

The Guide's Forecast - volume 14 issue number 6

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 3rd – February 9th, 2012**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Under permanent rule, the mainstem Columbia is open now to spring chinook fishing but effort will be very low, at least until March brings more promise. Sport seasons were recently set through the bi-state process allowing boat angling seven days per week from March 1 through April 6 from Buoy 10 upstream to Beacon Rock. Bank angling will be allowed during the same time frame from Buoy 10 upstream to Bonneville Dam. There will be three Tuesday closures – Mar. 20, Mar. 27 and Apr. 3 – to accommodate commercial fisheries. The first spring chinook of the season passed Bonneville Dam last week.

The lower Willamette water level has been on the drop but remains swift and muddy. In the recent decision by fishery managers regarding the spring chinook season, the lower Willamette fishery remained unscathed. It will be open seven days a week with a 2-fish bag limit for as long as the run lasts.

The McKenzie has yet to recover from the high water event although there is hope for the week to come.

The Santiam System will remain too high to be of interest through the coming week.

Still a little high but with good color, the Clackamas will be dropping through the coming weekend. Steelheading has been slow but broodstock fish should begin showing in better numbers in the weeks ahead.

Hardware and fly fishers are taking steelhead on the Sandy River. Use caution on soft sand riverbanks. Snow levels dictate river conditions but conditions should remain favorable for a while.

Northwest – Anglers received a glimmer of hope as river levels on some north coast streams dipped low enough to produce unexpectedly good results last weekend. Steelheaders side-drifting from boats and drift-fishing from shore did exceptionally well around Mills Bridge on the Wilson last Saturday. The river started to rise from another storm however and just began to fish again mid-week. The conditions should be ideal for weekend anglers and although there should be fair numbers of fish available in what will certainly be an excellent year for winter steelhead, don't expect easy limits this time of year. The ideal conditions will draw a significant crowd.

The North Fork Nehalem also received another shot of hatchery steelhead and anglers fishing near the hatchery deadline produced good results. This system and the Necanicum may be too clear for great results over the weekend and low water typically makes boating more hazardous. Bank anglers should continue to do well however as fish are well distributed throughout these systems. The North Fork Nehalem hatchery is recycling fresh fish back downstream and darker fish to Lake Lytle in Rockaway. Spent fish in these systems do bite well but aren't good for eating.

The Nestucca and upper Trask Rivers should also have fishable numbers of steelhead available. The Trask will primarily produce wild fish along with the Nestucca but the Nestucca should have a fair shot of broodstock fish entering the system as well.

Weekend tides and weather look conducive to a sturgeon outing for Tillamook Bay anglers.

Although the fishery is more challenging to figure out, success can be good in a relatively uncrowded water body.

Offshore fishing and crabbing remain a poor option through the weekend.

Southwest – Bottom fishing has been good offshore but not a given. Charter boats have had to move around to find rockfish and lingcod but once located, limits have been the rule.

Ocean crabbing has been slow due to rough ocean conditions almost daily over the past several weeks.

A few Dungeness have been taken in Winchester Bay but it's still slow. Now that the Umpqua has dropped into shape, steelheading has improved with the South Umpqua reliably producing hatchery fish. Steelheaders hooked up with wild fish over the past weekend on the North Umpqua.

When ocean conditions have allowed, lingcod limits have been taken out of Charleston. Coos Bay crabbing has yet to recover from the freshet resulting from recent storms.

Plunkers did well for winter steelhead over the past weekend on the lower Rogue but in the absence of precipitation, all forms of bank and boat fishing will take fish. Water conditions on the middle Rogue were coming into shape late last week with plug-pullers and side-drifters taking fish recently. With good numbers of winter steelhead already snug in the Cole Rivers Hatchery, there are enough in the upper Rogue to create a worthwhile fishery.

Steelheading on the Elk and Sixes rivers will improve into the coming weekend as rainfall has stopped, allowing the water to drop and clear. One wild steelhead per day may be retained from either river.

