

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **March 25th – March 31st, 2011**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- After a slow-down in spring chinook fishing on the Columbia in the Portland area, catches picked up on Tuesday. Winter run-off has been high, likely due to low elevation snow melt, causing fish to not respond as well as they normally would for late March. If flows continue to moderate, the last stretch of the Columbia season should produce good catches.

Although fishery managers haven't been forthcoming for where the sport fleet is on the Columbia quota, optimistic anglers are hopeful for additional time downstream of Rooster Rock. April 4th is the proposed spring chinook closure for metro anglers.

Flows at Willamette Falls are moderating and catches should improve by the weekend. Summer steelhead passage is ramping up as winter counts drop off. Clarity of the lower Willamette is fair, springer fishing is slow. It will be crowded after the Columbia closes April 4th.

Steelhead catches have picked up although only a few are scoring on the Clackamas. The level is high but the color is good. Experienced anglers are noting the action isn't as good as it was last year but the broodstock keeps to wild fish ratio is improving.

Although high, the Sandy River came into good color over the past weekend and has been dropping since. Fishing was good last weekend and if water levels remain stable, action should continue to improve.

Northwest – After weeks of less than ideal conditions, north coast streams are in prime shape and producing good numbers of steelhead. Peak season is now and consistent catches are coming from nearly every north coast stream and river.

The Wilson has been producing well throughout the system but as flows drop, the lower sections will get the freshest fish. Bank anglers should have access to good numbers downstream of Lee's Camp. Anglers may have to drop down in size and color by the weekend as the water clears.

The Nestucca has been producing as well. With both broodstock and wild fish available, anglers have seen some of the best action of the season this week. By the weekend however, catches will likely slow but fish should remain available on the lower reaches.

Smaller streams such as the Necanicum fished well late last week and over the weekend. Those systems are clear now with fish only likely to bite at first light. Many smaller coastal rivers close to steelhead on March 31st so check regulations before heading out.

Spring chinook opens in the Tillamook district on April 1st. The first fish really won't show until at least mid-April with the peak later in May. After a good season last year, anticipation is running high.

Sturgeon effort was increasing over spring break but fishing was fair at best. Bay clam diggers took more interest in the minus tide series with options running into the weekend. Tillamook Bay diggers were taking limits of cockles on Tuesday.

Razor clam diggers in Oregon haven't been doing as well as Long Beach Washington diggers.

Success is sure to slow by the weekend. Crabbing in the lower Columbia remains good but strong tides will limit success until next week.

Southwest – Charters were able to get out of central Oregon ports over the past weekend to take limits or near-limits of rockfish and excellent catches of large ling cod from deeper water. The ocean closes for bottom fishing outside the 40-fathom line on April 1st. Ocean chinook fishing is open through April 30th with the summer season to be set at a later date.

All-depth halibut will open May 12th for select Thursday through Saturday retention periods from Cape Falcon to Humbug Mountain. Details will follow as the opener nears.

Surf perch fishing has improved and is good on south coast beaches when the ocean isn't too rough.

The sturgeon bite in Winchester Bay has yet to turn on. Crabbing is fair. The Umpqua system has settled down with little change in flows expected during the coming week although water color should improve.

Crabbing in Coos Bay is slow to fair.

The Elk River was marginally fishable late last week with the winter steelhead season wrapping up. Early this week, the level was 5.5 feet and the water was clear.

Level and flow are dropping on the lower Rogue. Early spring chinook results were good so prospects are positive as conditions improve this week. Drift boats on the middle Rogue have a decent shot at end-of-season winter steelhead when water conditions cooperate with side-drifting most productive. Winter steelhead catches will continue to improve on the upper Rogue.

Tsunami damage remains evident in the Port of Brookings. Rough offshore conditions are in the forecast. If accurate, ocean fishing will not be an option through the coming weekend. Prospects are fair for late-run winters this coming weekend.

Eastern – Willowa Reservoir is producing limits of larger-than-average kokanee to anglers using bright-colored jigs.

Kokanee fishing has been slow at Green Peter with the water level very low. Water temperature is in the low to mid-40s.

Trollers are taking good numbers of kokanee along with a few bull trout at Lake Billy Chinook.

