

The Guide's Forecast - volume 14 issue number 4

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 20th – January 26th, 2012**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Sturgeon anglers below Bonneville Dam are still struggling to find keepers although boaters working the Portland to Longview stretch are getting into some undersize fish. Bonneville Pool anglers posted good catches again this week but success rates should drop as temperatures do. The quota for this reservoir will certainly get eaten up quick however.

Willamette River sturgeon anglers finally got word about their 2012 season. Washington and Oregon came up with an agreed allotment guideline between 1,768 and 2,022 fish. This equates to a modeled 4-day fishery which will take place on February 17th & 18th as well as February 24th and 25th. Effort will be high and it's likely the catch will be too.

Winter steelhead passage will be negatively affected by high water this week as will plunkers at Meldrum Bar as their fishing area goes underwater.

McKenzie water levels are expected to be too high for fishing for a week or so.

The Santiams will blow out with the storm this week and will be slow to recover.

Steelheading has been spotty on the Clackamas with the water dropping well below optimum for best results. Expect the river to be high and muddy by the coming weekend.

Fishing has been slow to fair on the Sandy over the past week. Levels are up now but water clarity will be determined as much by the freezing level as precipitation.

Northwest – Driftboaters will still taking fair to good numbers of fish late last week on the Wilson River. Although the flows were low, stealthy side-drifters and plug pullers each scored fair results on Friday. Some of the catch was made up of the earlier returning Alsea stock steelhead, which were less than ideal for table fare.

The cold snap dramatically dropped water temperatures, slowing the bite north coast wide. River levels remained fishable until mid-week, when the big storm is predicted to take rivers to unfishable levels for several days.

Most early season steelhead opportunities will slow, with only darker and near-spawn steelhead available. The exception will be the Wilson and Nestucca systems which should receive broodstock hatchery fish well into April this year.

Three Rivers, the North Fork Nehalem and Necanicum Rivers as well as the Highway 30 streams near Astoria will likely produce more spent fish than fresh ones. Wild fish should be available to a lesser degree however. Despite good tides, cold, wet weather kept sturgeon anglers from attempting an outing on Tillamook Bay this week. These fish won't go anywhere as the food source for these fish remains good through the winter months.

Crabbing effort and success were low this week with not much improvement in the near future.

Southwest – Ocean bottom fishing has been consistently good for rockfish and good at times for lingcod. Offshore fishing will not be an option this coming weekend with seas predicted to top

15 feet.

Steelheading has been good on most rivers despite low, clear water conditions. Storms this week will put most rivers out of shape for the coming weekend.

Winchester Bay has been producing good catches of Dungeness but crabbing will suffer from the freshet this week.

Sturgeon fishing has picked up in the lower Umpqua downstream of the Highway 101 Bridge but it's challenging to find one small enough to keep as most are oversized fish which must be released. While winter steelhead were nosing into the mainstem and catches have been fair, once the river recovers from rainfall this week, it will be good fishing.

Crabbing has been excellent in Coos Bay over the past week but fresh water from storms this week will chase Dungeness back into the ocean and results will suffer as salinity levels drop.

Steelheading on the Coquille was good following the last freshet, then slowed as the river dropped and cleared. Precipitation this week will bring fresh fish in for steelheaders to reap as conditions improve in a week or so.

Skinny water hasn't deterred steelheaders on the lower Rogue where catches have been fair but steady although fish have been running on the small side. The high water this week will silence low water complaints for a while.

If river forecasts remain accurate, on Thursday, January 19th, the Chetco River will be approaching an angler-unfriendly 40,000 cfs at Brookings. This prediction could be off by a lot but the result will be the same; it's not going to fish in the coming weekend.

Low and green at this writing on January 17th, the Elk River will blow out mid-week with heavy precipitation but, along with the Sixes, will recover rapidly and will produce winter steelhead.

SW Washington – Steelheading in the district has slowed with another round of late returning fish due back in February. The wild component should also make a stronger showing next month.

Kidney, Icehouse, Little Ash and Tunnel Lake in the Columbia River Gorge all received broodstock trout plants on January 9th. Although fish are likely to be lethargic in the cold temperatures, some quality fish are likely to fall to bait fishermen.

Eastern – The east side is not predicted to receive heavy rain but temperatures will be cold, sometimes remaining below freezing throughout the day in the week to come. Prepare accordingly.

The Dalles Pool put out some keeper steelhead, especially for boaters over the weekend. Action will likely taper in this reservoir as well as the John Day Pool as temperatures drop.

Columbia River Fishing Report – The Bonneville Pool is still the best thing going but given the weather this weekend, there won't be much enthusiasm for effort this week. Catch rates remained reliable and suspiciously similar to last week. Through mid-month, it's estimated that 765 legals were retained and although a 2012 guideline has not yet been determined, last year's quota (or guideline) was 2,000 fish. There's still some good action ahead and how does this

sound for odd, Bonneville Pool anglers may very well harvest more keeper sturgeon than Willamette River anglers. Reservoirs upriver are performing considerably slower.