Eastern – Nymphing has been marginally effective in the cold, high water of the Deschutes. Steelheading is done as fish have moved into tributaries to spawn.

Boat anglers fishing The Dalles Pool were averaging an unprecedented 3 fish per rod on the last creel check. Although 2/3 of the fish are wild, the ratio still worked out to be a keeper hatchery fish per angler.

Fishing is good on the Crooked River despite low, clear water. Typical winter hatches of midges and Blue-Winged-Olives are occurring early in the afternoon.

SW Washington – The Cowlitz saw a rebound in steelhead catches once flows dropped. Boat anglers averaged nearly a steelhead per rod and bank anglers did about half that good.

The Kalama and Lewis should produce some results over the weekend. These rivers are dropping into excellent shape right now.

The Washougal is also an option but high effort only produced fair results on the last check.

Soapbox Update: Do you care about how you go about catching your annual supply of salmon? As conservation-minded anglers, we should. Currently, scientists believe that not enough is known about critical populations of forage fish in our nation's oceans. Learn more about this campaign and the critical work its experts are doing to secure this valuable food source for our

great sport fish here: www.pewenvironment.org/pacificfish but also stop by their booth, booth #159, at the Pacific Northwest Sportsmen Show beginning this Wednesday, February 8th.

Columbia River Fishing Report – There still is not much yield on the Columbia River these days although anglers upriver of Bonneville Dam have come across ample numbers of sturgeon and steelhead recently.

In the Bonneville Pool, sturgeon anglers are still taking fair numbers of keepers and with the moderating weather, effort and catch are likely to increase. Although a hard quota number has yet to come out of the agencies for this reservoir, last year, the number was 2,000 fish. WDF&W estimates that nearly 900 fish have been taken so far this season; a clear indication that it won't be a long season if the agencies mimic last year's quota.

In the next pool up, The Dalles has been producing excellent catches of steelhead; nearly 3 fish per rod on the weekend creel check. The exact, impressive catch was (from the ODF&W report): Weekly checking showed 13 adipose fin-clipped steelhead kept, plus 23 unclipped steelhead released for six boats (13 anglers). Although I remain challenged to understand how these anglers are catching such great numbers of fish, I'm assuming that it's a trolling show (using plugs) and the bulk of them are summer run fish on their way out after spawning. Regardless, it's impressive fishing.

Downriver, sturgeon effort remains subdued with just one keeper reported for 17 boats in the Portland to Longview stretch. There are certainly spring chinook in the system as one has passed Bonneville Dam already and once the Willamette clears, there will certainly be fish caught at Sellwood Bridge. It's a big river out there however, to be finding February spring chinook.

The Guide's Forecast – If you're an adventuresome angler, go to The Dalles Pool and see what all the hub-bub is about. It's clearly good fishing and the weather looks to be tolerable for the next several days. Plan to troll plugs but someone clearly knows more about this fishery than I.

The Bonneville Pool remains the top bet for sturgeon anglers. Keepers will continue to fall to shrimp, squid and smelt this coming week and if catches continue to take off, this quota won't last long. There was clearly some good recruitment in recent years.

Don't bother with the mainstem unless you're trying to become a hero. Someone has to catch the first springer, you already let one go by Bonneville Dam. Do you know how good that one would have tasted? The water below the mouth of the Willamette will likely remain turbid. Plan your trip accordingly.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – While the water is still muddy, the level and flow of the Willamette is moderating at the Falls. Winter steelhead daily counts have started to pick up once again although the total as of today, February 2nd, is only 1,354. That's not enough steelhead to create any fisheries in any upstream tributaries. Sturgeon retention on the Willamette River, Multnomah Channel and the Gilbert River on Sauvie Island will be allowed February 17, 18, 24 and 25.

McKenzie River water levels dropped away from bankfull stage at the end of January and has been falling since. While early in the week it looked doubtful, it may be at pre-storm levels by the coming weekend after all.

