

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 9th – December 15th, 2011**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Sturgeon fishing slowed to a crawl on the lower Columbia and with cold temperatures likely to continue to grip the region, it likely will not get any better. The Willamette River, in the Portland Harbor will likely be the go-to spot for the remainder of the winter season. It remains catch and release there however and likely won't open until February, much like last year.

Fishery managers were surprised to see another downward trend in the population models for keeper-sized sturgeon. Further quota restrictions are highly likely in the 2012 season, not only in the Willamette but throughout the lower Columbia as well.

Water temperature is in the low 40s at Willamette Falls. The Falls navigation locks have been shut down indefinitely due to safety concerns. Plunkers are trying for winters at Meldrum Bar and late summers and cutthroat in the upper river around Dexter Dam.

McKenzie flows have returned to pre-storm level. Trout will respond to nymphs in winter although there are occasional blue winged olive hatches.

The North Santiam has dropped to a navigable level from Packsaddle downstream.

Winter steelhead have been in the Sandy for a few weeks in modest number. Broodstock catches will improve in January and February.

Very few winter steelhead have been caught in the Clackamas but numbers will improve in weeks to come. The river is in excellent condition.

Northwest – After a good stretch of chinook fishing in the Tillamook district, flows have once again subsided and chinook are harder to come by. Quality fish remain in the Wilson River but are hunkered down in the deeper holes and less likely to bite the longer they reside in fresh water. The tidewater stretch is the best place to intercept chinook under the current conditions.

It's been bitterly cold in the morning but trollers working the Ghost Hole in Tillamook Bay continue to score fresh chinook. Pat Vining and Ted Lane scored their 2-fish limit by 7:45 a.m. on Tuesday, taking 25 and 18 pound fish respectively. The two anglers were trolling herring 2 hours before high slack in the Ghost Hole.

Chinook action is winding down on other north coast streams as steelhead action is coming on. Although not quite the peak of the run, steelhead are well distributed in many north coast systems with the North Fork Nehalem and Three Rivers being primary targets for those seeking early run hatchery fish. Water temperatures are dropping making afternoons a viable option so anglers can avoid iced up roads. These smaller streams are also extremely clear, causing steelhead to be skittish and less likely to bite.

There will be many good options in this district when warmer, wetter weather returns to the north coast. There is no sign of that in the near future.

Tillamook Bay crabbing is spotty with some crabbers reporting good success and others just mediocre. Ocean crabbing remains temporarily closed until adults fill out more. That is

disappointing for bottomfishers that are scoring great catches of lingcod and rockfish in the deep reefs on calm seas. Calm seas are forecast to come up by the weekend however. The lower Columbia River remains the best place to catch crab, with limits easily attained around Buoys 20 and 22. Put in your best effort near high or low slack and be cautious of heavy tide exchanges that will likely submerge crab pot buoys if your timing is off.

An after-sunset minus tide series begins tonight. Clamming should be excellent prior to the weekend along Clatsop County beaches.

Southwest – Offshore charter boats have been able to launch this week. Limits of rockfish were taken as well as some large ling cod, particularly for boats targeting them in deeper water. Unfortunately, swells are forecast to increase into the coming weekend.

Recent Dungeness samples taken by ODFW biologists indicate crabs are not yet of harvestable quality. The ocean season will remain closed to commercial and recreational crabbing until at least December 15th.

Crabbing has improved in Winchester Bay with lower flows on the Umpqua but sorting of lightweights is required to cull quality catches.

Chinook fishing is done for the season in the Coos and Coquille systems.

Steelheaders on the lower Rogue have started catching early winters. Fishing has been slow on the middle river. Anglers on the upper Rogue continue to take steelhead but it's getting late in the season for quality summers. The fish are showing a lot of color and are, for the most part, suitable only for smoking. A few coho are also being taken.

With the Chetco River low, only the occasional chinook is being caught in tidewater and far upstream. Early winters are showing but the river is too skinny to fish well.

Low, clear water has virtually shut down chinook catches on the Elk and Sixes rivers. Rain will rejuvenate this fishery but mostly dry days are in the long range weather forecast.

The Washougal River is a good metro option with fish already reported back to the hatchery.

Eastern – Steelheading this late in the season is fair at best on the Deschutes. Traffic is very light at this time of year and the weather can be bone-chilling.

The John Day Pool and John Day Arm slowed a bit this week; likely due to the drastic drop in air and water temperatures. Action should pick back up again when temperatures moderate.

The Grande Ronde and Umatilla Rivers are good for steelheading. Anglers are averaging 4 to 5.4 hours per fish respectively on these systems. Bitter cold temperatures in these systems mean the possibility for streamside ice in the morning hours, use caution.

SW Washington – Although steelhead aren't swarming into district streams, they are returning in catchable numbers with the Cowlitz producing the best prospects. The Kalama and Lewis Rivers also have fish but should produce better results following the next rain freshet.

