

The Guide's Forecast - volume 14 issue number 2

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 6<sup>th</sup> – January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2012**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** Do you have your 2012 fishing licenses and tags yet? Be sure to acquire them before your first fishing trip of the year, it can be a costly oversight.

Reports of salmon taken by sea-lions near Astoria are speculative but quite possible. Spring chinook have been taken in January in both the mainstem Columbia and Willamette Rivers and with a good run forecast this year, it could happen again. Sea-lions may also be present for smelt, which are likely to enter this time of year as well but remain closed to sport and commercial harvest.

The lower Willamette River level crested on New Year's Eve and has been gradually dropping since although it remains off-color. Steelhead aren't moving over the Falls in high water but plunkers at Meldrum will be getting busy this week. Sturgeon fishing should improve once levels taper off again but it remains open to catch and release opportunity only until further notice.

McKenzie levels spiked near the end of 2011 but have been dropping since. It remains a little high for best results.

The Santiam system is forecast to remain high through the coming week.

Water levels on the Clackamas are quite fishable this week and the river is clearing. Fresh winter steelhead entered with rainfall over the past weekend. Eagle Creek has been slow but showed signs of improvement recently. For the limited numbers of hatchery steelhead still returning, this week should provide some fair opportunity.

Sandy levels are still high and off color this week. Clarity will improve as the freezing level drops. Fresh winter steelhead are in the system.

**Northwest –** Steelheaders are coming into their best opportunity in weeks but early indicators aren't what some would have expected. Smaller systems like the Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem were in prime shape late in the weekend. The Necanicum produced best on Sunday but there is a large obstruction that will likely cause boaters to drag driftboats across gravel. This situation will get more challenging as water levels drop. The North Fork Nehalem produced good catches amongst the high angler effort early in the week but will taper as flows drop.

The Wilson fished poorly on Tuesday but remained a bit high for optimum results. The Trask and Nestucca posted similar results early in the week and with another rain likely to rise river levels on Thursday, high water will persist into the weekend. Although some steelhead should certainly be present on these systems, the better action is likely to take place later in early spring. A good mixture of broodstock and wild steelhead will enter in better numbers by mid-February. Early run hatchery fish may already be making their way into smaller tributaries to spawn in the next few weeks.

Sturgeon anglers focused on Tillamook Bay are yielding results. Good tides for sturgeon take place now through the weekend with the best action likely just prior to low slack. The west channel of Tillamook will likely produce the most consistent results but other narrow channels in the middle of the estuary will also hold feeding keepers.

Crabbing in Tillamook Bay is slow but some anglers are getting fair numbers in Netarts Bay. The mouths of these coastal estuaries are extremely dangerous this time of year so check motor reliability and safety equipment before heading out. Lives are lost nearly every year.

**Southwest** – Offshore boats are taking good numbers of lingcod when ocean conditions have allowed them to get out. Rockfish catches have been fair to good.

Last week's storm caused a predictable slowing of Dungeness success in bays and estuaries but results will improve this week as salinity levels rise.

Winter steelhead will be available in the South Umpqua as it drops and clears from the weekend freshet.

Steelheaders on the Coos and South Fork Coquille Rivers are expected to do well this week as water conditions improve with dry weather.

Plunkers took winter steelhead on the lower Rogue following the storm over the past weekend. Bait and lures will be effective this week as the river settles down. Winter steelhead will be into middle Rogue stretches with the freshet moving fish upriver. Bait is legal river-wide as of January 1.

Still a little high early this week, the Chetco should be in excellent shape this coming weekend. Plunkers have been doing well for hatchery winter steelhead but conventional techniques will become effective as water conditions improve.

Waters of the Elk were high and muddy on New Year's Day but dry weather this week will provide good conditions as the river produces winter steelhead.

**Eastern** – Metolius fly anglers have been making fair catches using nymphs although Blue-Winged Olives are hatching afternoons. The occasional bull trout has been taken.

Winter fly fishing has been decent for whitefish on the Crooked River.

John Day anglers are still taking steelhead although the bulk of the catch are wild and must be released unharmed.

**SW Washington** – Anglers are just now finding their way back onto district streams in pursuit of steelhead. Although the Cowlitz remains one of the best options, the Lewis and Kalama systems should also produce good catches when rivers come back into fishable shape. That should be right now.

Sidedrifters and bait fishers will produce the best results until flows drop more when plugs will once again become effective. Target slower moving water until water levels drop, sending fish into the more hidden depths.

