

The Guide's Forecast - volume 14 issue number 3

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 13th – January 19th, 2012**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Prepare yourself for the 2012 near-record spring chinook season by ordering your Bob's Bait Wraps and tech reports from our web store. Go to:

<http://www.theguidesforecast.com/baitwrap.shtml> for all the information.

Willamette Valley/Metro- Although there is some effort for sturgeon in the Portland to Longview stretch, catch is slow and will likely remain that way. Success rates may change when pilot runs of smelt come in the mainstem; that should be any week now.

Bonneville Pool anglers are catching fair numbers of sturgeon, including keepers in this reach. Eighteen legals and over 200 shakers were reported for 25 boats over the weekend. This can be a peak fishing period for anglers working this reservoir right now.

Water flow at Willamette Falls has moderated with the clarity improving and the temperature dropping into the low 40s. Winter steelhead are on the move with the YTD count about 1,000. No word yet on the sturgeon retention season for 2012 but it's likely to be short and occur during the month of February.

McKenzie levels continue to benefit from rain late last month. It will be in good shape and gradually dropping for the weekend. Be aware that in the 2012 regulations, bait is prohibited for steelhead or salmon until April 28th.

North Santiam flows remain above the seasonal norm but are forecast to drop and clear over the next week or so. Steelhead won't be moving until the water warms somewhat.

As the waters of the Clackamas River clear, the best chance for a winter steelhead hookup will become first and last light. Overall, results have been slow.

Drift fishing is accounting for some winter steelhead catches on the Sandy this week with corkies and yarn effective recently. Expect to see some changes in the river from the recent high water. Broodstock fish should show with more regularity later this month.

Northwest – Steelheaders fared better than expected on many north coast streams this week. Following the big rain, most systems have been without precipitation for several days and are getting low and clearing. The larger systems such as the Wilson and Nestucca are producing fair to good catches with great catches reported on Tuesday. Levels are getting low enough for plug pullers to take advantage of concentrated numbers but side-drifters are still getting fair numbers too. Broodstock fish are clearly present on the Wilson while the Nestucca is rumored to be giving up mostly wild fish for catch and release purposes.

Smaller streams like the Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem remain viable options for bank anglers but boaters will have a more challenging time as flows continue to drop. The North Fork Nehalem hatchery is still reporting high pressure but good catches, especially from the disabled fishing platform. Early mornings will be a key time for anglers to take advantage of eager biters. Three Rivers near Cloverdale will also produce good catches for at least the next week although hatchery workers are already spawning adult steelhead.

With no rain in sight, the mainstem Nehalem should come into shape by the weekend. Although

still weeks away from peak season, there should be fishable numbers of steelhead available in all reaches. Big, bright lures and baits are encouraged.

Sturgeon fishing should be an option for Tillamook anglers beginning Saturday with the west channel likely to produce the best results.

The ocean may lay down for offshore anglers this weekend with crab and bottomfish a fair option. Don't have high expectations for crab however, the commercial catch appears to be down so far this season.

Southwest – Commercial charters were able to get out over the past weekend to experience excellent fishing for rockfish although lingcod catches were only fair. Ocean crabbing has been slow to fair.

Winchester Bay crabbing is once again productive following the freshet in late December.

Crabbing has rebounded at Coos Bay with the salinity level returning to normal. Both boat and dock crabbers are catching good-quality Dungeness. Steelheading on the Coos River has been fair but is slowing.

Coquille River winter steelhead catches were great following the freshet but the action is cooling as the water drops and clears.

Winter steelheading has been good on the lower Rogue as the water levels gradually drop. Results on the middle Rogue for winter steelhead have been slow to fair but results will improve in the weeks to come. Upper Rogue steelheading is fair but winding down as summer steelhead spawning season approaches.

Water is dropping and clearing on the Elk River which will lead to marginal conditions by the weekend to come. No rain is forecast until the third week in January.

Eastern – Redside fishing has been fair to good on the lower Deschutes, particularly as hatches appear in the afternoons. Steelheading is winding down as summers enter tributaries to spawn.

Crescent Lake has continued to produce fair catches of large lake trout to trollers using downriggers.

Bull trout catches have been good at Lake Billy Chinook with the best action mid-day and afternoons.