The Santiams have been slow to recover from last week's storm. Waters of the North Santiam at Mehama only fell below Action Level as recently as Monday this week. The South Santiam at Waterloo was still pushing 11,000 cfs at Waterloo as of today, February 2nd.

Sheridan Pond, E. E. Wilson Pond, Junction City Pond, Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake are on the trout stocking schedule this week.

The Association of Northwest Steelheaders Sandy River Chapter is holding a Winter Fishing Clinic on February 4th from 10am to 2pm at the Sam Cox Building at Glenn Otto Park, 1208 Historic Columbia River Hwy in Troutdale. It's a freebie so go soak up some fish-catchin' knowledge!

Sportsman Shows abound around the state and are coming soon to your area. See **Random Links**, below.

The Guide's Forecast – Plunkers on the bank of the lower Willamette below the mouth of the Clackamas have been making a little stronger effort as the water drops but there's still not much happening for them.

Trout fishing should be fair on the McKenzie if it comes into shape as predicted. It will be primarily a nymph show although BWOs are likely to be hatching in the afternoons. Trout fishing is all catch-and-release here until the third week in April.

The Santiams are predicted to fall to fishable level by the second week in February barring any further precipitation but mid-February is too early for sufficient numbers of winter steelhead to be available to create a fishery.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Clackamas level and flow are decent and the color is excellent for steelheading.

Water levels at the Sandy River are still a little high but clear as of mid-week. The level will be dropping through the weekend and effort is sure to be up.

The Guide's Forecast – Although fishing seems to be slow on the Clackamas, it's getting to that time of year where it will happen or not. Jigs have produced some hookups this week and are as likely to draw strikes as any other approach.

With only late-arriving broodstock fish in the Sandy and despite a fair number of fish taken earlier in the year, the bulk of the run will be arriving in the weeks to come. Fishing should be worthwhile over the coming weekend as the water level and color continue to improve.

North Coast Fishing Report – After a rough couple of weeks, it looks as if north coast streams will finally get a reprieve and anglers will have many choices to choose from in the coming weekend.

Success has varied the last several days with last weekend producing a flurry of catches for the few anglers fishing the high waters of the Wilson River on Saturday. One guide boat reported a dozen fish, of which 8 were broodstock steelhead, qualifying for retention. The Wilson remained high at mid-week (Wednesday) but there were still some fish taken in the Mills Bridge to Sollie Smith stretch and even below that. **Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** went 2 for 4 on that stretch, side-drifting rags and easy eggs, taking 2 nice broodstock fish. Other action was reported by drifters working the water just above the Shilo on the lower Wilson.

The upper Trask looked very fishable at mid-week but anglers reported less than anticipated catches. It's primarily a wild fish fishery here; they didn't seem to respond well at mid-week but it is early on this system as it produces best in March and April.

Smaller streams put out good numbers of fish last weekend before blowing back up again on Sunday. To my surprise, there were fair numbers of fresh fish taken but spent ones were in the mix as well. North Fork Nehalem anglers are fishing over recycled fish and so are Lake Lytle anglers. A bunch of spawned out steelhead were placed in that lake recently. Workers at the hatchery have handled over 1,000 fish so far and state there are plenty of fish left in the system but did admit a slight slowing in action by Wednesday.

The Necanicum remains another strong option with bank anglers taking fair numbers of fish after the most recent rain freshet. One boat reported fishing it on Tuesday, hooking 17 fish, landing 8, with 5 fresh fish of which 2 were hatchery. As predicted, a lot of fish are in the downstream running mode, making poor table fare.

The upper Nestucca surely has fair numbers of fish with a lot of natives reported recently. Anglers had good access to 6th Bridge and downstream, with some broodstock fish reported in the catch. The lower reaches should fish better as flows drop. That would be by the weekend.

The mainstem Nehalem should soon be an option but remains turbid as it extends over 100 miles inland with scores of tributaries contributing flow.