Side-drifters will take the lion's share of the catch but plugs can become effective in the lower flows that most area streams are now experiencing. Catches should improve through December.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Sturgeon fishing is only getting slower and we have cold temperatures to thank for that. Anglers will continue to focus on the Willamette River, even though there is no consumptive opportunity there. The Columbia will only get worse until spring temperatures improve water conditions.

Crabbing in the lower river is slam dunk limits right now. It's pretty impressive around buoy's 20, 21 and 22. You do have to pay attention to tides however as strong tides will take buoys under. Work the high or low slack for success.

The Guide's Forecast – Crabbers may want to focus their efforts around low slack over the weekend as the low tide is actually a fairly high tide. It's a no-brainer opportunity but weather may play a role in how pleasurable your trip is. You'll have to pay close attention to the tides so you don't lose your buoys underwater when the flows begin to pick up.

Really, don't bother sturgeon fishing unless your just out after an aesthetically pleasing day. You're not likely to catch any keepers and shaker action is falling off too.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Winter steelhead counts are tapering off as Willamette River flows drop at the Falls. Water temperatures are right at a chilly 40 degrees which contributes to low fish activity levels. Just over 400 winter have been counted at the Falls thus far this year.

McKenzie River level and flow has continued to gradually drop. It's currently at roughly 2,550 cfs at Vida as it was prior to last month's stormy weather.

The Santiam system has dropped into decent condition for fishing and drift-boating although recent results have been slow to fair.

The Guide's Forecast – While a few plunkers are trying for winter steelhead from the bank below the mouth of the Clackamas down to Meldrum Bar, it's still early in the season for best results. It's rare for this fishery to produce more than a few a day but this time of year it is truly a test of patience. Steelheading is getting tough on the upper river as well, where it's getting late for quality summer steelhead and there aren't enough winters in the system yet to target on the Middle Fork although a few trout are being caught.

Redsides are cooperating on the McKenzie despite low water conditions but it's mostly a nymph show at this time of year.

There are good numbers of summer steelhead in the Santiam system but most are of a quality the would be suitable for the smoker. A few bright coho have been landed recently but they will be turning dark very soon and be unsuitable for anything but fertilizer.

Starting January 1st, a \$7 per day fee must be paid to park, at any of five wildlife areas: E.E. Wilson near Monmouth, the Ladd Marsh near LaGrande, the Denman Wildlife Area near Central Point, The Sauvie Island Wildlife Area on the lower Columbia River's Sauvie Island and the Summer Lake Wildlife Area near Summer Lake. Alternately users can purchase an annual parking pass for \$22.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Fishing is slow at the Clackamas with the coho fishery over and winter steelhead yet to get started.

Cold weather will usually keep the Sandy River in good condition for fishing and that is certainly the case this week. The river looks great and is a decent level. While there have been a few winter steelhead landed, the switch to broodstock was made here several years ago. These fin-clipped fish are the offspring of wild steelhead and, by their nature, return later than hatchery steelhead. Consequently, the winter steelhead season on the Sandy will get underway in earnest in January with best results in February and March.

ODFW sez: " An error on page 54 of the 2012 Sport Fishing Regulations booklet incorrectly states the Sandy River above the mouth of the Salmon River is open the entire year for the harvest of both adipose fin-clipped and non adipose fin-clipped steelhead. The correct regulation should limit the season to the retention adipose fin-clipped steelhead and non adipose fin-clipped steelhead from July 1 to Aug. 31. The harvest of wild winter steelhead is prohibited on all rivers in the Willamette Zone."

Incidentally, the online version (see **Random Links**, below) have this error corrected.

The Guide's Forecast – The Clackamas River is in excellent condition, exhibiting good color and is at a nice level and flow for fishing.

Coho in the Sandy will not be in good enough condition for the table. That being the case, we'll call the coho run over for the year. Despite a couple of early winter steelhead catches recently, the season hasn't really started yet.

North Coast Fishing Report – Tillamook die-hards are still reaping the benefits of a late season chinook fishery. With district water levels going low and clear, serious anglers are focusing on the bay again and coming up with good results.

Pro guide John Kirby (406-930-1133) reported in a good day on Wednesday. He took 4 nice chinook and 11 crab (for 2 pots), fishing the Ghost Hole with herring on the incoming tide. Although John didn't find much success a few days prior, he has a history of good catches in December when most trollers are packing it up. The Ghost Hole and Bay City has remained a Tillamook Bay staple for the last 2 months. Motivated anglers have to pay a very cold price to reap the benefits as the mornings have been very cold. There is no effort to speak of in any other parts of the estuary for salmon.

John has also experienced some good crabbing lately although nothing compares to the lower Columbia River right now. John reported the success has been worth the effort the last several days. Crabbing remains closed in the ocean, where bottomfishers targeting lingcod in the deep reefs are scoring limits of quality fish. Seabass are falling too.

Anglers targeting salmon on the district streams have found the action drying up since flows has dropped. Driftboaters are finding mostly darker fish and wise anglers are changing their focus to winter steelhead, and believe me, they know it's winter time with the cool weather and all.

Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) scored a limit of Alsea strain winter steelhead for his one customer on Wednesday. Chris utilized his plug pulling skills in the lower Wilson, taking 2 steelhead and a dark chinook (released) downstream of Donaldson's. Chris knows about a few other steelhead in recent days, including a broodstock steelhead on the Wilson already. It's looking like a good steelhead return this season.

The Kilchis can often times be a good option for steelhead and chinook this time of year but

flows are too low for good action but some fish may be present downstream of the Highway 101 Bridge.

Most other streams like the Highway 30 options, Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem and Three Rivers all have fish present but another rain freshet is needed to stimulate the bite and the movement of new fish into the system. The disabled angling platform is putting out a few fish almost daily but other than that, action is fairly slow on the North Fork Nehalem.

The mainstem Nestucca, especially near Three Rivers is getting some attention lately, indicating a batch of fish is present and occasionally accounted for.

No real sign of sturgeon effort in Tillamook Bay but undoubtedly, there are fish present in the estuary. You can catch a few quality hours of the tide if you go sooner rather than later. Low slack is now after sunset.

Crabbing on Netarts Bay is only fair. By the time the ocean finally does open up for crabbing, the weather will likely get rough again.....I know, call me a Debbie Downer.....

The Guide's Forecast – If you're still seeking salmon, the extreme lower portion of the Wilson River may produce some action for bobber fishers. If you're really serious about catching fish, you had better just stick to trolling herring on the incoming tide in the Ghost Hole. It'll still be a bone-chilling adventure but it should produce some results on the big tide series we're currently on. Same 'ol technique, different day. Troll herring on the bottom throughout the incoming tide and expect your best results an hour after low slack through the next 3 hours after that. As you near high slack, crabbing will be better than fishing. On Sunday and early next week, you may get some good fishing in along the jetty on the last part of outgoing tide. There should be some chinook present. Be prepared for bright hens to cut pale. It's best to target bucks only this time of year.

Steelheaders still have options despite the low, clear flows on all north coast streams. The bad news for steelheaders is that there are fish waiting to come in, they just need some liquid inspiration (and I don't mean Jack Daniels) to encourage them to act. Long range forecasts call for only minor rises in river levels; not what the driftboater or bank anglers is looking for. This will keep the lower reaches of these rivers a better option for anglers.

Nestucca anglers should focus on the mouth of Three Rivers but the lower reaches of Three Rivers itself may pay dividends although a lot of that is private land.

Steelheaders may want to try their luck in the lower Wilson or Kilchis tidewaters. Bobber and bait or jigs may work as well as just sitting with plugs out the back on the strong outgoing tides happening in the afternoons this week. Anglers will have to get creative to find success under these conditions.

Whatever you do, if you're using bait or artificials, you'll have to downsize your gear in the clear water conditions we're currently experiencing. Tidewater of even smaller systems like the Necanicum may produce fair results this week. This strategy is often employed by knowledgeable locals but warrants further exploration.

Sturgeon opportunity won't last much longer as anglers will want to focus efforts on the second half of the outgoing tide. That will fast approach post-sunset by the weekend but there should be catchable numbers in Tillamook Bay.

Crabbing in Tillamook County won't be outstanding but fresh water flows have been low enough for a long enough period of time that crab should march back into these bodies of water in search of food. Crabbers will just have to be focused on their timing because if you don't pay close attention to the outgoing change or the strong incoming tide, you'll lose your buoys underwater and your crab gear may very likely crawl away from you. Hopefully, an ocean opener is in the forecast because the ocean won't stay flat forever. As a matter of fact:

FRI

NE WIND 10 TO 15 KT...EASING TO 5 TO 10 KT IN THE AFTERNOON. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 5 FT.

FRI NIGHT

NE WIND 5 TO 10 KT...VEERING TO SE AFTER MIDNIGHT. WIND WAVES 1 FT. W SWELL 7 FT.

SAT

SW WIND 5 TO 10 KT. GUSTS TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 9 FT.

SAT NIGHT

W WIND 5 TO 10 KT...VEERING TO N AFTER MIDNIGHT. GUSTS TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 1 FT. W SWELL 10 FT. CHANCE OF SHOWERS.

SUN

N WIND 10 TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 14 FT.

MON

NE WIND 5 TO 10 KT. WIND WAVES 1 FT. W SWELL 9 FT.

Weekend offshore opportunities for bottomfish don't look as good as we'd like them too. A big swell is coming but keep in mind, it's much easier to predict the fishing this far in advance than it is the marine weather.

Central & South Coast Reports – Rockfish limits are being taken by nearshore boats which are also catching some lings. Offshore charters are taking larger ling cod fishing deep water now that there is no depth restriction as there was earlier in the season.

The ocean is fairly flat today, December 8th, but swells are forecast to build through Friday and the seas look less than friendly for the weekend to come.

Coho are being caught in Siltcoos and Tenmile lakes but they are dark for the most part.