The Washougal River should also produce some results for steelheaders as this is often a peak week for anglers here.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – It's par for the course on the Columbia. Slow sturgeon fishing and salmon season is still many weeks away. Prep your gear and boat for the season so you don't have to rush to do it when the season is upon us.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Didn't you just get done reading the last section? Well, you must still be wondering about steelhead fishing in the John Day Pool or crabbing in the estuary.

Well, both are going downhill. Steelheaders are rapidly losing interest although a few boats are still taking fish but most are wild.

Crabbers in the estuary don't have a lot of large keepers to work over. The commercials have harvested them and smaller keepers are hard to come by but if you work over areas that aren't hard hit by the commercial fleet, you may still find workable numbers. You'll need a little more luck than usual however.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – Winter steelhead are once again on the move as the flow at Willamette Falls has moderated. Visibility has improved although it is reported to be less than a foot. With the level dropping and the water temperature in the mid-50s, there is reason for optimism.

While the McKenzie has yet to fall to pre-storm levels, the water is dropping, has cleared and is in decent condition for fishing.

The Santiam System has yet to recover from the recent storm and will be too high and wild to fish well by the coming weekend.

The 2012 trout stocking schedule is yet to be released. As with all things fishing-related, when we know, you'll know.

Be sure to get new licenses and tags for 2012.

**The Guide's Forecast** – As the water level of the lower Willamette gradually drops and clears, plunkers have begun to work the banks below the mouth of the Clackamas River as winter steelhead will take this route on their way to the Clack. While never a fast and furious fishery, plunking can be an effective method using Spin 'n' Glos, often in conjunction with bait. Boats in the area have started to take a few. The Middle Fork Willamette above Hills Creek Reservoir is closed until the valley "trout season" opens in April.

Trout fishing is catch-and-release only on the McKenzie from Hayden Bridge to Leaburg Dam and closed to fishing above Leaburg Lake, both until April 28th, 2012. Prospects are fair for trout fishing where legal with nymphs the best option.

Once the waters of the North Santiam settle down to fishable levels and flow again, winter steelhead will be present although numbers will improve later in the season. According to the NOAA river forecast, South Santiam levels may be fishable as early as this coming Sunday but certainly during the week to come.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – The Clackamas River has recovered from the deluge. Although levels went over flood stage on New Year's Eve, the water has dropped and cleared with fresh steelhead scattered in the system. At roughly 13.5 feet and 5,300 cfs at Estacada as of mid-day on Thursday, January 5th, the waters are forecast to gradually drop approaching mid-January. Eagle Creek produced a few steelhead early this week but is likely to be too low and clear to fish well by the weekend.

Although the Sandy became a muddy mess late last week, water conditions has improved as the level dropped. A few early steelhead were taken prior to the storm. As of Wednesday this week, Oxbow Park had been closed due to the possibility of falling limbs and toppling trees with the ground soft from the recent storm. Expect additional boat traffic on Saturday, January 7th as the Sandy River Chapter of the Northwest Steelheaders annual Frostbite Follies float will take place on the Oxbow to Dabney stretch.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Results for winters on the Clackamas have been fair and spotty. No particular technique has been more productive than another as a variety of bait and lures are taking fish at times. Try spinners, jigs or drifted bait.

As the Sandy has received plants of only late-arriving broodstock winter steelhead for years, the bulk of the run is not yet in the system. While there will be some steelhead in the system, results will be fair at best this early in the Sandy winter steelhead season. Water has recovered from the storm and is in excellent color.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – After a prolonged high water, anxious anglers got out on most north coast streams with high hopes of easy limits of winter chrome. Well, that didn't happen for most people but those anglers targeting smaller streams, particularly the North Fork Nehalem, did find reason to celebrate.

Anglers can still expect good success on streams like the North Fork Nehalem and Three Rivers, where hatchery fish are forced to hold due to a weir to keep them from going upstream of the hatchery intake. (By the way, they do get upstream of the hatchery intake and are fair game as long as they are fin-clipped). The North Fork Nehalem has reported good results over the last several days with limits coming for several anglers working the water near the hatchery. Action reportedly slowed on Wednesday, after a multi-day binge but fish were still being caught in fair numbers. One angler reported there was an estimated 1,000 steelhead holding in the trap. Can you say recycle?