Sturgeon effort is climbing again but far from busy on Tillamook Bay. Effort hasn't been significant to get an accurate report but action should be fair to good on the estuary. The ocean along with bay crabbing is a worthless effort.

The Guide's Forecast – Steelhead will remain a predictable target for anglers working north coast rivers this weekend. With near perfect conditions to work with, here's our river-by-river breakdown as to what to look for from this productive corner of Oregon:

Highway 30 streams (Klaskanine, Big Creek, Gnat Creek)- The run is largely over on these systems. Unfortunately, these early run hatchery fish bite better after they've spawned. For this reason, any fish remaining in the river should bite pretty well and lower flows should make them a fairly easy target.

Necanicum River- Like clockwork, this system is booting out the boots. Unlike other hatchery systems, there is no facility for these fish to return to and therefore, they remain in the river, trying to make it back downstream for another run in the future. This makes for great "boot" fishing as these fish are aggressive and you can choose what to do with them. Although these fish are meant for a put and take fishery, I typically release these fish for another chance (albeit low) in future years. I've made my fair share of mistakes and tried to smoke a dark one, only to come out disappointed. There is one bad spot for boaters below Klootchie Creek so drifters need to be prepared to drag their boat around a navigational hazard. All techniques should produce results this weekend but the river will be pretty low to expect a drag-free float. You may not have that much fun if you drag your boat more than you drift. This is a great system for bank anglers however with ample access along Highway 26 but you still have to be very mindful of private property.

North Fork Nehalem – Not as great as the Necanicum for bank access until you get close to the hatchery. Like the Necanicum, there will be a lot of spent fish here but keep in mind that numerous fish have been taken out of the system and restocked in area lakes like Vernonia Pond

and Lake Lytle in Rockaway. Workers are still recycling fish back downriver to Aldervale however so more semi-fresh fish will remain in the system. Those that keep track are saying it's clearly one of the best returns in recent history.

Mainstem Nehalem – Still too big and dark for productive fishing. If the weather remains intact, it may fish by the middle of next week.

Kilchis River- The river has fished fair in recent days with the bulk of the fish caught from wild genes. It gets a meager hatchery planting these days but remains primarily a wild fish river. Flows will continue to drop and clear, which will make the lower reaches the better option in the coming weekend. Don't plan on catching a quality keeper here but the wild run should start gaining momentum in the coming weeks.

Wilson River - You and hundreds of other anglers will be on this system over the weekend and it will put out fair numbers of fish. This time I mean it, action will only be fair as pressure and a dropping and clearing river will not produce gangbuster results. All reaches should fish by the weekend and anglers may even find that the rock garden about 1.5 miles above Mills Bridge may be tricky to navigate by Saturday or Sunday. By then, action may be best downstream for boaters anyway. You'll find a mix of early run (spent) fish, wild and broodstock fish. It's already clear that there is a good return of broodstock fish destined for this system.

Bank anglers should find favorable results in the upper reaches of the Wilson River. There is excellent bank access for folks and there should be a good number of quality and some spent fish distributed into the upper reaches. Bait will produce best but don't overlook artificials such as pink worms, spinners or spoons for the more aggressive wild and broodstock fish now entering the system.

Trask River – A bit of a disappointment this round, this system should gain momentum in the coming weeks. The upper reaches will be best pursued by bank anglers while boaters should concentrate on the Cedar Creek to Highway 101 reach. There may be a stray broodstock fish here but plan on intercepting mostly wild fish.

Three Rivers/Nestucca system - Three Rivers, like other early season systems, is about spent. Many of the fish have spawned or are near spawning and are in poor condition. There is still a rare fresh fish being taken at the deadline but it will offer few quality opportunities in the coming months.

The Nestucca should continue to perform well with fish from 5½ Bridge downstream. All reaches should perform well over the weekend with bait producing best in the higher flows and plugs taking on some of the action as flows drop. By the weekend however, traffic will be high and water well picked over. You will have to get creative to throw something at them that they haven't seen before. Quality broodstock fish should be available but likely not in the numbers that we'll see on the Wilson.