SW Washington – Steelheaders are experiencing good catches after a long period of poor water conditions. The Kalama and Cowlitz Rivers are the best bets with bait producing good results for side-drifters. As flows drop, fish will become more receptive to plugs.

The Cowlitz is fast becoming a great late season option for steelheaders. With the new broodstock program on-line, late March and early April should produce good catches of quality sized steelhead. Plunkers were taking fair numbers of fish in the lower reaches while Blue Creek anglers were scoring on drifted baits.

Spring chinook should fall on the heels of the late winter steelhead run. The Cowlitz, Kalama and Lewis Rivers should receive fair runs this year but down from the previous year's returns.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Although action isn't what it has been like the last few years, it's not all that unexpected that springers aren't falling from the sky in the lower Columbia River fishery. Remember, the predicted run size this year is less by a fair percentage from previous highs. There has however been good fishing recently, which always gets up the hopes of those that are trying.

Pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327) recently reported that it hasn't been a good year. Brandon blames the lack of action mostly on the high flows the lower Columbia has witnessed this season. We know that has had an impact on previous years catches but we typically don't see these kind of flows until late April. Brandon fished on Wednesday, spending most of his time near the I-5 Bridge and the airport and reported landing (and releasing) a nice 23 pounder by 11:30 that morning. He reported seeing only 14 other fish caught for a whole lot of boats. Reportedly, action was considerably better on Tuesday. It's not uncommon to have hit and miss days this time of year either.

Over the weekend, only 5 springers were tallied for 113 boats in the Troutdale area while 43 salmon for 295 boats were tallied for the Portland to Longview stretch. For years with stronger returns, we would have expected to see better results for this time of year. Bank anglers aren't faring much better which is odd, given the fact that flows are so high. This typically favors bank anglers but only 6 steelhead (4 hatchery, 2 wild) were tallied for 204 bank rods. Downriver, estuary boats weren't posting any big numbers either.

Simply put, it's hard to believe, especially after all the good fishing we've had in recent years, that we're not seeing better numbers. With a fair early push of fish, even this writer was more optimistic but poor river conditions and sub-par catches above the dirty water (upstream of the Willamette) has me rethinking my wishful thoughts just a few weeks ago.

With no recent update on where we are with the 7,750 fish quota in the downstream of Bonneville fishery, we just don't know when this fishery is scheduled to close. Test netting and earlier VSI (Visual Stock Indexing; which determines if the spring chinook is an upriver bound fish or a Willamette bound fish) has oddly favored the upriver bound fish which will certainly hurt the Sportfleet when quota counting.

The Columbia is predicted to rise again but history points to volatility so you can't rely on hydrograph models. If flows go back up again, fishing will likely remain challenging. If they drop, fishing should improve but not by much. We just have to come to the realization that we're not going to experience a run size like we've seen in recent years.

Some guides have switched tactics to target sturgeon when salmon fishing has been so slow. Action for shakers remains excellent near the mouth of the Willamette River. Keepers are hard to come by however so weigh your motivation as this will primarily be a catch and release fishery and you'll burn through a lot of bait.

Reports of good crabbing from the lower Columbia continue to come in. Soft tides are producing the best and that's not what we're experiencing right now. All the fresh water coming from downstream will also likely dampen catches in the coming weeks.

Rockfishing off the south jetty is productive when weather allows. The problem is, the weather rarely allows.

The Guide's Forecast – Time is ticking on the lower Columbia fishery. Managers will meet very soon to determine the fate of this fishery. Although we're still weeks away from what many

would call a peak, the action over the next several days may be the best we're going to see in this fishery.

It's become a no-brainer fishery by now; trolling herring very close to the bottom in 20 to 40 foot of water from the I-205 Bridge to Davis Bar. The river upstream of the Willamette will remain the best from a visibility perspective but the river downstream should start fishing better too. Herring trollers and anchored plug anglers should start to produce better results around the Westport/Tenasillahe Island area. The wing jetties out of the John Day Boat Ramp near Astoria should also become options. This will be the clearest this section of river has been in weeks.

Anglers fishing in Troutdale should also see a jump in action but if there is a common thread in this weeks report, it's don't count on white hot fishing because it's not likely to happen. Bank anglers in the gorge will also continue to struggle and it's important to note that only 38 adults have passed Bonneville Dam.