The Necanicum fished well over the weekend but not as well as most would think. On Saturday, boats reported sporadic action with 3 being considered a good catching day. On Sunday, one boat reported almost triple that, which is certainly feasible on a small stream like that, with some spent fish in the mix. It's not uncommon to already see spawned out and dark fish present this early in the season. A testament for how early these steelhead may show on this system. Anglers reported a serious obstruction in the way on the Necanicum; a small series of logs down about 2/3 the way of the drift. This is always a hazard on this system.

Three Rivers action on the Nestucca has been mum. Although anglers are certainly catching fish in the area, the action isn't quite like it is on the North Fork Nehalem. The deadline at the hatchery is a great spot to intercept returning adults however and there is no shortage of people there.

Larger systems didn't produce as well as most had hoped but that isn't surprising given the longevity of the last high water period. The Wilson and Nestucca were favorites but anglers can't overlook the fact that these systems now favor the later returns of the wild and broodstock fish that return in a more earnest number around mid-February. By the time the fisheries on these systems should have been hitting full stride, most of the holding fish were beating fins upriver and out of reach for lower river drifters, which have been having a hey-day with them the last few weeks in the lower reaches. Most boats on the Wilson posted few, if any fish, with the best action taking place in the higher drifts. Bank anglers should get a good shot at them when flows stabilize upriver through the weekend. Keep in mind however that the bulk of the early plants

don't go too far upriver and it will be a bit early for high numbers of broodstock fish. In other words, anglers shouldn't count on a great day of fishing.

The Nestucca did produce a few fish in the upper reaches early in the week but like the Wilson, the fishing didn't really match up with expectations. The bulk of the early run was headed for Three Rivers where bank anglers have the edge in this smaller tributary.

The Trask was unusually slow as well but there were a few fish taken at the Dam Hole in the high water over the weekend. This spot fishes best in high, cloudy water.

Sturgeon anglers have been venturing out recently and still finding success working the south channel of Tillamook Bay. Of course sand shrimp is the go-to with mud shrimp still hard to find. Peak tides fade by the weekend.

Crabbing has been less than stellar. Netarts remains the primary target. With few freshwater streams and not too much commercial effort adjacent to the estuary, it's a good place to still find some quality keepers. The tide cycle hasn't been great for crabbers this week although a low slack effort isn't necessarily a bad one.

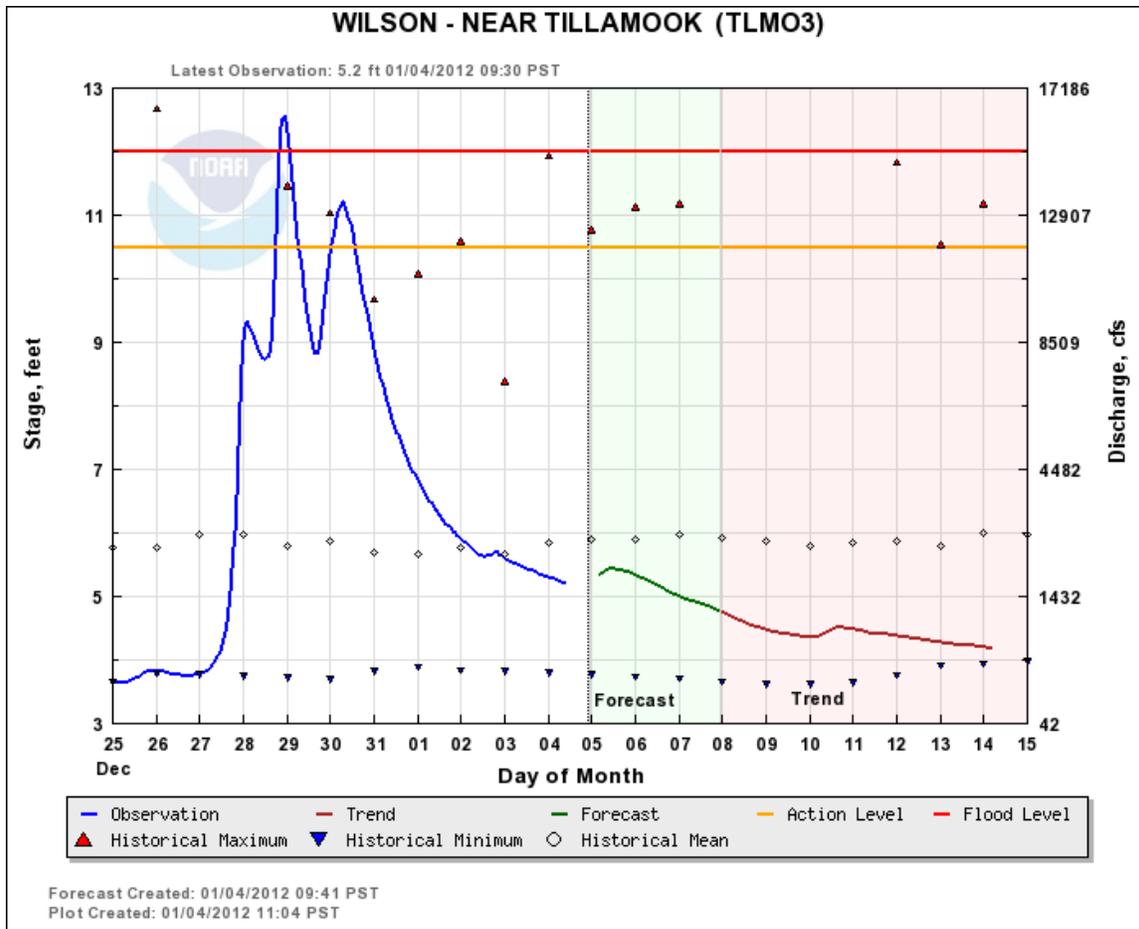
**The Guide's Forecast** – Although another deluge hit the Tillamook area at mid-week, only a slight bump in the hydrograph was predicted and that may in fact be all that comes to fruition. If that's the case, the river may be in ideal shape for weekenders but do keep your expectations in check as there likely won't be a large surge of steelhead coming into north coast systems.

