a broodstock fish which will be in the river through the remainder of March alongside wild steelhead, the latter of which must be released unharmed.

Strike while the metaphorical iron is hot, however; as much as we feel no envy for those to whom the duty of forecasting the rapidly-changing weather conditions in Oregon at this time of year, prognosticators predict rain starting Thursday next week which, if a freshet comes to pass, will cause yet another rise in the water level and put the kibosh on efforts.

Conditions at the Sandy will be improving over the weekend and into the coming week as drier conditions combine with a lower freezing level. Catches of hatchery and broodstock steelhead have been as good here as anywhere in the valley when water conditions have been decent.

North Coast Fishing Report – High water kept most guides and anglers off of the larger systems this week but the Kilchis River fished fairly well for anglers over the weekend and early in the week. **Pro guide Kent Anderson (503-550-6303)** reported 3 to 6 opportunities for a days effort and also reported other guide boats producing similar results in the high but fishable flows. Another surge of rain kept the Kilchis the best option around mid-week but river levels for all north coast streams are expected to come into fishable shape even prior to the weekend.

About the only other system worth an anglers time was the Necanicum River. Both the Necanicum and Kilchis Rivers are primarily wild fish systems this late in the season. Any hatchery fish present would likely be in poor condition.

Weather and water conditions kept all other north coast systems in rough shape. We'll save all the juicy text for the forecast section of this portion of the newsletter.

Scheduled for trout planting in anticipation of north coast youngsters on spring break are Lake Lytle, Lost Lake (Clatsop County), Lost Lake (Lane County), Loren's Pond, Mercer Lake, Munsel Lake, Nedonna Pond, North Georgia Lake, Olalla Creek Reservoir, Perkins Lake, Siltcoos Lagoon, Siltcoos Lake, Smith Lake, South Lake, Spring Lake, Sunset Lake, Tahoe Lake, Thissel Pond, Town Lake, Vernonia Pond and Woahink Lake.

The Guide's Forecast – As rivers continue to drop, prospects should continue to improve. Small streams (lacking hatchery steelhead this time of year) should produce best before the weekend.

By the weekend, the two key hatchery systems on the north coast (Nestucca and Wilson Rivers), should be booting out good numbers of both hatchery broodstock and wild fish. As we typically state, the upper reaches will fish best early but fresh fish will still likely be making their way up through the lower stretches as well as soon as the rivers clear.

Only these systems will have quality hatchery fish available. Other systems such as the Trask, Kilchis, North Fork Nehalem and Necanicum Rivers should produce fair results, just plan on catch and release fishing.

For bait, we still suggest big baits and drift-bobbers in big water. Pink is a no-fair color when the water turns milky green. Eggs are likely to produce the most strikes but sand shrimp should get some attention as well. Bank anglers should have good access to fish in the upper stretches of most north coast streams but until flows slow, anglers will need to concentrate on softer water where fish are more likely to lie until the rivers clear.

The Nehalem hasn't been fishable for much of the season but it could come in by next weekend. With all the snowmelt and rain recently, it will need some precipitation free time before it becomes clear enough to have confidence to catch fish.

Another nice round of morning tides for the motivated sturgeon angler. Effort has been light due to inclement weather but some fair opportunity should exist in the coming week. Sand shrimp may produce good results in the west channel or middle channel of Tillamook Bay. Crabbing should be fair at best if you catch the tides right but Netarts will really be the best option. For the few people crabbing, prepare yourself for quality over quantity.

Long range forecasts are calling for a calming sea by early next week. Quality ling cod and bottomfish awaits those that practice safe offshore recreation. We may get our window.

Central & South Coast Reports – A rough weekend is predicted for conditions offshore and it only gets more fierce as one move south along the Oregon coast. If the forecast is accurate, launches will be possible in the coming week.

Ocean Chinook fishing opened March 15th from Cape Falcon to Humbug Mountain although it's too early in the season to expect stellar results. The early opening was made possible by a return of Sacramento fall Chinook which has reached a "normal" level in 2011 according the fisheries biologists following several yeas of poor returns. Decisions regarding further openings as well as the coho fishing season are expected to be made by the Pacific Fisheries Management Council in mid-April.

Winchester Bay crabbing has been spotty although the South Jetty has produced fair to good rockfish catches when the ocean has laid down. The sturgeon bite has improved recently. The Umpqua has been high and muddy but has started to drop and clear. Dry weather in the coming week will allow continual improvement. Steelhead in the mainstem and North Umpqua will be mostly wild so try the South Umpqua for the nest odds of catching a fish for the table.

According to the ODFW, "Striped bass, stripers, are moving into tidewaters for spawning on the Coquille, Smith and Umpqua rivers." We haven't heard of any catches but that's not unusual as this is a fishery about which locals remain mum. Sunset, nighttime and first light are generally the best times to fish with either baitfish or lures. This may be an opportunity for some to catch a fish which is guaranteed to give a good accounting for itself, however. Coos bay are anglers occasionally hook a striper which surf fishing, an encounter which is memorable on light tackle.

Rock and jetty fishers are taking decent numbers of rockfish and ling cod when wind and wave action allow fishing in relative safety. Look for conditions to improve this coming week starting Sunday, March 20th.

Crabbing has been slow with fresh water washing into the Coos Bay. Steelhead results historically taper off in March on the Coos River but sturgeon fishing should improve on the lower river and into the bay.

Winter steelheading historically winds down during the latter half of March on the Coquille River. Area beaches have been fair for surf perch with catches improving in late March though April.

Lower Rogue water levels have been high and fluctuating through out the week but have started to drop and will continue to improve through the week to come. Winter steelhead are still around and while there's a chance of hooking a bright fish, the smart money is on spring Chinook as those chrome torpedoes will be entering in greater number daily as conditions improve and the ocean lays down. Chances will be fair to good for winter steelhead on the middle stretch of the Rogue. Hatchery fish may be kept at 15 inches or better while steelheaders can keep one wild fish at least 24 inches per day up to five per year. There's not much pressure on the upper Rogue although winters have been entering for a while. This stretch will be the first to recover from a high water event and may offer a shot at some action without too much competition.

As of this writing on the morning of St. Patrick's Day, the Chetco River at Brookings is flowing at 9,540 cfs which is too much water even for plunkers. There's one more storm front in the forecast which is predicted to bump the water level on March 18th, where after the sun comes out, birds sing, yada, yada. Now, here's the 'good news, bad news situation: While the lower Chetco is predicted to fall into great shape and color over the coming week, there ain't much to fish for here.

Emigrant Reservoir, Expo Pond, Lake Selmac, Lost Creek Reservoir, Willow Lake and Reinhart Pond are scheduled for trout planting.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Limits of Kokanee are coming to patient anglers at Lake Billy Chinook. Trolling has been most effective for fish holding in the 40 to 60 foot range.

Deep trolling has produced fair catches of bull trout at Lake Billy Chinook. While not legally mandated, this is almost entirely a voluntary catch-and-release fishery which has a improved results and quality of fish.

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

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Random Links

There's an app for that! Tsunami Email Alert:

<http://wcatwc.arh.noaa.gov/watcher/tsunamiwatcher.php>

Recommended 2011 Halibut Regulations (confirmation soon):

<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/MRP/finfish/halibut/seasonmaps/Halibut%202011%20Oregs%202102011.pdf>

GOOD LUCK!