While steelheading has been slow on much of the Siletz, best early results are coming from fairly low on the river. It's early yet, as we're fond of saying.

While the fishing regulations state that radio-tagged hatchery steelhead must be released, in a December 8th News Release, ODFW officials announced that these fish may be retained on the Alsea to encourage steelheaders to turn in the tags on fish they catch. If you land one, telephone the Alsea Hatchery at 541-487-7240. The News Release states, "In order to encourage anglers to return tags to ODFW, two sport groups are sponsoring drawings that will award prizes to anglers

returning tags. The Alsea Sportsman's Association will award two \$50 gift certificates to a local sporting goods stores to two anglers whose names are drawn from Alsea River tag returns."

Chinook fishing is about done in Winchester Bay and Umpqua tidewater as these fish moved upriver with rain last month. crabbing has remained good in Winchester Bay with reports of the quality of Dungeness improving, that is more of the critters are full of meat. This bodes well for the December 15th ocean opener actually occurring without the need of further delay. Rain is needed to get winter steelheading underway on the Umpqua mainstem. There are still a few late summers in the upper mainstem although they're getting colored up. Steelheading remains slow on the North Umpqua

despite a slight uptick in catch numbers recently. Coho return here in numbers too small to be of much angler interest but the ODFW would like anglers to be aware that some are marked with a pink floy tag and must be released. Likewise, those which have spawned out and died are to be left undisturbed as they will be involved in a ground survey in the near future. Although the South Umpqua opened at the 1st of December for winter steelheading, numbers of fish as well as the water level is too low to fish at this time. Steelheading will get underway with the next round of rainfall.

Winter steelhead were caught on the Millicoma and South Coos rivers with precipitation last month, but the water levels have dropped and are too clear to fish well at this time.

Steelheading got started around Thanksgiving on the Coquille River but has since stalled as the river level dropped.

Rainfall will rejuvenate winter steelhead prospects here. A good season is expected with more water in the system. Wild steelhead must be released here until January 1st.

Although a few winter steelhead are being taken on the lower Rogue, the season is just getting underway here and currently the river is too low and clear to fish its best. When the fish start coming, they really come. The Rogue received the best winter steelhead return on the south coast.

There are still late season summer steelhead and coho in the middle Rogue but the water temperature is so low that the Fishes metabolism is slow which has a negative effect on their willingness to bite so fishing is fairly slow. while plugs and lures are taking a few, bait is probably the best way to encourage these fish to take a hook. The upper Rogue will continue to produce very colorful, if out of season, summer steelhead for you smoking pleasure. It may seem unusual to be catching summers at Christmastime, but they are fairly willing, sporty and plentiful although cold water has slowed the bite in this stretch as well. Expect to find a few coho in the mix for the next few weeks. Lures and flies have been effective for taking either or both. At the latest counts on Monday this week, 1,873 summers and 1,612 coho had entered Cole Rivers Hatchery facility.

Take the Elk and Sixes river off your short-term fishing bucket list. When it rains again, they'll be on fire. Until then, there's nothing to see here. These are not the rivers you're looking for. Move along.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Crooked River anglers are taking good numbers of trout averaging 12 inches with a few large fish and jumbo whitefish in the mix. Small nymphs and scud patterns have been effective.

Fly anglers on the Fall River are taking Browns and reddsides, primarily on nymphs.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDFW Weekender Report for December 2011

North Puget Sound

For most area anglers the holiday season is a time to choose between fishing for steelhead in the region's rivers or heading out on Puget Sound for crab and blackmouth salmon.

Marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands), 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) and 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) are all open for **salmon** fishing in December. Anglers fishing those marine areas have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook salmon.

John Long, statewide salmon manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), said anglers could do well fishing for blackmouth, especially around the San Juan Islands. "Traditionally, anglers have had success fishing for blackmouth in the San Juans this time of year," he said. "Of course weather can be a factor, but if conditions are good and you put time in on the water you could hook a nice-size fish."

Long reminds anglers that salmon fishing in Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet) closes Dec. 1. Before heading out, anglers can check [creel reports](#) for information on catch and effort in Puget Sound. Recreational fishery samplers with WDFW collect the information each week at fishing access sites throughout Puget Sound.

Crabbing also is open in some marine areas of Puget Sound, including marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu), 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 7, 8-1, 8-2, a portion of Marine Area 9 north of a line that extends from Olele Point to Foulweather Bluff, 11 (Tacoma-Vashon Island) and 13 (South Puget Sound).

In each area, crabbing is allowed seven days a week through Dec. 31.

The daily catch limit in Puget Sound is five Dungeness crab, males only, in hard-shell condition with a minimum carapace width of 6¼ inches. In addition, fishers may catch six red rock crab of either sex per day, provided those crab measure at least 5 inches across. Additional information is available on the [WDFW website](#).

All crab caught in the late-season fishery should be recorded on winter catch cards, which are valid until Dec. 31. Winter cards are available at license vendors across the state. Catch reports are due to WDFW by Feb. 1, 2012. For more information on catch record cards, visit WDFW's [catch record card webpage](#).