We had such a prolonged period of dry weather and fish stacking up in the lower reaches that we should have seen the mother lode on this last drop in river levels. Well, we've seen the best of the early run already, there aren't a bunch more coming I hate to say. None-the-less, there are still good numbers of fish present and in catchable shape. This trend won't last long however as these early returners will be seeking spawning grounds and will be wanting to make their way back downstream in the coming weeks. Anglers are already finding spent steelhead in their catches and they will only get more numerous in the coming weeks. That went quick, didn't it?

Top prospects will remain the smaller systems, the Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem and Three Rivers, where fish will continue to stack up near the hatchery deadline (NF and Three Rivers) and maybe even get recycled a time or two. Bait will remain the favored menu item as spinners and jigs will be harder to fish effectively with all the competition anglers will continue to meet in these areas. Drop down your presentation size as flows drop and use more subdued colors as waters clear. There is pretty good bank access on all three of these systems but you still have to respect private land that graces each one of these lower reaches.

On the larger system side of things, the Wilson and Trask may offer up the best opportunity with the Nestucca a clear third. The upper reaches will produce best late in the week, when flows are still high but as the rivers drop, the lower reaches will become the favored stretches. As we mentioned earlier however, don't have high expectations for these systems as the bulk of the run is yet to come.

These systems will get pounded hard over the weekend as weather is expected to moderate and maybe even get sunny by Saturday. People will have the driftboat itch so don't count on a serene float. You won't be alone. The water is still likely to have fair color to it so bigger and brighter offerings may pay the best dividends but eggs will be a good bet as chinook are still spawning in some systems. Chinook retention is closed now so don't even think about it. Here's the hydrograph as of Wednesday, late evening:



Looks like clear sailing ahead and maybe even a chance for a mainstem Nehalem trip by next week.

Sturgeon tides are favorable Friday and for several afternoon hours on Saturday. There should be some good catching if the wind forecast remains tame:

**FRI**

NW WIND 5 TO 10 KT...BACKING TO S IN THE AFTERNOON. WIND WAVES 1 FT. W SWELL 20 FT...SUBSIDING TO 17 FT IN THE AFTERNOON. CHANCE OF RAIN.

**FRI NIGHT**

NW WIND 10 TO 15 KT...EASING TO 5 TO 10 KT AFTER MIDNIGHT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 12 FT. CHANCE OF SHOWERS.

**SAT**

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

**SAT NIGHT**

SE WIND 5 TO 10 KT WITH GUSTS TO 20 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 10 FT.

## **SUN**

S WIND 10 TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 3 FT. W SWELL 9 FT.

## **MON**

N WIND 20 TO 25 KT. WIND WAVES 5 FT. W SWELL 15 FT.