SW Washington – Steelhead fishing on the Cowlitz has slowed although it remains one of the better options in the district. This run typically shows a bit earlier so it's likely past its prime.

Returns to other district facilities are much like last year with little variance. The Kalama is producing fair-at-best catches while the Lewis is only slightly better.

Several district lakes and ponds were planted with winter trout on the first few days of January. These water bodies should be producing good catches in the afternoons for those using bait.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Same report, different week. The only change below Bonneville is that smelt should soon enter the river, sparking a slight increase in catch rates for

keeper sturgeon in the Longview area. If the river experiences any slight temperature increase, this should prove favorable for smelt migration. The smelt population remains volatile and closed to sport or commercial harvest. They are currently listed under ESA and it will be a while before they rebound enough (if at all) to sustainable levels again.

The Bonneville Pool witnessed some good catches over the weekend. Eighteen legals and over 200 shakers were reported for 25 boats for the weekend fleet. This is not uncommon for this pool this time of year. Some of it has to do with the lack of effort for a good part of the year as it remains catch and release for the bulk of it. The Dalles Pool, or any other pool didn't produce nearly that good.

Effort for spring chinook isn't non-existent, it's just a bit futile right now but it won't be long.... The first spring chinook is due to be caught in the Willamette in early February; won't that be tasty?

The Guide's Forecast – The Bonneville Pool will be one of the best bets for keeper sturgeon up until it closes. The wind may be blowing pretty hard however as it is forecasted to be warmer on the coast than inland. It will be coming from the east, hard.

A nice soft high tide over the weekend may produce some crab but the commercial fleet has taken the bulk of the quality keepers. As commercial effort wanes, sport catches may improve but it's shaping up to be a less than stellar crab season, at least most recent reports indicate that.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – As of the latest data on January 10th, 1,181 winter steelhead have been counted at Willamette Falls. The water temperature is dropping along with the level with the latest reading 42 degrees. For those who keep track of such things, the 2011 coho count was finalized on January 31st at 3,393.

McKenzie flows are dropping to pre-storm levels with excellent color for winter trout fishing.

The North Santiam has yet to fully recover from the storm earlier this month but the South Santiam has dropped and will continue to do so through the coming weekend.

In the first trout planting of 2012, Huddleston Pond, Junction City Pond, Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake are on the schedule, all of which will receive legal and larger fish.

The Guide's Forecast – Plunkers will be working the banks of the Willamette below the mouth of the Clackamas and, with winter steelhead on the move now, there's reason for moderate optimism. For those new to this type of fishing, chat up one of the locals on-site. They are usually willing to help out a novice. Trout fishing on the Middle Fork Willamette will be productive over the coming weekend. Try small nymphs which have returned good results recently.

McKenzie flows are frequently a bit milky and glacial in appearance. Low water temperatures will slow the metabolism of local trout population but log-rodgers will still have some success with small nymphs which will, on occasion, take large trout.

There will still be a few late summer steelhead in the Santiam system but with only 1,000 or so winters over Willamette Falls, it's still too early to be optimistic about a hookup with one of them on the Santiams.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Steelheading picked up over the past weekend on the Clackamas River but as the week has passed and the water level dropped, catches have started to slow. Eagle Creek was slow over the past weekend and is slower now that the water level has further dropped.

Sandy water levels have dropped and will continue to drop through the weekend to come. With the freezing level low, the water will remain quite clear which is not a preferable condition for winter steelheading.

The Guide's Forecast – The Clackamas will continue to drop and, unfortunately, clear through the coming weekend, making steelhead just a little more difficult every day. This trend will continue until January 18th or so, at which time we are to expect some serious precipitation. Rain? Snow? We don't know' we're fishermen, not meteorologists. Consider thinking low-water techniques until the next round of precipitation. Small lures, tiny baits, little corkies and even link plastic worms will draw strikes.

Best results have come to those who stay on the move, trying different stretches, lures and baits on the Sandy. There are steelhead in the river (and more too come), but catches are expected to be slow through the weekend as the bulk of the winter run has yet to arrive.

North Coast Fishing Report – Early returning broodstock and wild steelhead provided some surprises this week on the larger streams of the north coast. Excellent catches were reported from the Wilson on Tuesday although it did slow by Wednesday according to reliable reports. Similarly, the Nestucca has been productive for wild winter fish although a few broodstock are certainly in the mix.