For a change of pace, anglers in the region may want to venture out in the evening to jig for **squid**. Good spots include the Elliott Bay Pier in Seattle and the Edmonds Pier. More information is available on the department's [squid fishing webpage](#). Information on fishing piers is available [here](#).

In freshwater, several rivers are open for **steelhead** fishing, including the Skagit, Snohomish, Skykomish, Snoqualmie and Green (Duwamish). Bob Leland, WDFW's steelhead program manager, said as long as the rivers stay in shape anglers should have some good opportunities to fish for steelhead during the month. "Fishing for hatchery steelhead picks up around mid-December, when we traditionally see the peak of the run," he said.

Rainbow trout are another option for freshwater anglers, who might want to try casting for lunkers at Beaver Lake near Issaquah. About 2,300 hatchery rainbows – averaging 2 to 3 pounds each – were released into the lake in early November. Beaver Lake, which is one of several westside lowland lakes open to fishing year-round, is best fished by small boat, although anglers also can be successful fishing from shore.

Other good bets during December are Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish, where anglers can hook **perch, cutthroat** and **smallmouth bass**. Anglers targeting perch should fish near deep ledges, said WDFW fisheries biologist Danny Garrett, who recommends using nightcrawlers. "Perch are generally caught within a couple feet of the bottom," he said. For cutthroat or smallmouth bass, try trolling deep, 30-100 feet or more. "Anglers will likely have to put in some time to hook a smallmouth, but those that do could catch a big fish," Garrett said.

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

The holiday season has arrived and with it comes opportunities to hook hatchery steelhead on several coastal streams, catch crab and salmon in Puget Sound and dig razor clams on ocean beaches.

Early in December, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) will proceed with an evening razor clam dig if marine toxin tests are favorable at Long Beach, Twin Harbors and Mocrocks. The tentative opening date and evening low tide is:

- Dec. 10, Sat. – 6:30 p.m. (-0.5 ft.); Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks

Later in December, razor clammers will have another opportunity. Tentative opening dates and evening low tides for that dig are:

- Dec. 22, Thurs. – 4:40 p.m. (-0.9 ft.); Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
- Dec. 23, Fri. – 5:29 p.m. (-1.4); Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks

Clam diggers are reminded that they should take lights or lanterns for the nighttime digs and to check weather and surf forecasts before heading out. No digging will be allowed before noon on any of the razor-clam beaches. Harvesters are allowed to take no more than 15 razor clams and must keep the first 15 they dig, regardless of size or condition. Each digger's clams must be kept in a separate container.

All diggers age 15 or older must have an applicable 2011-12 fishing license to harvest razor clams on any beach. Licenses, ranging from a three-day razor clam license to an annual combination fishing license, are available on [WDFW's website](http://www.wdfw.wa.gov) and from license vendors around the state.

Meanwhile, **winter steelhead** fisheries are under way around the region, where more and more hatchery fish are expected to move into rivers as the month progresses. "Fishing for hatchery steelhead is usually at its best in December," said Kirt Hughes, regional fishery manager for WDFW. "Fishing should be productive for anglers as long as the weather cooperates and the rivers stay in shape."

Anglers fishing the Quillayute and portions of the Bogachiel, Calawah, Hoh, and Sol Duc rivers have a daily limit of three hatchery steelhead. In the Grays Harbor area, anglers fishing the Chehalis, Hump Tulips, Satsop and Wynoochee have a daily limit of two hatchery steelhead. Rather catch **salmon**? Anglers can find **late-run hatchery coho** salmon in some of the region's rivers, including the Chehalis, Satsop and Skookumchuck. For **winter chum** salmon, anglers might want to try fishing the Nisqually River. The late-chum run hits full stride mid- to late December and generally remains strong until at least mid-January, said Hughes.

Portions of Puget Sound also are open for salmon. Anglers fishing marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon Island) and 13 (South Puget Sound) can keep one chinook as part of a two-salmon daily

limit. On Hood Canal (Marine Area 12), anglers have a daily limit of four salmon, but only one of those fish can be a chinook. Anglers are reminded that marine areas 5 (Sekiu) and 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca) are closed for salmon fishing.

Before heading out, anglers can check [creel reports](#) for information on catch and effort in Puget Sound on WDFW's website.

Crabbing also is open in some marine areas of Puget Sound, including marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5, 6, 7 (San Juan Islands), 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner), a portion of Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet) north of a line that extends from Olele Point to Foulweather Bluff, 11 and 13

In each area, crabbing is allowed seven days a week through Dec. 31.

The daily catch limit in Puget Sound is five Dungeness crab, males only, in hard-shell condition with a minimum carapace width of 6¼ inches. In addition, fishers may catch six red rock crab of either sex per day, provided those crab measure at least 5 inches across. Additional information is available on the [WDFW website](#).