Downriver, the highest effort remains in the Portland to Longview stretch but the catch is less than impressive. It will remain that way.

Steelheaders in The Dalles Pool posted some impressive numbers over the weekend. Admittedly, we don't know a lot about this fishery but have to assume it is much like the John Day fishery where anglers are likely to troll plugs in strategic locations. Here is the creel count for the weekend:

The Dalles Pool:

Weekly checking showed two adipose fin-clipped steelhead kept, plus 10 unclipped steelhead released for 45 bank anglers; and one adipose fin-clipped steelhead kept, plus seven unclipped steelhead released for one boat (three anglers).

John Day Pool:

Weekly checking showed one unclipped steelhead released for four bank anglers; and one unclipped steelhead released for five boats (10 anglers).

As has been the case for much of the season, wild fish outnumber wild ones.

The Guide's Forecast – Looks like another rough weather week ahead but prepared anglers will have a fair chance at keeper sturgeon in the Bonneville Pool. Smelt will remain a top bait but anglers can also score on sand shrimp. With a slight warming trend coming through, water temperatures may finally stabilize and the bite could get better.

Don't look for action downstream of Portland, on the mainstem Columbia to bump upwards however, fresh smelt in the lower river could be a factor on the current warming trend. This could stimulate the bite but since fresh smelt aren't an option, it would be hard to compete using frozen smelt for bait.

Although steelhead opportunities are clearly an option for reservoir trollers upstream of The Dalles, most of these fish are likely summer run fish that will be less than desirable for table fare. None-the-less, the action may warrant the attempt but you need to be ready for a learning curve.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Willamette levels started showing the effects of the deluge on Wednesday this week. Winter steelhead counts started to decline on January 12th and aren't expected to improve until water flows start to moderate.

The announcement on January 17th of a four-day sturgeon retention season for the lower Willamette came as a surprise to know one as we wrote of the likelihood of just such an occurrence weeks ago. Due to a shortage of keeper-sized fish, the harvest quota has been reduced a whopping 38 percent. Sturgeon may be kept February 17th, 18th, 24th and 25th only on the lower river in 2012. ODFW officials will be closely monitoring catches which means if fishing is really good, the season will be even shorter. This is news we've been anticipating without looking forward to it.

The McKenzie is up over seven feet below Leaburg Dam and is continuing to rise at this writing.

North Santiam levels are forecast to crest around midnight and remain above normal through next week. The South Santiam will crest just below Action level and follow a somola schedule.

As the NOAA phrases it:

FLOOD WATCH

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE PORTLAND OR
1157 AM PST THU JAN 19 2012

...FLOOD WATCH IN EFFECT THROUGH FRIDAY MORNING FOR RIVERS AND CREEKS IN NORTHWEST OREGON AND SOUTHWEST WASHINGTON...

.HEAVY RAIN AND SNOW MELT IS CAUSING RIVERS AND CREEKS TO RISE SHARPLY. MINOR FLOODING IS POSSIBLE ON SEVERAL RIVERS... ESPECIALLY THOSE DRAINING THE NORTH AND CENTRAL OREGON COAST RANGE. NOTE THAT FLOOD WARNINGS ARE ALREADY IN EFFECT FOR THE MARYS AND LUCKIAMUTE RIVERS IN THE WILLAMETTE VALLEY

The Guide's Forecast – Local rivers will be high, muddy, cruddy, messy maelstroms. This is a good time to plan and prepare for fishing trips when conditions improve.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – At this writing on the afternoon of January 19th, the Clackamas River is at 19,5, rising rapidly and forecast to go over flood level tonight. The boat ramp at Carver has been closed due to high water conditions.

Sandy River water levels are also on the rise with the water extremely dirty.

The Guide's Forecast – Expect the Sandy River to be very high through the week to come. Steelheading will eventually be a decent prospect but it may be a week or more before the river is fishable.

With the freezing level predicted to be fairly high for the most part over the week to come, expect the Sandy to be a roiled mess.

North Coast Fishing Report – Rivers on the north coast are on the rise at this writing. Prior to the rise in river levels, water temperatures were plummeting, putting steelhead off the bite. Before the drastic weather change, fishing had been pretty good in the dropping and clearing conditions. Driftboaters on Friday were doing pretty good on the Wilson River where we spent a few hours Friday afternoon pursuing steelhead in the warming afternoon. We took 2 steelhead between Mills Bridge and Sollie Smith, both on the black pirate size 30 hot shot. The first fish came right at Mills Bridge, it was a colored up Alsea stock fish that likely went close to 10 pounds. It was a buck but it still cut pale pink so that one went in the smoker. It was Rennie Ferris' first steelhead ever; and he had put some time in. Further downriver, we hooked a nice broodstock steelhead in the 6 pound class and took out at dark. We had heard about good fishing throughout the day with a few guide boats taking their 4-fish limit earlier in the day. What few boats we saw in the afternoon reported favorable results.

Other systems had been producing fair results too. The Trask and Nestucca systems had sporadic action for wild fish and an occasional hatchery fish too. Most anglers were working the lower reaches of these systems given the low water conditions we were experiencing.