Most steelheaders expect to still see the early run Alsea and North Fork Nehalem stocked fish this time of year. With the bulk of that run through and staging at the hatcheries or their liberation site, one cannot expect excellent results this time of year. Some hatcheries, like Three Rivers are already spawning the early arrivals with another bunch of adults nearing the spawning stage and less than desirable for table fare.

The North Fork Nehalem is still reporting good catches for anglers employing low water techniques. Sheer numbers may keep this fishery going for a few more weeks although quality will quickly do downhill. The Necanicum was producing about 1 quality keeper per rod recently but it's primarily a bank angler program this time of year. With fish well dispersed throughout the lower reaches and driftboating a bit hazardous in the lower flows, bank anglers should have the best access to fish. There will be spawning fish in the tail-outs however so watch for those.

Steelheaders fortunate enough to be on the Wilson on Tuesday reported good success for largely broodstock fish. The upper reach (Vanderzandens downstream) was still floatable although when the level drops below 4.7 feet, it gets a bit dicey in the minefield which is downstream of the Siskeyville Ramp about a mile. That's ok because in these lower flows, the freshest fish will be in the lower reaches anyway. They'll move upstream a lot slower too. Although side-drifters still took a good number of fish, plug pullers certainly had a hand in the good fishing. Steelhead begin to concentrate in good numbers in more readable waters under these conditions. They become more territorial as well, which bodes well for plastic wiggly critters (plugs). **Pro guide Chris Vertopolous (503-349-1377)** reported fair at best action for a short float that he did on Wednesday. He had 4 chances (3 on plugs, 1 on a spoon), landing just one of the fish that hit. He floated from Mills Bridge to Sollie Smith. He noted that action has slowed dramatically from the previous day.

The Trask has some fish available, mostly wild, with not much effort to pursue steelhead. The lower drifts will begin to produce the best results and they will vary day by day. This river will likely get much more productive in March and April.

The Nestucca has been producing well, especially for wild fish. The upper drifts produced good results for this early in the season when flows were higher and now, the lower floats are producing better however not as good as when the flows were up. With the onset of low water conditions right now, look for most of the action to take place downstream of First Bridge. Unfortunately, we're on a weak tide series now so no big rushes of fish are likely through the weekend, but certainly possible.

There has been some sturgeon effort at Bay City mid-week but most serious sturgeon anglers are waiting for the better tides this weekend. More on that in the forecast section. Crabbing remains fair at best in most estuaries, even Netarts Bay, likely the best prospect.