All crab caught in the late-season fishery should be recorded on winter catch cards, which are valid until Dec. 31. Winter cards are available at license vendors across the state. Those catch reports are due to WDFW by Feb. 1, 2012. For more information on catch record cards, visit WDFW's [catch record card webpage](#).

Before heading out, anglers should check [WDFW's sportfishing regulations pamphlet](#) for details on all fisheries.

Southwest Washington

This year's **winter steelhead** season got off to a promising start just before Thanksgiving, when the first wave of fish started taking anglers' lures in several tributaries to the lower Columbia River. With decent river conditions, catch rates should continue to improve in the weeks ahead, said Joe Hymer, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "Despite recent high water and cold weather, that first jag of winter steelhead was definitely on the bite," Hymer said. "So long as the rivers don't rise too high or fall too low, we could be looking at a darn good fishery this year."

Before planning a trip, anglers should be aware that Long Beach and several other ocean beaches are tentatively scheduled to open for evening **razor clam** digs Dec. 10, 22 and 23, pending the results of marine toxin tests. For updated information, check the WDFW [Razor Clam website](#).

Best bets for winter steelhead include the Cowlitz, Lewis (including north and east fork), Kalama, Grays, Washougal, Elochoman, and Salmon Creek in Clark County. All have a two-fish daily limit, but Hymer cautions anglers to check the [Fishing in Washington](#) rules pamphlet for rules specific to each river.

As with all steelhead fisheries in southwest Washington, only hatchery fish with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar may be retained. All wild steelhead must be released.

Anglers are also reminded that the White Salmon River has been closed to fishing until further notice since late October, when Condit Dam was breached to provide fish passage. The reopening date is not yet certain.

Hymer notes that water conditions, often highly variable at this time of year, can make a big difference when it comes to catching fish. "If the water is too low, the fish get spooky - if it's too high it can be dangerous to be out there," he said.

As basic preparation for a steelheading trip, Hymer recommends checking the Northwest River Forecast (<http://www.nwrfc.noaa.gov/>) or other sources before heading out. "Most anglers do best when water levels are rising or dropping," he added. "It's a lot harder to catch steelhead in the peaks and troughs."

In deciding where to fish, it also helps to know how many smolts were planted in specific rivers and how many adult fish have returned to area hatcheries. In the first case, Hymer recommends checking WDFW's [smolt-planting schedule for 2010](#). WDFW also posts [hatchery returns](#) on a weekly basis.

While winter steelhead are the main attraction right now, **late-stock coho** will continue to bite through December. Most of those fish are too dark for consumption, but some bright fish are still available, Hymer said. As he sees it, the best bet for coho is the Cowlitz River where over 30,000 fish have returned this year.

Hymer also flagged several new fishing regulations that take effect Dec. 1 on specific rivers:

- **Grays River** – Opens to fishing for hatchery steelhead, hatchery coho, and adipose and/or ventral fin clipped chinook from the Highway 4 Bridge to the South Fork. Also on Dec. 1, the open area on the West Fork also expands from the hatchery intake/footbridge to the mouth that day.
- **Green River, North Fork Toutle River, and mainstem Toutle** from the mouth to the forks – All close to fishing for steelhead and salmon.
- **South Fork Toutle River** – Closes to fishing for steelhead from the 4100 Bridge upstream. Fishing remains open under selective gear rules from the mouth to the bridge.
- **North Fork Lewis River** – The night closure and anti-snagging rules are lifted from Johnson Creek to Colvin Creek. (The area from Colvin Creek upstream to the overhead powerlines below Merwin Dam reopens for hatchery steelhead and salmon Dec. 16.)
- **Cowlitz River from Mill Creek to the barrier dam** – Night closure and anti-snagging rules are lifted.
- **Blue and Mill creeks (tributaries to Cowlitz River)** – Blue Creek opens to fishing for hatchery steelhead and sea-run cutthroats, while Mill Creek opens to fishing for hatchery steelhead.
- **Wind River** – Catch-and-release fishing closes for game fish above Shipherd Falls.
- **Klickitat River** – Closes to fishing for trout, hatchery steelhead and salmon, except for salmon fishing from the Fisher Hill Bridge downstream, which remains open through January. The night closure remains in effect. The whitefish-only fishery opens from 400 feet upstream from #5 fishway upstream. Whitefish gear rules will be in effect.
- **Swift Reservoir** – Closes to fishing.

Rather catch a **sturgeon**? Winter conditions have put a chill on catch rates from Bonneville Dam downriver to the Wauna power lines, but new seasons will open Jan. 1 from Bonneville to McNary Dam.

The news for **trout** anglers is that WDFW is scheduled to stock three lakes in Clark County with half-pound rainbows in early December. Lacamas Lake will receive 8,500, while Battle Ground Lake and Kline Pond will each get 5,000.

There should also be plenty of trout remaining from plants in November to provide good fishing at other lakes through the end of the year. John Weinheimer, a WDFW fish biologist stationed in Vancouver, notes that Fort Borst Pond, a juvenile-only fishing pond near Centralia, received 1,200 jumbo rainbows just before Thanksgiving, as did South Lewis County Park Pond near Toledo. Kress Lake near Kalama got 1,000, Rowland Lake near Bingen got 1,700, and Battleground Lake got 2,500. Anglers should be aware they'll need a Discover Pass to enter Battleground Lake State Park.