We'll see big tide swings in the morning and afternoon, making crabbing a poor option.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – The weekend forecast (and the coming Sunday in particular) hold promise for offshore boats anxious to get out following a couple of weeks of rough ocean conditions.

Nearly every south coast river has steelhead available now. Following last week's storm, there's only dry weather in the forecast so water levels will be dropping through the coming week.

Crowds are jamming the Alsea upriver and down yet reports have universally been of poor to slow fishing.

Tenmile Creek should have winter steelhead available. Another possibility would be Eel Creek but for the fact it's full of late-run coho. Give Eel creek another week, however, and steelhead should be available here as well.

Crabbing has slowed in Winchester Bay this week with fresh water washing into the bay. High, muddy water often means good sturgeon fishing and while fair numbers of fish are being caught, almost all Umpqua sturgeon are oversized and must be released. Winter steelhead have entered and scattered on the mainstem Umpqua. Levels are dropping which will create prime steelheading conditions for the weekend to come. The waters of the South Umpqua are just now dropping to levels of fishability. Forecasts are for a continued drop through the coming weekend and there should be plenty of fresh winter steelhead available following the recent storm which dumped several inches of precipitation on the south coast. With results improving on the mainstem and South Umpqua, it follows that there has been some improvement on the North Umpqua as winters have entered, creating a viable fishery on the lower portion.

Incidentally, prior to the influx of water last week, steelheading was very good on the Umpqua but hatchery fish were nowhere to be found. As a consequence, local petitions are urging the ODFW to allow a one-per-day, five-per-year while steelhead fishing here as is allowed on the Rogue.

Crabbing in Coos Bay took a hit from the recent freshet but catches will improve as salinity levels rise. A predictably positive result of heavy rainfall last week is the influx of fresh winter steelhead. Catches have been fair to good on the South Fork Coos as well as the Millicoma River. Try bobber and jig rigs or drifted, cured eggs to tempt fresh chrome winters.

Steelheaders have been experiencing good results in the South Fork and North Fork Coquille Rivers using the same techniques described above. Fly anglers are also hooking up.

Water levels on the lower Rogue have been dropping and are predicted to return to pre-storm levels by mid-January. Winter steelheading is improving with fresh quarry available. As water conditions improve, plunking will yield to drift fishing as the more productive technique. Wild steelhead may now be kept on the Rogue upriver to the Hog Creek Boat Ramp. One unclipped steelhead per day is allowed up to five for the year. On the middle Rogue, while there are still some summer fish available, they will soon be supplemented, both in number and desirability, by

winters which are now moving upriver. Plug-pullers and drift fishers are taking fish. A few summer steelhead remain in the upper Rogue following the freshet last week and those are suitable only for catch-and-release entertainment or smoking.

Elk and Sixes Rivers are dropping and clearing and are producing only the occasional winter steelhead. Both will probably be too skinny to fish well over the coming weekend in the absence of precipitation. Over 13 inches of rain fell in the area over the month of December, most of it over the 29th through 30th. This was below normal but not near the record low that occurred December, 1976 when precipitation was only 3.1 inches.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – Lake Billy Chinook has been pumping out reasonable numbers of good-sized bull trout to trollers this week.

### **Washington fishing reports:**

***From the WDF&W Weekender Report for January 2012***

#### **North Puget Sound**

Winter has arrived, but anglers still have opportunities to hook hatchery steelhead on several streams and blackmouth salmon in Puget Sound.

Of course, weather can be a factor in making decisions on where to fish. "Hatchery steelhead fishing should continue to be decent in early January," said John Long, statewide salmon manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "But if the rivers are out of shape, anglers might want to head out onto Puget Sound and fish for blackmouth salmon."

Areas currently open for **salmon** fishing include 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). Anglers fishing those marine areas have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook salmon.

Long recommends fishing the waters around the San Juan Islands, where catch rates traditionally are some of the highest during the winter. Later in the month, anglers also might want to consider fishing Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet), which opens for salmon Jan. 16.

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.

The **Puget Sound crab fishery** closes at sunset on Dec. 31, and crabbers are reminded that they are required to report their winter catch to WDFW by Feb. 1. Reports are due for the winter season, whether or not crabbers actually fished or caught Dungeness crab. To submit catch reports, crabbers may send their catch record card to WDFW by mail or file their report on the department's licensing website. The mailing address is WDFW CRC Unit, 600 Capitol Way N., Olympia, WA 98501-1091. The [online reporting system](#) is available Jan. 1-Feb. 1. For more information on catch record cards, visit WDFW's [catch record card webpage](#).

