

The Guide's Forecast - volume 14 issue number 5

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 27th – February 2nd, 2012**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Inclement weather kept most anglers at home instead of pursuing Bonneville Pool sturgeon last week. With better weather in the forecast for the weekend and a possible warming trend on the way, the bite should stay consistent through the weekend. Sturgeon anglers downstream will be biding their time until the spring.

Smelt numbers are expected to improve this year although no harvest will be allowed by the sport or commercial interests. A healthy run however could focus keeper sturgeon in the Portland to Longview stretch although fresh bait far out-fishes frozen. Anglers may be able to take advantage of higher concentrations of fish however.

Winter steelhead passage, stalled in high water, will resume as the level drops. The 2012 sturgeon retention season on the lower Willamette and Multnomah Channel will consist of two Friday/Saturday periods, February 17th & 18th and February 24th & 25th.

Although February is often the first month that a spring chinook is caught in the Willamette system, that won't happen anytime soon as high, colored water will keep effort and catch to a minimum. The hot-spot in February is Sellwood Bridge, trolling herring on the bottom, just upstream of the bridge abutments.

The McKenzie River is expected to be out of shape for several days.

The Santiams will not be an option this week due to high water.

Clackamas levels dropped earlier this week but have shot back up again. Level and flow are forecast to drop through the coming weekend but may still be off-color. Most anglers will be looking to late February/March for a stronger showing of broodstock fish.

Sandy flows were moderating early this week but the water is likely to be roiled with a high freezing level forecast for the week to come. Steelhead were beginning to show in fair numbers prior to the high flow.

Northwest – Steelheaders only had a brief window of opportunity late in the weekend, on smaller streams such as the Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem. Action was fair with a few fresh fish still in the catch. After flows subside, the remaining early run will be spawning in tributaries with plenty of kelts in the catch, especially for those using bait. The Highway 30 streams, Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem and Three Rivers may be the only options over the weekend. The dam Hole on the Trask may produce some limited catches for bank anglers.

It will likely be after the weekend before the larger systems come back into shape. The Wilson and Nestucca will be the main targets of serious steelheaders, with broodstock fish available for the rest of the winter season. March is peak month for that return.

Fair tides for sturgeon anglers through the weekend but it's questionable as to whether winds will cooperate with anglers. Windy conditions create too much rocking, not allowing anglers to detect the sensitive bites that often occur using sand shrimp for bait.

Crabbing remains poor and offshore excursions won't be an option for a while.

Southwest – As weather conditions moderate, offshore conditions are forecast to improve for the coming weekend. If predictions hold accurate, boats should be able to make bottom fishing trips.

Crabbing in bays and estuaries will remain poor through the weekend to come. As rainfall moderates and salinity levels improve, Dungeness catches will pick up as well.

The Umpqua system is forecast to be out of shape for the weekend to come with the next round of storms pushing up water levels. As precipitation moderates and water conditions improve, steelheading in the upper mainstem and South Umpqua will become worthwhile.

The Coos and Coquille Rivers will be productive for winter steelhead once water levels drop and clear.

Winter steelhead, which seem to have vaporized from the lower Rogue, have been drawn upstream to Grants Pass where they will entertain anglers as the river recovers, perhaps as early as the coming weekend. On the other hand, the summer steelhead fishery on the upper Rogue is history with tributaries beckoning these fish to spawn.

Dropping but still muddy on Monday this week, the Elk River blew out again as heavy rain returned to the south coast on Tuesday. With a dry day forecast on Friday and only light showers to follow, both the Elk and Sixes will produce winter steelhead as conditions improve.

Eastern – The Crooked River should provide some fly fishing opportunities this week as it is fairly low and very clear. Midges are hatching so take smaller offerings for whitefish and rainbows.

Trollers working The Dalles and John Day Pools may still find a few steelhead if the weather calms down but fish will be close to the spawning stage and most will be wild, requiring release.

SW Washington – Accumulated snow, mixed with the current warm front, will likely cause flooding conditions on most district streams. Not that it matters much, as these systems transition from early returning fish to later returning broodstock steelhead. Wild fish should also make an appearance but no one system is expected to get a great run.

If smelt enter the Cowlitz system, anglers may have a viable target fishery for sturgeon in the lower Cowlitz as that is where the smelt are surely destined for.

Columbia River Fishing Report – It's still a Bonneville Pool show for mainstem Columbia River anglers although weather this week was less than desirable for an outdoor angling adventure. Anglers that did get out over the weekend did find good success however as the weekend check indicated nearly a keeper per boat average for anglers in this pool. It's really the only game going as anglers downstream are just finding shorts in the Portland to Longview stretch.