Weinheimer also reminds anglers they can keep up to 10 adipose clipped rainbows in Scanewa Lake (Cowlitz Falls Reservoir).

Eastern Washington

The region's four winter-only **rainbow trout** lakes open to fishing Dec. 1, and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) fish biologists say all should provide good open-water angling opportunities.

Southwest Spokane County's Hog Canyon Lake, 10 miles northeast of Sprague, has rainbows ranging from nine to 16 inches, according to WDFW central district fish biologist Chris Donley, who tested the waters over Thanksgiving weekend.

Donley said Fourth of July Lake, two miles south of Sprague in Lincoln County, looks better than last year.

"Most of the fish at Fourth of July will be in excess of 14 inches with some very large 22- to 24-inch fish in the mix," he said. "Fish densities are not back to where they were historically, 10 to 30 years ago, but the fishery is definitely getting better. We have a cormorant and pelican predation problem on that lake in the spring and summer that makes it difficult to get enough fish to recruit to the population to provide the kind of fishery that existed there in the past." Donley noted that both Hog Canyon and Fourth of July lakes have a daily catch limit of five trout, but only two can be over 14 inches.

The other two winter season trout lakes are in Stevens County – Hatch Lake, about five miles southeast of Colville, and Williams Lake, 14 miles north of Colville. WDFW northeast district fish biologist Bill Baker said fishing in both lakes should be good this season. The rainbows in Hatch Lake should range between 12 and 15 inches, and those in Williams Lake will be slightly smaller, 11-13 inches.

There can also be good trout fishing opportunities through the winter at several large year-round waters in the region, including Rock Lake in Whitman County, Sprague Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line, and Waitts Lake in Stevens County. Net-pen-reared rainbows are usually a good bet, too, at Lake Roosevelt, the huge reservoir off Grand Coulee Dam.

Snake River drainage **steelheading** continues in December, after good catches in three stretches of the mainstem river. WDFW southeast district fish biologist Glen Mendel of Dayton said creel surveys in late November showed anglers fished an average of 16 to 17 hours for each fish kept in the stretch from Lower Granite Dam to the interstate bridge, from Little Goose Dam to Lower Granite Dam, and from Lower Monumental Dam to Little Goose Dam. Anglers fished an average of 26 hours for each fish kept on the lower Grand Ronde River. As winter advances and temperatures drop, anglers are reminded to be careful about ice that can hamper access on fishing waters – both ice cover on lakes and shoreline "shelf" ice on rivers and streams.

According to U.S. Coast Guard guidelines, no one should venture onto lake ice unless it is at least

four inches thick, clear and solid. As much as nine inches may be needed to safely support snowmobiles or other vehicles. Such ice depths can form after at least a week of below freezing temperatures, both day and night.

Ice depths vary throughout a waterway due to underwater structures, springs, geothermal activity, and water movement caused by flows, wind, or waterfowl use. Rivers and streams rarely have safe ice because of constant currents. Thawing and re-freezing can create air pockets that leave ice "honeycombed" or porous and significantly weakened.

Drilling a hole in the ice from a safe, near-shore location can give anglers an idea of ice depth. However, drilling only provides an estimate of the ice depth because shallow water near shore freezes quicker than deeper water in the middle of a lake where springs may slow the freezing process.

WDFW does not measure ice on fishing lakes and cannot guarantee ice fishing safety. But here are a few tips to help keep an outing safe:

- Don't fish alone. Let others know exactly where you and your fishing partners are going and when you plan to return.
- Keep fishing holes small and few. When drilling fishing holes with an ice auger, keep the diameter under eight inches. Bigger holes are not necessary to land fish and can create a safety hazard for others.
- Watch your step. Avoid ice fishing near feeder streams or known springs; brush, logs, plants or docks; multiple ice cracks or ice that is popping or otherwise audible; and dark-colored ice that may be weak.
- Spread out. Too many people congregated in one area may be more than the ice can safely support. Disperse weight and fishing holes.
- Be prepared for weather conditions. Dress in layers and wear thermal underwear, fleece or wool, and wind and waterproof outerwear, especially for feet, hands and head. Take extra clothes, food, water, sand for on-ice traction, and a sled for easy on-ice transport of all equipment.
- Be prepared for emergencies. Carry equipment such as ice picks or awls, rope, and personal flotation devices. Also pack a first-aid kit and matches for starting a fire.

Northcentral Washington

Three Okanogan County lakes switch from catch-and-release fishing to catch-and-keep fishing for **rainbow trout** on Dec. 1. Big Green, Little Green, and Rat lakes all have a daily catch limit of five trout, which can be caught on bait.