Bank anglers working the lower Columbia River beaches should have a more productive week this week, given the minus tides and strong flows from upstream. No spring chinook were tallied in last weeks bank creel check however, which seems strange to me.

Bring your sturgeon gear along if you want to make a day of it. If the salmon fishing is slow, you can dunk sand shrimp or smelt and likely get all the action you want if you fish near the Port of Portland terminals. Just don't count on many, if any, keepers.

No sign of a calming sea so don't count on bottomfishing the jetty near the mouth of the Columbia. Crabbing is likely to taper as well.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Counts of winter steelhead at Willamette Falls have once again started to pick up as the YTD total heads for the 5,000 mark. According to the ODFW, this is the best winter run on record in five years. Summer steelhead (discernable by the adipose fin clip indicative of their hatchery origin) have been spotted since March 2nd with 228 counted as of March 21st. The bulk of both steelhead runs are bound for the Santiam system. ODFW biologists predict an increase in winter steelhead as water conditions clear and summer counts will climb seasonally. The lower Willamette and Multnomah Channel remain open to catch-and-release sturgeon only and while effort is light, catches are good. Visibility has been poor to fair but is improving this week.

The water level at the McKenzie River has been dropping into good shape.

The North Santiam will experience high flows this week due to Army Corps of Engineers releasing water to assist hatchery smolts downriver to the Willamette. Expect the river to return to seasonal flows by Saturday, March 26th.

Scheduled for trout planting this week are Canby Pond, St. Louis Pond, Blue River Reservoir, Timber Linn Lake and Waverly Lake.

The Guide's Forecast – Lower Willamette turbidity level is at 14 (which is good) and dropping (which is better) as of Thursday this week. The water color could actually be described as some shade of green for the first time in quite a while. Don't wait for springer season to close on the Columbia April 4th. It's not the height of the season by any means but the lower Willamette is shaping up and catches are improving. We guarantee you won't catch any sitting there looking at your computer. Meldrum Bar results have been poor for plunkers lately with the Eagle Creek

steelhead run wrapped up and spring Chinook numbers yet to be sufficient in the lower river for them to be vulnerable to a land-based approach.

Expect to find March Browns hatching on the lower McKenzie with interest and action improving along with water conditions over the coming week.

Catch-and-release winter steelhead fishing has been slow on the Santiams. Perhaps the best news for this system in a while is that a few summer steelhead have been taken in the lower Santiam, around Green's Bridge and near Jefferson. Bobber & jigs have been seducing the fresh hatchery fish.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Winter steelhead catches were fair to good over the past weekend on the Clackamas as the river was steadily dropping. Currently, the level is decent and the color is excellent. Boaters are advised to continue keeping an eye out for debris from the last storm. The return of hatchery steelhead to Eagle Creek is wrapped up for the year so, despite decent conditions, there's little of interest here at this time of year.

Sandy steelheading has been an unrewarding prospect recently. The time of year is right for broodstock steelhead and river conditions seem to be decent. This one is tough to call for the coming weekend, though.

The Guide's Forecast – Clackamas River forecasts indicate some fluctuation in the levels this coming weekend. When the river is once again dropping, prospects for steelhead are good and recent catches have included broodstock steelhead. Some talented steelheaders (who aren't guides) have been doing very well this week. Expect to find wild fish in the mix which should be carefully released.

Winter steelheading slow although broodstock fish are in the river. A confirmed summer steelhead catch occurred on March 18th with 'fish tales' of others as well as some talk of spring Chinook hookups. It's gotta turn on soon.

North Coast Fishing Report – It's been the week steelheaders have been waiting for. Ideal conditions for north coast streams in the middle of peak season for late-run winter steelhead.

Almost all north coast systems were fishing good by mid-week. After a prolonged period of high and off-colored water, larger, more popular systems are full steam ahead with motivated fish and motivated fishermen. Smaller systems fished well for much of last week with guides taking advantage of these smaller systems such as the Kilchis for fresh, wild fish for catch and release. **Pro guide Kent Anderson (503-550-6303)** reported consistent action on the Kilchis last week and we followed up early this week with decent action on the lower reach. We fished the Kilchis system nearly by ourselves having 2 opportunities each day in the low, clear water conditions. All fish were wild and released.