We've talked about smelt entering the lower river and the possibility of a subsequent bite but until we hear substantive evidence, we won't give this section much "press".

It won't be long before the first spring chinook is caught on the mainstem Columbia, it is open now. Don't count on much luck in the lower river however as mud will be flowing from the Willamette for quite a while here.

The Guide's Forecast – If you just gotta fish this week, go to the Bonneville Pool if you want to have a reasonable chance for a keeper. With the warming trend, it will be a good bet for those that know the pool and how to fish it. It's likely the quota is about half gone and may not last too long into March, if that. Weather and wind will dictate effort, and therefore, catch.

All other options, including crabbing in the estuary is a wasted effort.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Water flow at Willamette Falls has moderated but remains well above normal. Passage of winter steelhead has yet to resume with the water swift Visibility has been less than one foot for over a week.

The McKenzie continues to flow over 'bank=full' stage for the most part. It won't fish by the coming weekend.

The Santiam system is still feeling the effect of recent storms and is predicted to remain high and swift through the weekend.

The Guide's Forecast – Lower Willamette conditions are not conducive to fish movement - or fishing, for that matter. When the river starts to drop and clear, plunkers in the Meldrum Bar stretch will be the first to connect with winter steelhead.

Though the water level is not fishing-friendly on the Santiams, it's still too early for the North or South Santiam to fish well anyway. As steelhead populations improve, catch results will follow.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Clackamas high at this writing is forecast to be dropping through the coming weekend.

Sandy River levels have remained fairly high and have been fluctuating due to snowmelt as well as rainfall.

The Guide's Forecast – Efforts for winter steelhead on the Clackamas this week have been futile. While the Clackamas has been slow to clear, Eagle Creek was fishable Wednesday this week and while it should contain a few winters, none have been reported as taken so far this week.

Conditions on the Sandy will remain challenging until the freezing level drops and the water clears.

North Coast Fishing Report – After back to back deluges on the north coast, the rains have finally ceased and the larger rivers are finally on their way to recovery although it may still be late into the weekend before good results will be realized.

With high water for many of the destination rivers this week, there isn't much to report on. Reports of one boat positing double-digits just prior to the high water are possible as this can often be a productive time to fish. Just catch the first part of the rising water and you can really be in `em.

Smaller systems posted a brief flurry of activity prior to the high water. Anglers fishing the Necanicum early in the week did find a few fresh fish and a few dark ones. The conditions didn't last long however as the second pounding came roaring down shortly after the window of

opportunity for mostly bank anglers. The high occurrences of strong winds certainly put some trees down in the way of driftboaters. Similarly, the North Fork Nehalem saw a flurry of catches early in the week with a fair number of the fish beginning to turn dark. As of this writing on Wednesday night, the river remained too high to fish with confidence but was likely to drop back into shape by Friday.

No sturgeon effort or crabbing effort has taken place recently, it's just too nasty out there!

The Guide's Forecast – Although certainly subject to change, hydrologic models indicate a good string of fishable days ahead. As always, it will start with the smaller streams and go to the larger systems, maybe as early as the weekend. A reprieve in the rain is certainly a welcome site to steelheaders this time of year.

What we like to do under these circumstances, is give a river by river review and forecast (from north to south) for what anglers can expect for results assuming the upcoming weather models remain intact.

Highway 30 streams (Klaskanine, Big Creek, Gnat Creek)- Most fish present will be near or post spawn. The best place to fish is at the deadlines near the hatchery intakes but as we mentioned, don't have high expectations for large numbers of quality fish this late in the season. Downriver, hatchery fish that spawned in the mainstem may be pretty easy to catch as down-runners further downriver. These rivers don't receive much of a wild run. Don't hesitate to report snaggers here.

Necanicum River- A good bet when the flows subside but there will be more spent fish than fresh ones on this system. They're good biters however; plugs, bait, spoons, spinners, they'll take about anything. You'll have to decide whether you want to fill your smoker with "boots" or not. After all, they are hatchery fish but don't waste 'em if you take 'em. There should be some fresh wild fish and a very rare bright hatchery fish too. WATCH OUT for freshly downed trees. This system is a prime candidate for eating driftboats. Every boater can be a victim.