And what are your other options this weekend? Sturgeon of course. Good tides will grace Tillamook Bay over the weekend and you don't have to get up early to hit it. The first minus will happen on Sunday but you don't need an extreme low to expect fair results. The South (West) channel should produce fair results but some anglers have been fishing at Bay City too. The middle channel should be a candidate as well but leave the crab gear at home. Too much fresh water and high seas make it a poor choice.

Don't even think about going offshore this weekend. Who do you have for Superbowl?

Central & South Coast Reports – Offshore conditions have been too rough for bottom fishing with even charter boats staying tied to the docks. Ocean crabbing remains open but there has been no effort due to high winds and waves.

The Pacific Halibut Commission set the quotas for 2012. For area 2A (Oregon) the TAC (Total Allowable Catch) has been increased by 8.7%, this is the highest TAC since 2008.

For the Central Oregon (from Cape Falcon to Humbug Mt.):

Nearshore _____ 23,014 lbs.

Spring all depth _____ 120,821 lbs.

Summer all depth _____ 47,945 lbs.

Winchester Bay will remain slow for crabbing until the salinity levels rise. South jetty anglers are catching rockfish, particularly those seeking clearer water as some remains muddy. Some tickets were issued recently to those retaining cabezon which are off limits until the 1st of April, even to those casting from shore. Sturgeon fishers are hooking up above Reedsport although the majority of fish hooked are larger than legal to keep. Steelheading is picking up for side-drifters and plug-pullers on the mainstem Umpqua but most of the fish hooked here are unclipped and must be released. No retention of wild fish is allowed on the Umpqua system. Some anglers have had success on the North Umpqua this week and results will improve through the month but this is by-and-large a catch-and-release fishery with 95% of the winter steelhead wild. The South Umpqua will produce mostly hatchery fish as the season gets rolling. Catches will continue to improve as the peak of the season is a few weeks away but results will remain good through March.

Crabbing has been slow in Coos Bay with salinity levels just starting to recover from last week's storm. A few Dungeness have been taken near the jetties. Surf perch are being taken near the bay entrance whenever swells have moderated.

While the Coquille River was hit hard by storms, the level has dropped and water visibility is improving. The South Fork Coquille was subject to heavy boat traffic over the past weekend but produced steady catches of fresh winter steelhead and will continue to produce through the coming weekend.

Steelheading is good on the lower Rogue and catches are expected to remain good through the coming week as the water level is forecast to be on a steady decline. Both bank and boat fishers are doing well with good numbers of winter steelhead available. The middle Rogue started to produce fish over the past weekend as waters dropped and cleared with catches of winters holding up well this week. One wild steelhead per day up to five per year can be kept above the Hog Creek Boat ramp. winters are entering the Cole Rivers Hatchery and anglers have been catching fair numbers this week. Steelheading on the upper river will only improve as the season progresses.

Chetco plunkers owned the river last week but now odds fall to drift and side fishers. Winter steelhead are scattered in the river and catches has been good for the most part. According to forecasts, The Chetco is said to fish best at flows between 2,000 and 4,000 cfs (although these numbers vary depending on the source, those are decent reference figures) although plunkers do well between 4,000 and 5,500 cfs as long as there's minimal visibility. The flow at this writing mid-day on Thursday, February 2nd is 2,200 cfs with forecasts for the coming weekend indicating

level and flow at the lowest end of the scale. Steelheading will be OK if a little challenging although side-drifting is unlikely to happen at 2,000 cfs. Small baits and lures will be most effective in the coming week as we get a respite from storms. There are lots of steelhead in the system now and they're taking baits of cured roe.

Traffic on the Elk River was increasing on Wednesday this week as the water level dropped with the color turning steelhead green from mossy brown. Fishing was fair to good mid-week and will remain productive until water levels become too low to fish well.

Cooper Creek Reservoir is scheduled for trout stocking.