Winter is prime time to jig for **squid** in Puget Sound. 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 **hatchery steelhead** fishing, including the Skagit, Stillaguamish, Snohomish, Skykomish and Snoqualmie. "Fishing for hatchery steelhead should continue to be decent in early January," said Bob Leland, steelhead program manager for WDFW. "Anglers usually find bright fish through the month."

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

### **South Sound/Olympic Peninsula**

Winter fisheries are under way in the region, where anglers have opportunities to hook salmon in Puget Sound and reel in hatchery steelhead on several coastal streams.

This time of year, weather conditions will often dictate where an angler chooses to fish, said Kirt Hughes, regional fishery manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "If the rivers are blown out, salmon fishing in Puget Sound is probably your best bet," he said. "But, if the weather cooperates and the rivers are in shape, anglers might want to try fishing for hatchery steelhead."

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, Humptulips, Satsop and Wynoochee have a daily limit of two hatchery steelhead. Information on weekly steelhead catches in the Quillayute River system and the Hoh River are available on [WDFW's website](#).

Hughes reminds anglers that they will not be allowed to catch and keep **wild steelhead** on eight Olympic Peninsula rivers until mid-February. The annual opening date for wild steelhead retention is Feb. 16 on the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc rivers. Those eight rivers are the only waters in Washington where wild steelhead retention is allowed.

Freshwater anglers looking to hook salmon also have opportunities in January. Anglers can find **late-run hatchery coho** salmon in some of the region's rivers, including the Humptulips, Satsop and Willapa, said Hughes.

For **winter chum** salmon, anglers should try fishing the Nisqually.

On Puget Sound, Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound) remains open for **salmon**. However, regulations for Marine Area 13 change Jan. 1, when anglers will have a daily limit of one salmon. Anglers should be aware that salmon fisheries in marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon Island) and 12 (Hood Canal) close Jan. 1. Before heading out, anglers should check [WDFW's sportfishing regulations pamphlet](#) for details.

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## Southwest Washington

Winter steelhead are still the name of the game in the Columbia River Basin, although several other fisheries are beginning to compete for anglers' attention.

Sturgeon fishing reopens Jan. 1 from the mouth of the Columbia to McNary Dam, and more than a dozen lakes and ponds are scheduled to receive an infusion of 38,000 catchable-size rainbow trout by the end of the month.

Those **trout** were raised at state hatcheries in Goldendale and Aberdeen with the specific intent of providing winter fishing opportunities in the southwest region, said John Weinheimer, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

"We want to give area anglers a chance to get outdoors in the wintertime and catch some fish," Weinheimer said. "All of these waters can be fished from shore, so you don't need a boat and a lot of gear to get in on the action."

Waters scheduled to receive fish in January include Fort Borst Park Pond (3,000) in Lewis County; Silver Lake (5,000), Sacajawea Lake (3,000), Horseshoe Lake (3,000) and Kress Lake (3,000) in Cowlitz County; Battleground Lake (8,000) and Kline Pond (6,000) in Clark County; Icehouse Lake (1,000) and Little Ash Lake (1,000) in Skamania County; plus Rowland Lake (3,000), Spearfish Lake (1,800) and Maryhill Pond (500) in Klickitat County.

For **steelhead**, the Cowlitz River is still the best bet, although the Lewis, Kalama, Grays, Washougal, Elochoman rivers – and Salmon Creek in Clark County – are also producing fish, said Joe Hymer, another WDFW fish biologist based in Vancouver.

"As usual, river conditions basically determine success at this time of year," Hymer said. "Most anglers do best when water levels are rising or dropping. It's a lot harder to catch steelhead in the peaks and troughs."

Hymer also reminds anglers that the White Salmon River is closed to all fishing until further notice and that fishing on the lower Klickitat River is limited to the period from one hour before official sunrise to one hour after official sunset.

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. The daily limit on all area rivers is two marked, hatchery-reared steelhead.

Starting Jan. 1, anglers may also retain up to two adult hatchery **chinook salmon** per day on the mainstem Columbia from the I-5 Bridge downstream and in the Cowlitz and Deep rivers. On the Lewis and Kalama rivers, the daily limit is one chinook per day.

While the bulk of the spring chinook run isn't expected to arrive until March, Hymer said anglers will likely start catching early-arriving fish by late January or early February.