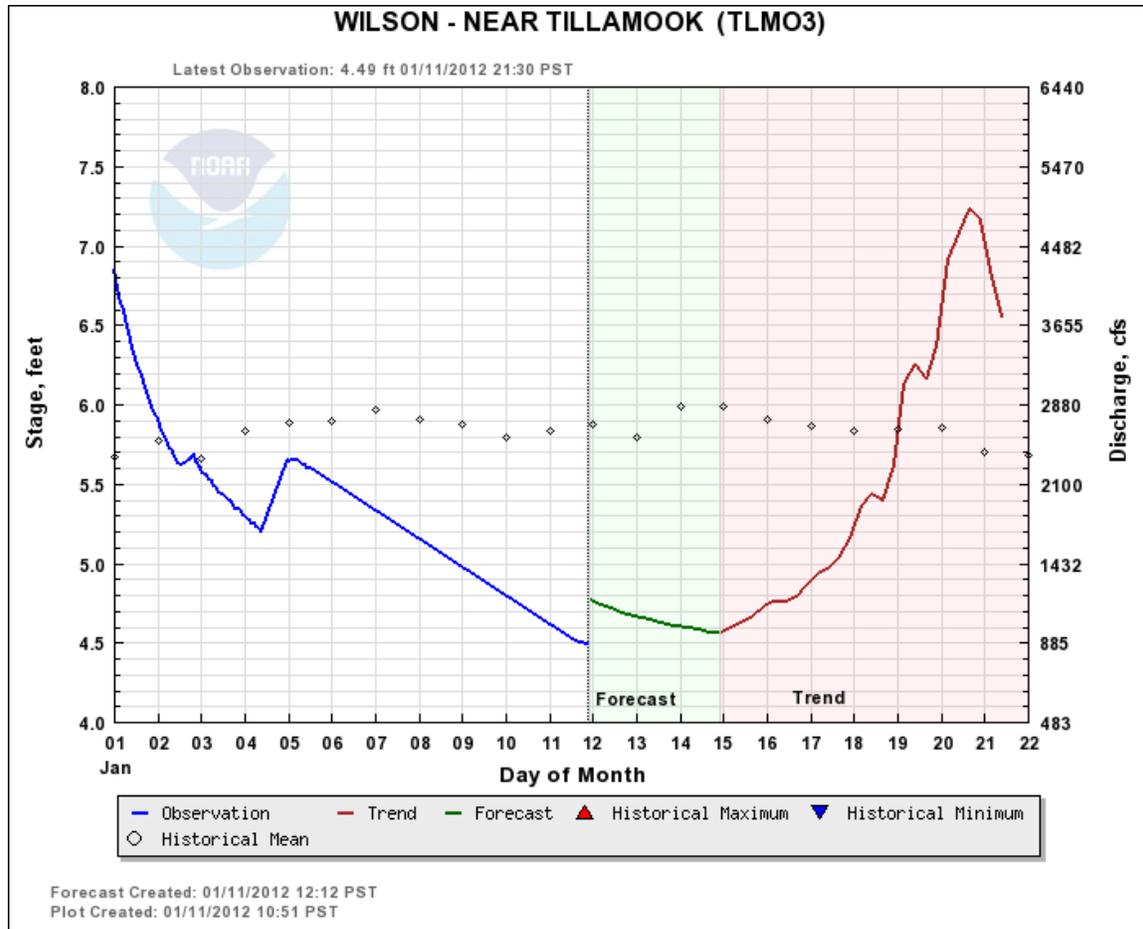
With a big swell, there hasn't been much offshore activity but that may change this weekend. Bottomfish should be ripe for the winter picking.

The Guide's Forecast – Steelhead will of course take front and center and water conditions are expected to remain low through the weekend. Another system is expected to push through and bring with it significant precipitation but that shouldn't happen until Sunday.

With low water conditions facing weekenders, the lower reaches of most north coast streams will be the place to intercept willing fish. It may even play out that anglers should look to the tide cycle when planning their outing. Under these conditions, the early bird (read, first one through the hole) will likely produce the biggest numbers. There is something to be said however for the late morning angler that fishes in warmer temperatures than the sub-freezing first light effort. (You won't find me there...).

Larger systems will be the best bet for most steelheaders with the Wilson and Nestucca leading the charge. On the Nestucca, fish downstream of First Bridge but it's not a bad bet to target your effort even downstream of Three Rivers. There should be fish present but you'll have to employ low water techniques if your side-drifting or long line out those small, dark colored plugs in the heads of the holes to find the most willing biters. On the Wilson, fish below Mills Bridge and even downstream of Sollie Smith if you have the proper boat to work that water. Did I mention plugs? These will be an effective method this weekend (and now for a matter of fact).

The Wilson River hydrograph is back on-line, finally. You can see the predicted rise in river levels coming up early next week:



The mainstem Nehalem will become an option this weekend. Although it's unlikely that huge numbers of fish will be available, there should be a fair number in this larger system. The problem with fishing this larger system is that well, it's a larger system, and fish can get by you a lot easier than the smaller systems that I prefer to fish. And speaking of smaller systems....

Rivers like the Necanicum and Highway 30 streams will still host biters in the pocket water but you really have to be stealthy, especially if you are bank fishing. Practice your upstream casts because once the fish sees you, you're not likely to entice them to bite. The North Fork Nehalem will certainly have darkening fish present as well as Three Rivers. Fish close to the hatcheries as that is where the highest concentration of fish will hover. This will produce the best in the early morning.

Sturgeon becomes a good option by Saturday, with favorable tides in the afternoon, when it's the warmest. Sand shrimp is the best bait for Tillamook Bay. Fish the west or middle channels, expecting the best action to take place about 1 to 2 hours before low slack. It may even behoove you to drop crab pots but do place them carefully as the building tides may take them to sea if you're not rigged right. Don't expect fantastic results crabbing however.

There may even be an offshore option coming up but do watch for a building swell coming into the weekend. This is one of the most dynamic weather models, meaning it is subject to change at any minute in time. Proceed with caution, this may not be the one to risk an attempted trip despite the likelihood of excellent opportunity for bottomfish.