The Necanicum River had booted out good numbers of quality wild fish late last week with one fish reportedly in the high teens downstream of Black Bridge. Although traffic is light on this system this time of year, action can be good if you're willing to catch and release.

We put in another half day on the Wilson on Monday afternoon, drifting from Siskeyville to Mills Bridge, landing another 2 wild fish. The water couldn't have been in better shape. By Wednesday, hordes of anglers had swamped the system, making for crowded conditions but fair

fishing opportunities. The action had slowed by mid-week however with Sunday – Tuesday producing the best on the Wilson.

The Nestucca fished quite well for Kent Anderson during the same time frame. Starting with the upper reaches, Kent was having multiple opportunities early in the week and sounded a bit disappointed by only landing 4 by Wednesday. Kent stated that the river had become very busy by mid-week. Not uncommon given the Willamette Valley springer fishing is sub-par and the returns this winter have been great.

The Nehalem has yet to fish but may come in close to the weekend barring any heavy rains. This system should be full of fish but widely distributed given the amount of precipitation that this system has received. Don't look for outstanding results from this driftable stretch until the water gets much lower. By then, the fishery will be closed.

Check regulations carefully for your favorite north coast system as some close on March 31st for all angling, especially those with wild steelhead only this time of year.

Sturgeon anglers were out on this current tide series. Effort was relatively light however as the best fishing was months ago. Some fish should still be present however and good tides will last into next week. Clamming has been good on Tillamook and Netarts Bays. That too should continue on this low tide series.

Razor clam digging was fair at best on the last tide series and with a surf that's expected to remain high, don't count on it improving any time soon.

Crabbing in the area remains challenging. The ocean is forecast to be rough for another weekend. Too bad because deep water ling cod fishing will be great when conditions allow.

The annual **fin-clipping party at Whiskey Creek Hatchery** will take place on April 9th. This will be the 22nd year that volunteers have gathered for a day of food, camaraderie and a chance to give something back to the river. No experience is required, just show up for at 8 AM for free coffee and doughnuts. Lunch at noon is also on the house with clipping taking place until 2:30 PM or so. It's an all-volunteer operation so come lend a hand and join in the fun.

The Guide's Forecast – Stable river levels are in the forecast for much of the weekend and into next week; an unusual occurrence for this time of year. Convenient however, for those down steelheading on spring break. The weekend should be a mad house!

All systems go, (well, maybe not the Nehalem) but with a prolonged period of quality water conditions, the bulk of the batch of fish waiting for landing have indeed landed. As in, they've made their way to their upstream lairs. Fish will be well distributed under these conditions but the good news is, conditions should remain nearly ideal for both bank and boat anglers.

The Wilson and Nestucca will remain area favorites as anglers ply the waters for take-home fish. All reaches should fish fair but the heaviest pressure will likely be in the lower stretches. Keepers and wild fish will both be culled from the biting pool of adults so as you go upstream, plan on less action as traffic will be busy downstream of where you're fishing. Under these conditions, you'll have to be more creative than your competition so use more scent and fish non-typical gear. The change-up may produce better results for you.

Smaller streams will remain low and clear so the first boat to the virgin water will produce the best results. Under these conditions, if you're the second or third boat down, your chances

diminish. You'll certainly know where the fish are however, the deepest, darkest water. Plugs will work well under these conditions.

Again, check fishing regulations for March 31st closures. April 1st marks the opening for spring chinook in Tillamook County. Don't go out with high expectations but there should be a rare salmon around in the next few weeks. I've caught them as early as April 14th.

Sturgeon will remain an option in the west and middle channels. You may want to bring your clam gear too as tides will remain favorable. Use sand shrimp for bait if you sturgeon fish.

No offshore recreation for you this week, at least, not any fun recreation. Use extreme caution. Crabbing in Netarts will be fair at best, poor in other estuaries.

Central & South Coast Reports – As announced earlier this week, the ODFW set seasons for Oregon halibut fishing. Starting May 1st, offshore fishers may take halibut within the 40-fathom line until the end of October or a quota of 13,800 pounds. All-depth halibut which is of interest to most ocean anglers, starts May 12th until a quota of 115,578 pounds is taken.