Central and Eastern Oregon – With steelhead off the angling activity list as these summers are tending to their seasonal biological imperative and winters are yet to arrive, the Deschutes is a trout fishery now, though as such, is less than stellar. The water is swift and cold and action is slow. Nymphs are the best bet now.

Fly anglers are finding cooperative fish and even a few risers in the afternoon. Catches this week have been a mix of whitefish and trout.

While a flow of just over 70 cfs might seem too low for productive fishing, anglers on the Crooked River do well. With midges and Blue-Winged-Olives hatching early in the afternoon on days when the weather is decent, fly fishers are having a good time here.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report for February 2012

North Puget Sound

With fishing for steelhead and other game fish scheduled to close early on several rivers in the region, anglers are shifting their attention to the marine areas where blackmouth salmon fisheries are under way.

"Over the last couple of years, the San Juan Islands have been the most productive for anglers fishing for blackmouth salmon in February," said Steve Thiesfeld, a fish biologist with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "Fishing isn't red hot in the early part of the month, but there have been reports that indicate anglers have had some pretty good days."

Anglers fishing Marine Area 7 (San Juan Islands) – as well as marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) and 9 (Admiralty Inlet) – have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook salmon.

Thiesfeld reminds anglers that Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) is closed to salmon fishing.

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.

Winter is prime time to jig for **squid** in Puget Sound. Good spots include the Des Moines Pier, Redondo Pier, 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](#).

Meanwhile, fishing for **steelhead and other game fish** is closing early in several river systems in Puget Sound and along the Strait of Juan de Fuca to protect wild steelhead. The early closures

affect the Nooksack, Skagit, Stillaguamish, Snohomish and Puyallup river systems, along with several streams along the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Most river systems close Feb. 1. However, the Puyallup River system closed Jan. 16, and some waters near WDFW fish hatcheries are scheduled to close Feb. 16.

Pre-season estimates developed by WDFW last fall indicate that wild steelhead will return to those watersheds in numbers far short of target levels, said Bob Leland, WDFW's steelhead program manager. "By taking this action, we can protect wild steelhead that do make it back to these river systems," he said.

Leland reminds anglers that the Samish River, from the I-5 Bridge to the Hickson Bridge, closed to fishing Dec. 1. The stretch of the Samish River from the mouth to the I-5 Bridge closed Jan. 1. For more information on all the closures, check the emergency rule changes on WDFW's website at <http://1.usa.gov/hfDjYl>.

With several of the region's rivers closing early, freshwater anglers might turn their attention to local lakes. Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish are good spots to fish for **perch, cutthroat** and **smallmouth bass**, said WDFW fisheries biologist Danny Garrett. "Anglers have had success catching trout at both lakes recently, and bass and perch have been caught as well," he said.

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

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

Several areas of Puget Sound open to blackmouth salmon fishing in February, as wild steelhead continue to move into coastal rivers. A razor clam dig also is tentatively scheduled later in the month.

If tests are favorable, WDFW will proceed with an evening **razor clam** dig at Long Beach, Twin Harbors and Mocrocks. Tentative opening dates and evening low tides are:

- Feb. 18, Saturday, 4:13 p.m. (0.0 feet) Long Beach, Twin Harbors and Mocrocks
- Feb. 19, Sunday, 5 p.m. (-0.2 feet) Long Beach, Twin Harbors and Mocrocks

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

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

Meanwhile, the hatchery **steelhead** run is winding down, but more wild steelhead are arriving to the northern rivers each week, said Kirt Hughes, regional fishery manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

Beginning Feb. 16, anglers can retain one wild steelhead per license year 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.

"The abundant wild steelhead populations returning to those rivers also provide great catch-and-release fishing opportunities," Hughes said. Information on weekly steelhead catches in the Quillayute River system and the Hoh River are available on [WDFW's website](#). Elsewhere, fishing for steelhead and other game fish closed early in several rivers along the Strait of Juan de Fuca, where wild steelhead are expected to return in numbers far short of target levels.