FRI

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

FRI NIGHT

E WIND 5 KT...VEERING TO S AFTER MIDNIGHT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 9 FT.

SAT

S WIND 10 KT EARLY...THEN SW 15 TO 20 KT WITH GUSTS TO 25 KT. WIND WAVES 4 FT. W SWELL 8 FT. SCATTERED SHOWERS.

SAT NIGHT

W WIND 20 TO 25 KT WITH GUSTS TO 30 KT...EASING TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 5 FT. NW SWELL 9 FT. SHOWERS.

SUN

W WIND 20 TO 25 KT. WIND WAVES 6 FT. NW SWELL 16 FT.

MON

W WIND 15 TO 20 KT. WIND WAVES 4 FT. NW SWELL 12 FT.

Central & South Coast Reports – According to offshore forecasts, swells will be building into the weekend with Sunday a maelstrom. Stoke the fireplace and plan your next fishing trip.

Charter boats have reported fairly easy Rockfish limits when last they launched but that Ling cod catches have been spotty. There have been plenty of cabezon are in the mix but they must be released until the first of April.

Rock and jetty fishers are reminded that as of the 1st of January, cabezon may not be retained as part of a rockfish limit, even by shore-bound anglers through March.

The Siletz has dropped to low and clear tis week which has caused steelheading to go from slow to slower.

Traffic has been crushing on the Alsea, particularly near the hatchery, although winter steelhead catches have been slow.

While Siuslaw steelheading has been slow this week, drift boats are doing better than bank anglers o the main river.

Crabbing has yet to fully bounce back from fresh water washed into Winchester Bay from the recent storm. Sturgeon fishing has been decent in the Umpqua estuary but the majority of fish here are over the legal length limit to retain. Mainstem Umpqua steelheading has been an exercise in frustration for those hoping to take home a fish or two as the cast majority of winters here are wild which must be released. Despite the cast that it's still early for best results, head for the South Umpqua for hatchery fish.

When boats have been able to launch out of Charleston for offshore fishing, results have been decent with rockfish and ling catches fair to good. Crabbing has slowed in Coos Bay with best results coming near the jetties. Steelhead are scattered into the upper Coos and tributaries but the water is very low and clear which has slowed catches dramatically.

Steelheading has been negatively impacted by low, clear water on the Coquille system but small offering and jigs are taking a few.

Unlike smaller rivers, the Rogue is still in fishable condition this week with the lower river fairly productive for winter steelhead. Despite the recent freshet and the resultant movement of winter steelhead, there are still only a few available in the middle Rogue. While there are some late summers available, they are the long-in-the-tooth variety. Catches have been slow to fair overall. The upper Rogue has continued to offer fair-at-best steelheading for marginally smoker-quality summers.

Hot winter steelhead action which Chetco anglers enjoyed following the freshet at the first of the month has cooled with the water dropping and clearing. Decent results are still available up high on the river but a permit is required to access Forest Service land. Try early or late in the day. Conditions will once again cycle to steelheaders' benefit with the next round of storms starting early next week. Until then, think upriver, think stealth.

Although the Applegate River received a shot of water and a few steelhead at the first of the month, it's too early to expect worthwhile results here. The next round of precipitation will occur in the third week in January and with it, a few more winters.

Steelheading has slowed at the Elk and Sixes rivers with water levels dropping and visibility glass-like. Showers are in the forecast for the coming weekend, turning into rain in the week to come. This will trigger another freshet and reinvigorate steelheading on the Elk and Sixes. Catch 'em on the initial drop for best results. It can happen literally overnight on these diminutive ocean tributaries.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Look for hatches of midges, Blue-Winged-Olives and caddis afternoons and at which times dries will be effective for redsides on the lower Deschutes. Steelheading for summers is drawing to a close as fish move into the tributaries to spawn.

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 expect 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 big **net-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.

TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail

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Random Links

Keep track -Fishing Regulation Updates:

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/reg_changes/index.asp

FWIW, ODFW 2-12 Winter Steelhead Guide:

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/RR/steelhead_guide/index.asp

Knot to know (more reliable than Palomar) - Fish-H-Fool:

http://www.netknots.com/html/fish_n_fool_knot.html

GOOD LUCK!