"It's good to keep the chinook regulations in mind, even if you're fishing for steelhead," he said. "Somebody has to catch the first springer of the year, and it could be you."

WDFW recently released preliminary forecasts of Columbia River salmon and steelhead returns for 2012, predicting an upriver run of 314,200 adult spring chinook compared to a return of 221,200 last spring. In addition, 462,000 sockeye and 91,200 summer chinook are expected to return during the coming season, which would set records for both species. The outlook for fall

chinook is similar to last year's robust return of 600,000 adults.

The preliminary forecasts, along with anticipated fishing seasons, are posted on [WDFW's website](#). Current fishing rules are described in 2011-12 [Fishing in Washington](#) pamphlet and river conditions are available from the [Northwest River Forecast](#).

Ready to catch some **sturgeon**? All fishing areas will open to anglers Jan. 1 from the mouth of the Columbia River to McNary Dam. From the Wauna powerlines upstream to Bonneville Dam (including all adjacent Washington tributaries), white sturgeon may be retained Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays only.

"The main concern right now is the cold water temperatures," Hymer said. "A warming trend would likely improve the bite when the season gets under way." He noted that fishery managers from Washington and Oregon are scheduled to meet Jan. 26 to consider changes to current catch quotas and mainstem fisheries.

But when it comes to **eulachon smelt**, Hymer said there will be no fishing of any kind this year. Once abundant in the Columbia River Basin, eulachon were listed for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act in May 2010. Since then, Washington and Oregon have closed all sport and commercial dipping in the Columbia River system. All marine and freshwater areas in Washington are also closed to fishing for eulachon smelt.

Anglers can, however, still use any frozen smelt they have in their freezer as bait, said Capt. Murray Schlenker, WDFW enforcement chief for southwest Washington. "There's no law restricting possession," he said. "You just can't fish for them."

### **Eastern Washington**

Most catches at the region's four winter-only **rainbow trout** lakes are now through the ice, but that ice cover could be hazardous if warmer weather continues.

Hog Canyon Lake, 10 miles northeast of Sprague, and Fourth of July Lake, two miles south of Sprague, have been giving up some nice trout 12 to 24 inches in length.

Both 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 Hatch Lake, about five miles southeast of Colville, and Williams Lake, 14 miles north of Colville. Good fishing has been reported at Hatch Lake where the rainbows run about 13 to 16 inches. Anglers have also been catching some fish in that range at Williams Lake.

Bill Baker, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), reminds anglers to be careful on and near ice that may be melting somewhat during the day and re-freezing at night, creating air pockets that leave ice "honeycombed" or porous and significantly weakened. 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 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 and emergencies. 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. 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.

But anglers don't necessarily have to fish at winter-only lakes to catch fish. There can also be good winter trout-fishing opportunities at several large year-round waters, including Rock Lake in Whitman County, Sprague Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line, and Waitts Lake in Stevens County.

WDFW Enforcement Officer Don Weatherman recently patrolled Lake Roosevelt on the Stevens-Ferry county line, where anglers are after **bignet-pen-reared rainbows**. He also checked fish on the Pend Oreille River, where anglers are targeting **northern pike**.

January can also be a good time for Snake River system **steelheading**, depending on water temperatures and flows with rain and snow. The best fishing has been reported on the Tucannon River, a tributary of the Snake, where anglers spent an average of about two hours per steelhead caught. Stay tuned here for updated creel check results on both the mainstem Snake and all tributaries.

### **Northcentral Washington**

Most hatchery **steelhead** fisheries on the upper Columbia River from Rock Island Dam to Chief Joseph Dam, and those on the Wenatchee, Icicle, Entiat and Methow rivers, close Jan. 2 to keep impacts on wild steelhead within limits established under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).

**Whitefish** angling also closes Jan. 2 on the Wenatchee, Methow and Entiat rivers to minimize impacts.

Steelhead and whitefish seasons remain open until further notice on the Okanogan and Similkameen rivers. Details on what's closed and what's open are available on the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (WDFW) [website](#).

"The primary reason the upper Columbia steelhead fisheries are permitted is to remove excess hatchery fish from spawning grounds," Jeff Korth, WDFW northcentral regional fish manager, Korth said. A steelhead run update later this month could allow some areas to reopen for additional fishing opportunities, he said, noting that anglers should keep a close eye on the WDFW website for these possibilities.