North Fork Nehalem – I could almost cut and paste from the Necanicum section although this system has a hatchery deadline on it, which is an ideal place to intercept hatchery fish. Like the Necanicum however, the bulk of them will be dark and tired of seeing angling gear. I haven't heard of much recycling going on here but it's getting pretty late for that program as the quality of fish continue to degrade. The disabled ramp may be a fun place to just sit and watch if you don't have anything else better to do.

Mainstem Nehalem – Many days out but there may be some willing wild fish available at the mouths of clearing tributaries. No need to drift a boat here before next week but bank anglers, work the slower water towards the edges of the main flow. Fish will be shallow here and respond best to bait. It would be pretty rare to see a hatchery fish on this system but it can happen. Be prepared for catch and release fishing.

Kilchis River- This system should be a good bet, even before the weekend. The hatchery run is pretty miniscule in recent years and what hatchery fish remain, will likely be spent. This system does get a good wild run however and when the flows do drop, it could be pretty decent. Like other small streams in the district, it could be littered with downed trees so use extreme caution when boating this for the first time after a high wind event.

Wilson River - This will of course be a primary target for most steelheaders when it comes back into shape. Keep in mind however, you don't have to wait for it to become steelhead green before it's fishable. High water will require its own specific technique however as anglers will have to target the slower water and tailouts, using patience to expect success. Also, in the

higher, off colored flows, the fish will be on the move all day so let them come to you. There is a reason plunkers do so well in big water compared to anglers that are always on the move. Although I rarely advocate for anchor fishing, in off-colored water and high flows, this is a good technique to explore.

When flows do drop, likely by the weekend, target the upper reaches first but you'll still want to fish the slower water first as fish will be taking the path of least resistance. Bait will rule the day in higher flows, you'll have to wait out the plugging conditions until early next week. Side-drifted eggs will be a big hit and leave no water unmolested as fish will be well distributed throughout the river and I mean north to south, east to west.

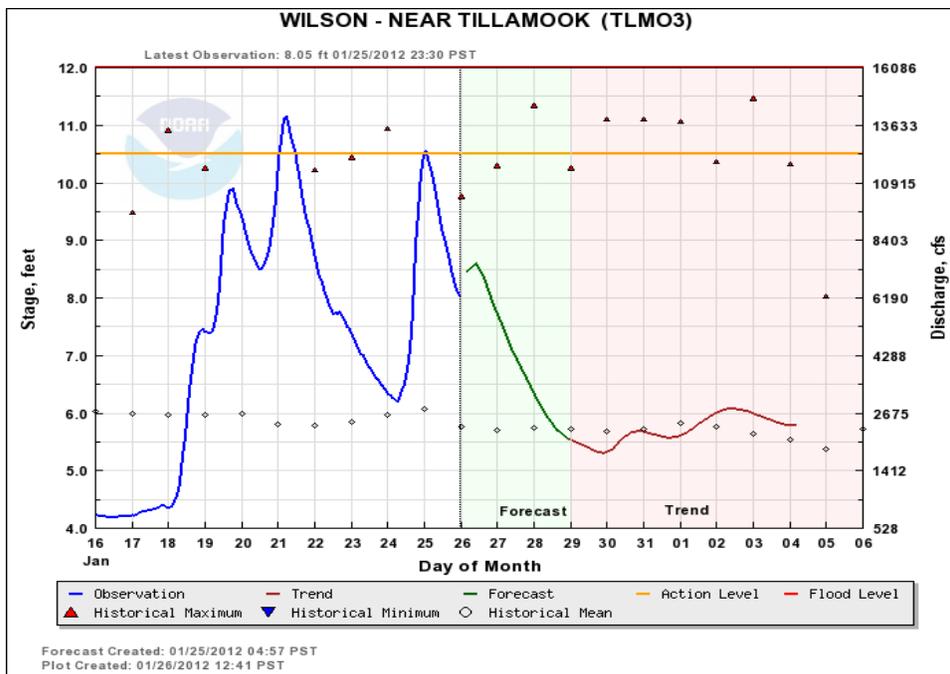
Anglers are likely to find a mix of spent early returning fish, wild fish and some broodstock fish as well. Although it's still early for a great return of broodstock fish, they will certainly be present when these flows drop.

Trask River – This system should be a fair bet for wild fish. If you know the upper Peninsula reach, it could fish well by the weekend. Again, bait will rule up here in the higher flows and you'll still have to be cautious for downed trees in this dynamic stretch. The Dam Hole will be a strong option for bank anglers by Friday. There could be a rare broodstock stray here, maybe even an Alsea stock stray from the Wilson.