Ocean fishing for rockfish and ling cod will be open without depth restrictions through the month of March but will be limited to the 40-fathom line (240 feet) thereafter. Jetty and rock fishers are taking rockfish, kelp greenling, cabezon and the occasional ling cod but conditions in the coming week are likely to keep boats inshore and prevent rock fishing.

Crabbing has been slow to fair at Yaquina bay with boaters taking enough for a good meal but short of limits. Ling cod have been taken this week off the jetty.

Winter steelheading is just about history for 2011 on the Siuslaw as confirmed by dwindling numbers in the trap at the Whittaker Creek hatchery facility.

while recent rain has enticed some late-season winter steelhead into the Coos and Coquille river systems, the season is winding down and catches are tapering off. Crabbing in Coos Bay is slow although sturgeon fishing is expected to pick up in the coming weeks.

Crabbing has been slow in Winchester Bay but will improve as salinity levels rise to normal. Effort for ocean salmon has been insignificant out of Reedsport although there's definitely an opportunity to hook spring Chinook bound for the Umpqua. While there have been some striped bass taken in the area recently, local anglers are not forthcoming with details. Stripers are most vulnerable at night and will take offerings of baitfish. Water levels in the mainstem Umpqua have dropped and the visibility is improving. Sturgeon fishers have taken a few in upper tidewater and catches will improve in April. NOAA forecasts indicate a gradual moderation of flow may be expected over the coming week. As the river stabilizes, spring Chinook catches will pick up. A few springers have already been caught in the Scottsburg stretch. South Fork Umpqua flows had dropped to 1,750 cfs at Tiller as of March 24th which should allow steelheading opportunities here. The South Umpqua holds the best chance of holding late-season hatchery steelhead. Fishing has been slow to fair on the flies-only stretch of the North Umpqua.

The Elk River is at good level and color this week. There should be a few late-season winter steelhead in the system.

Springers were landed by several boats on the lower Rogue Wednesday this week with some reporting multiple catches. Lower Rogue anglers are targeting spring Chinook as steelhead catches are on the wane. Steelheaders are taking fish on the middle Rogue with catches actually

improving over the past week despite higher-than-normal water conditions. Upper river steelheaders are making fair to good catches of winter steelhead although many are starting to show some color. Steelheaders may continue to take one wild fish per day up to five per year through April 30th.

The Lion's Whelp, a 92-foot schooner, was raised in Brookings Harbor on Tuesday this week. It was the last of the boats to be recovered from the tsunami which occurred March 11th. An estimated \$7 million in damage occurred in the harbor. Port Manager Ted Fitzgerald assured the public earlier this week that the harbor has recovered and all facilities are up and running. Local merchants are selling T-shirts stating, "Tsunami Evacuation Instructions: Run Like Hell." Chetco River levels have dropped to a decent level. On the other hand, winter steelheading is nearly a memory here although an occasional bright fish has been taken recently. Effort here is seasonably light.

Bradley Lake, Upper and Middle Empire Lake, Johnson Mill Pond, Powers Pond, Butterfield Lake, Middle and Lower Empire Lake and Eel Lake are scheduled to be stocked with hatchery trout.

Central and Eastern Oregon – The lower Deschutes flow is just over 5,000 cfs which is about average for this time of year. Trout fishing is fair to good with the best results predictably at mid-day. Caddis and Blue-Winged-Olives remain the predominate hatches of interest.

Wallowa Lake has continued to deliver limits of kokanee averaging 12 inches to anglers using jigs in depths of 100 to 150 feet or more.

Lake Billy Chinook has continued to produce fair to good catches of kokanee with best results coming from the Metolius arm. Trolling has been most effective although jig fishers have scored as well. Trolled plugs are taking bull trout.

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 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:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com

Michael Teague: Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com

Random Links

Steelhead forecast bodes well for summer fishery:

<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/news/2011/march/031711c.asp>

Marine Reserves in the news:

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OSMB to Address Unlicensed Oregon Fishing Guides:

http://www.oregonlive.com/outdoors/index.ssf/2011/03/outdoor_guides_come_under_oreg.html

GOOD LUCK!