Meanwhile, ice fishing opportunities are now available at Patterson and Davis Lakes in the Winthrop area, Rat Lake near Brewster, and Big and Little Green lakes west of Omak, said Bob Jateff, WDFW Okanogan district fish biologist. "The predominate species at Davis, Rat, and Green lakes is **rainbow trout** in the 10-12 inch range," he said. "Patterson Lake has **yellow perch** in the seven to eight-inch range. Powerbait works well for trout, and small jigs tipped with mealworms work well for perch."

Jateff encourages anglers fishing Patterson Lake to retain as many perch as possible. The daily limit for rainbow trout is five fish per day with no minimum size. He cautions to be alert and aware of changing ice conditions at these and other waters. Safety tips for fishing through the ice are available on [WDFW's website](#).

Rufus Woods Reservoir, upriver from Chief Joseph Dam on the Columbia River, has big **triploid rainbow trout** that can be caught throughout the winter months. Boat anglers can launch at the Army Corps of Engineers boat ramp and can explore upstream any one of numerous back bays and shorelines that could hold triploids.

"Most of these fish are in the two to four-pound range, with larger fish to eight pounds," Jateff said. "Still fishermen use Powerbait, while gear and fly fishermen use jigs, spinners, and streamer patterns."

### **Southcentral Washington**

Anglers continue to reel in hatchery **steelhead** from portions of the Columbia and Snake rivers, although the lure of bigger fish will undoubtedly prompt some to switch gears. Starting Jan. 1, the John Day Pool (Lake Umatilla) will reopen for retention of **white sturgeon** that measure 43 to 54 inches from their snout to the fork in their tail.

Anglers planning to take part in the fishery should be aware there is an annual quota for sturgeon on Lake Umatilla, said Paul Hoffarth, a regional fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "In recent years, the quota has been reached in a couple of months, so I'd advise anglers to get out early if they want to take a sturgeon home for dinner," he said.

Another option is McNary Pool (Lake Wallula), including the Snake River below Ice Harbor Dam, which reopens for sturgeon retention Feb. 1. There is no quota in that pool, where anglers often catch sturgeon up until the pool closes to retention Aug.1.

Meanwhile, **steelhead** fishing has been up and down, typical of the winter fishery, said Hoffarth, who noted that some of the best catches on the Columbia River have been reported in the Ringold area. In the Tri-Cities area, the fishery is open for retention of hatchery steelhead from John Day Dam upstream to the wooden power line towers at the old Hanford town site through March 31, 2012.

The lower Snake River is also open for the retention of hatchery steelhead through March 31. The daily limit in the Snake River is three hatchery steelhead. Barbless hooks are required.

Anglers should be aware that steelhead fishing will close Jan. 2 by [emergency rule](#) on the upper Columbia River from the Rock Island Dam to Chief Joseph Dam, as well as on the Wenatchee, Icicle, Entiat, and Methow rivers.

**Walleye** fishing can get slow in winter, but there's always a chance of catching a lunker. Hoffarth said some of the largest walleye of the year are boated during the winter months near the Tri-Cities – including the 19.3-pound state record taken in Lake Wallula in 2007.

Angling activity on the Yakima River has been fairly slow, although anglers have been taking a few limits of **whitefish** on the mainstem and its tributaries. Seasons for winter whitefish are currently open on the Yakima, Naches, Tieton, Cle Elum and Bumping rivers. Anglers are strongly advised to check the Fishing in Washington rules pamphlet for regulations that apply to specific river reaches.

Eric Anderson, a WDFW fish biologist stationed in Yakima, recommends that anglers fishing for whitefish concentrate their fishing efforts in deep pools below riffles. Whitefish gear is restricted to one single-point hook with a maximum hook size of 3/16-inch from point to shank (hook size 14), and bait is allowed. Fish are usually caught with a small fly, tipped with a maggot, Anderson said. Up to 15 whitefish can be retained daily. Most fish are 10 to 15 inches.

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#### **Random Links**

Whale Watch Information:

<http://www.whalespoken.org/>

Winter steelhead feast: Caviar and Cutlets (commercial site):

<http://oregonflyfishingblog.com/2009/02/25/winter-steelhead-feast-caviar-and-cutlets/>

New ODFW process for suggestion regulations:

[http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/public\\_process/docs/2013 Public Process Packet.doc](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/public_process/docs/2013_Public_Process_Packet.doc)

For Serious Custom Rod Builders:

<http://www.icrbe.com/>

**GOOD LUCK!**