Three Rivers/Nestucca system - Another strong option for later returning broodstock fish, this system could fish fair to good in the upper reaches as early as Friday. Anglers will need to know their water before fishing above 5½ Bridge however. Treat every reach with respect. We could see the first good surge of broodstock and wild steelhead on this clearing.

No sense in fishing downstream of Three Rivers as fish will be on the move, and in a quick way. The Three Rivers stock should be spent by now although anglers fishing near the deadline may luck into a fresh one here or there.

Here's how the Wilson River hydrograph looked on Wednesday night:



And more good news.....the water temperature is rising too! The nights are predicted to get cool again however but overall, temperatures are looking favorable for the weekend.

Sturgeon tides are improving into the weekend and early next week. It could be a good option as the weather improves. It's an early morning show with low tide just after mid-morning. Sand shrimp should produce some results in the west channel as well as the middle channel too.

Crabbing won't be worth a hoot however and the offshore opportunity? Saturday may be an option with an East wind predicted. It's always a roll of the dice this time of year however. Here's the forecast for offshore:

FRI

NE WIND 10 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 12 FT.

FRI NIGHT

NE WIND 10 KT. WIND WAVES 3 FT. NW SWELL 11 FT...
SUBSIDING TO 9 FT.

SAT

E WIND 5 TO 10 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. NW SWELL 7 FT.

SAT NIGHT

S WIND 10 TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 3 FT. W SWELL 6 FT.

SUN

SW WIND 20 TO 25 KT. WIND WAVES 5 FT. W SWELL 13 FT.

MON

SW WIND 15 TO 20 KT. WIND WAVES 4 FT. W SWELL 13 FT.

Central & South Coast Reports – Offshore launches may be possible on this coming Saturday according to forecasts but be sure to check at the last moment as conditions can (and will) change quickly at this time of year.

Winter steelhead should be available in the Siletz River and, according to river forecasts, it should be driftable by this coming Sunday. Scout ahead for surprises such as downed trees.

Coos and Coquille rivers are dropping but have been slow to clear due to slides which are causing muddy conditions. In addition, fallen timber is caution hazardous conditions for anyone accessing the area.

Crabbing on Winchester Bay will be slow until the salinity level returns to normal following the flush of fresh water from rainfall. Anglers are catching sturgeon below the Highway 101 Bridge on the lower Umpqua but most are over the legal length for retention. Fresh, bright winter steelhead which entered during recent storms are now available in the mainstem Umpqua although most are wild and must be released. On the other hand, catch-and-release fishing has been very good at times. The better chance of taking a limit of hatchery fish would be on the South Umpqua as fin-clipped steelhead are in the majority here. Side-drifters and plug-pullers will be taking fish in the week to come.

The lower Rogue is forecast to be dropping by Sunday this weekend. Steelheading should be good as conditions improve with plunkers reaping the initial rewards on gravel bars. Plug-pullers and back-bouncers will find winter steelheading the middle Rogue as the river drops and clears in the coming week. Recent high water moved winter fish upstream and caused late summers to move into tributaries where they'll be spawning soon. There seems to be some questions as to whether steelhead taken recently on the upper Rogue were summers or winters but since they were bright fish, the chance of these being late summers which lingered through the freshet seems remote. Expect to see and increase in winter steelhead in the upper river in coming weeks.

Chetco flow was about 115,000 cfs at this writing on Thursday, January 26th but is dropping rapidly. It's predicted to be less than 7,000 cfs on this coming Saturday and 5,000 cfs by Sunday as it continues to drop. Plunkers on the Chetco have been known to hookup with steelhead at 9,000 cfs but general fishability here is between 2,000 and 4,000 cfs. Most certainly in the coming week there will be plenty of winter steelheading opportunities for all regardless of preferred technique.

The Elk River will be in excellent conditions for steelheading by the coming weekend. To check water conditions on this volatile river, call 541-332-0405.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Deschutes water levels have been rising slightly this week - not the best conditions for fishing. It's too late for summer steelheading and too early for winters. Trout results have been spotty.

Crooked River remains low, clear and fair for whitefish and trout on midges. Try to find a sheltered spot that's protected from the wind.

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.

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Random Links

Huge Yellowtail landed out of Puerto Vallarta:

<http://www.wonews.com/Blog.aspx?id=1615>

Outdoor Police Beat:

<http://wdfwenforcement.blogspot.com/2012/01/great-shellfish-heist-busted.html>

GOOD LUCK!