The three big early season producers (Three Rivers, North Fork Nehalem and the Necanicum) are currently on the rise but stealthy steelheaders were taking a few over the week. Although these systems are getting the needed precipitation right now, it will be several days before they drop down into fishable shape again. These rivers are full of early run fish, which won't be in very good condition, even for your smoker. It's your choice however, these fish were planted for catch and keep fisheries. In the coming weeks, anglers will have ample opportunity for down-running steelhead.

Sturgeon anglers were less than enthused about venturing out on the estuary for a chance at a keeper in the good tides this week. It just wasn't safe. These fish will be around into the spring so there's no reason to rush things.

Crabbing and offshore fishing? Are you kidding?

The Guide's Forecast – It's a bit of a transition time for steelheaders on the north coast. However, water conditions are the bigger concern this week as flows are expected to remain high for a good part of the reporting week. Here's the Wilson River, keeping in mind that anytime the river is over 6.0 feet, it's pretty high and hard to catch steelhead:



Although this hydrograph model indicates the Wilson shouldn't come back down to below 6 feet until we get close to the end of the month, it's too early to be making that kind of prediction. Given the precipitation that we're currently getting, and the amount of snowfall in the coast range, it does seem highly unlikely that we'll be seeing fishable conditions by the weekend, certainly on the larger systems like the Wilson, Nestucca, Trask and certainly the Nehalem.

It's not bad timing since we're getting late for early run steelhead and still a bit early for peak season broodstock fish. Plunkers and anglers savvy to high water techniques may find some biters however. You'll have to use lots of scent and bright colored lures and be certain to fish the slower water closer to the banks. Oh yeah, you'll have frigid waters to deal with too. Good luck, you'll need it!

Smaller streams may fish by the weekend however but will likely only provide spent fish and a very rare fresh one. The Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem and Three Rivers are all strong possibilities for the weekend but boaters need to exercise extreme caution because we had very strong winds here on Wednesday. It's highly likely trees will be down along most river banks. Highway 30 streams are equally viable for steelhead with the same caveat that the catch will largely be made up of spent fish.

Sturgeon tides are going away but with the wind forecast, who cares?

And along those lines, why post an offshore weather forecast unless you're a storm watcher. Combined seas to 20 feet by the weekend. Sounds like surfing weather to me...

Central & South Coast Reports – It has been stormy on the west side this week. Winds reached hurricane force on the coast this week with the 110 MOH reading at Cape Foulweather. It occurred to us that this point of land is appropriately named, however.

Ocean crabbing is now open south of Gold Beach for all the good it'll do, at least for the next week or so as offshore conditions and passing storms will keep recreational seekers of deep-water Dungeness safely at bay.

Seas are forecast to reach a height of 20 feet or better over the coming weekend. While ocean conditions are predicted to moderate in the week to come, there's nothing friendly about the long-range forecast as weather systems move through.

Crabbing in bays and estuaries is off the recreational activities chart for a while as well. Fresh water and Dungeness do not mix and sea spiders will head for saltier water following a major influx of storm-driven H₂O as we are currently experiencing.

The past week produced good low water steelhead action in most south coast rivers. It's over for a while and larger rivers will take over a week to recover.

Waters of the Alsea were clear early on Tuesday this week. then started to rise and turn to mud. The water level went above major flood levels on Wednesday and as of mid day Thursday, January 19th, the level is 21.5 at tidewater and it is still coming up. According to long-range predictions, it may fish the first week in February. A Flood Watch issued on January 19th for the Coquille, North Coquille was upgraded to a Flood Warning later the same day. What does this have to do with fishing? Not much, unfortunately. The Flood Warning on the lower Rogue is ongoing.

Over 1.5 inches of rain had fallen in the Brookings area by Tuesday this week. Newsflash: The Chetco is high today. OK, just kidding ... about the newsflash, not the water level. When the lower Chetco flow exceeds 55,000 cfs, details are superfluous. Of greater important to those of us who would seek fresh winter steelhead is the long-range forecast which indicates a drop in the river level and moderation of flow starting the morning of January 20th. While the Chetco is

predicted to drop rapidly, it will remain over 7,000 cfs for the entire week to come. Plunkers may be able to find some steelhead love.

The wind at Port Orford, measured at 70 MPH with gusts to 90 mid-week, was accompanied by heavy rain as over two inches fell on Wednesday and over three inches on Thursday for a total of nearly 11 inches since the latest round of storms began. The Elk and Sixes are high, rising and muddy but will recover quickly with a moderation in rainfall, so keep an eye on water levels.

Central and Eastern Oregon – No reports this week but rain has been falling this week on the east side as well.

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.

Anglers can also 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.

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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 Klineline 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

Look here for weather watches, warnings and advisories from NOAA

<http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/warnings.php?wfo=pqr>

Here's Waterwatch from USGS:

<http://waterwatch.usgs.gov/new/?m=real&w=gmap®ions=or>

Stay dry and warm - watch a movie. Fly Fishing Film Tour: <http://flyfilmtour.com/>

GOOD LUCK!