Then again, Patterson Lake near Winthrop can be good for **yellow perch** during the winter, said Bob Jateff, Okanogan district fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Bait can be used year-round and there is no daily limit on perch. "In fact, anglers are encouraged to retain as many perch as possible, regardless of size, to better balance the fish populations in the lake," he said.

Jateff reminds anglers using WDFW access sites at these winter fisheries to display the WDFW vehicle use permit that came with their fishing license. Non-fishing recreationists who use the access sites for other activities need to have a Discover Pass.

In Chelan County, Fish and Roses lakes provide good fishing during December and throughout the winter, WDFW Chelan district fish biologist Travis Maitland of Wenatchee. Yellow perch and rainbow trout are the main winter targets at both lakes, which are open year-round. "Fish Lake is popular for ice fishing," Maitland said, "but until we get low enough daytime and nighttime temperatures to produce thick, safe ice, everyone should be cautious."

According to U.S. Coast Guard guidelines, no one should venture onto lake ice unless it is at least four inches thick, clear and solid. As much as nine inches may be needed to safely support snowmobiles or other vehicles. Such ice depths can form after at least a week of below freezing temperatures, both day and night.

Ice depths vary throughout a waterway due to underwater structures, springs, geothermal activity, and water movement caused by flows, wind, or waterfowl use. Rivers and streams rarely have safe ice because of constant currents. Thawing and re-freezing can create air pockets that leave ice "honeycombed" or porous and significantly weakened.

Drilling a hole in the ice from a safe, near-shore location can give anglers an idea of ice depth. However, drilling only provides an estimate of the ice depth because shallow water near shore freezes quicker than deeper water in the middle of a lake where springs may slow the freezing process.

WDFW does not measure ice on fishing lakes and cannot guarantee ice fishing safety. But here are a few tips to help keep an outing safe:

- Don't fish alone. Let others know exactly where you and your fishing partners are going and when you plan to return.
- Keep fishing holes small and few. When drilling fishing holes with an ice auger, keep the diameter under eight inches. Bigger holes are not necessary to land fish and can create a safety hazard for others.
- Watch your step. Avoid ice fishing near feeder streams or known springs; brush, logs, plants or docks; multiple ice cracks or ice that is popping or otherwise audible; and dark-colored ice that may be weak.
- Spread out. Too many people congregated in one area may be more than the ice can safely support. Disperse weight and fishing holes.
- Be prepared for weather conditions. Dress in layers and wear thermal underwear, fleece or wool, and wind and waterproof outerwear, especially for feet, hands and head. Take extra clothes, food, water, sand for on-ice traction, and a sled for easy on-ice transport of all equipment.
- Be prepared for emergencies. Carry equipment such as ice picks or awls, rope, and personal flotation devices. Also pack a first-aid kit and matches for starting a fire.

Steelhead fishing on the mainstem Columbia River usually picks up in December, as the action slows a little on the upper tributaries with advancing winter conditions. Areas to try include both above and below Wells Dam, at the mouths of the Entiat, Methow and Wenatchee rivers, and in the area across from the Eastbank Hatchery. Selective gear rules are in effect for the mainstem, although bait is allowed. There is a mandatory retention rule on adipose-fin-clipped hatchery steelhead, and a night closure.

Southcentral Washington

Catch rates for **hatchery steelhead** have picked up in the Hanford Reach, but are still running a little slower than normal. Paul Hoffarth, a district fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), said fishing should remain productive through December as steelhead mill around waiting for the spring spawn.

The question, though, is whether anglers will brave the elements to catch those fish as they move upriver. "Angler participation definitely drops off as we head into the winter months," Hoffarth said. "The fish are still out there, but fishing tends to get spotty – good one day, bad the next."

As with all area steelhead fisheries, only hatchery fish with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar may be retained. All wild steelhead must be released.

The Yakima River Basin is closed to steelhead fishing, but the **whitefish** season opens Dec. 1 on both the Yakima and Naches rivers. As in years past, the catch limit is 15 fish per day, but anglers are required to use a single-point hook, measuring no more than 3/16 inch from point to shank (hook size 14).

Anglers fishing the Yakima River above Roza Dam can catch **eastern brook trout** under selective gear rules. No size or daily limits are in effect for eastern brook trout, but fishing is strictly catch-and-release for all other species of trout.

In other waters, WDFW recently stocked **half-pound rainbows** in the North Elton Pond near Selah, which opens to fishing Dec. 1 with a two-fish daily limit. In addition, the department plans to stock excess rainbow trout brood weighing 3-8 pounds apiece in several other lakes by early December. Fio Rito Lake and Mattoon Lake are each scheduled to receive 125 of those lunkers, Myron Lake 100 and Rotary Lake 125. I82 Pond #4 will also get 125 big trout and Reflection Pond in Sarg Hubbard Park 40.

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

2012 Sport Fishing Regulations are available at license agents or online here:

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/licenses_regs/regulations.asp

Rogue River Float Guide: (large file and slow to download)

<http://www.blm.gov/or/resources/recreation/rogue/files/FloatGuide04.pdf>

GOOD LUCK!