The early closures, which take effect Feb. 1, affect the Dungeness, Pysht, Clallam and Seiku rivers, as well as Morse, Salt and Deep creeks. For more information on all the closures, check the emergency rule changes on WDFW's website at <http://1.usa.gov/hfDjYl>.

On the other hand, saltwater **salmon** fishing opportunities will expand Feb. 1, with the opening of marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon) and 12 (Hood Canal). In addition, salmon fisheries also get under way in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, where marine areas 5 (Sekiu) and 6 (eastern Strait) open Feb. 16.

Once the Strait opens, anglers might want to try trolling Coyote Bank, which is located about 13 miles north of the Washington shore between Port Angeles and Dungeness Spit, said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "This time of year, Coyote is a good bet for salmon anglers out in the Strait," he said. "Weather can be issue, however, so make sure you check the forecast if you're heading out that way."

In South Puget Sound, anglers are hooking resident **coho salmon**, especially in the Tacoma Narrows area of Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound), said Larry Phillips, regional fish biologist for WDFW. Other areas anglers might want to try fishing for resident coho include the Squaxin Island area and in Eld Inlet off Evergreen Beach.

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.

Winter is prime time to jig for **squid** in Puget Sound. Good spots include the Point Defiance Park and Les Davis piers in Tacoma, and the Illahee State Park, Waterman and Indianola piers in Kitsap County. More information is available on the department's [squid fishing webpage](#). Information on fishing piers is available [here](#).

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

Looking for some competition? Anglers can take part in the **Olympic Peninsula Salmon Derby** over Presidents' Day Weekend near Sequim. Prizes include \$10,000 for the largest fish, \$5,000 for second place and \$1,500 for third place. Details are available at the [derby's website](#).

Southwest Washington

Ocean bright **spring chinook salmon** are beginning to move into the Columbia River, setting the stage for one of the state's most popular fisheries. Anglers typically start landing early-returning "springers" in early February, but the fishery usually doesn't catch fire until March.

"This is a good time to dust off your gear, order your bait, prepare your boat, and maybe do a little prospecting," said Joe Hymer, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "You want to be ready to go when the bulk of the run arrives." According to the pre-season forecast, a total of 314,200 upriver spring chinook will return to the Columbia River Basin this year, which would be the fourth-largest run on record. Another

109,000 spring chinook are expected to head for tributaries to the lower Columbia such as the Cowlitz, Lewis and Willamette rivers.

Cindy LeFleur, Columbia River policy manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), said this year's spring chinook fishery looks promising, especially compared to last season.

"Not only is the run forecast well above average, but fishing conditions should be a lot better than last year when anglers had to contend with weeks of high, turbid water," LeFleur said.

As in previous years, only hatchery-reared fish marked with a clipped adipose fin and a healed scar may be retained. All wild spring chinook, identifiable by an intact adipose fin, must be released unharmed.

Fishery managers from Washington and Oregon have adopted new fishing seasons for spring chinook that run from March 1 through April 6 below Bonneville Dam. (See the WDFW [news release](#) and [rule changes](#) for details.) Until then, seasons and regulations listed in the 2011-12 [Fishing in Washington pamphlet](#) remain in effect.

Fishing for spring chinook is currently open on the Columbia River below the Interstate 5 Bridge, where the limit is two adult hatchery fish per day. Anglers may also retain two adult hatchery spring chinook per day on the Cowlitz and Deep rivers, but are limited to one adult hatchery chinook a day on the Lewis and Kalama rivers.

"The Cowlitz River and waters near the Willamette River are probably the best bets early in the season, because spring chinook usually start showing up there first," Hymer said.

Meanwhile, anglers continue to reel in **hatchery steelhead** from waters ranging from the Cowlitz River to the John Day Pool and beyond. In general, the steelhead in the lower tributaries are winter-run fish, while those above Bonneville Dam are left over from last year's summer run, Hymer said.

"Hatchery-reared late-run winter steelhead are still moving up the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers and should be available to anglers for weeks to come," he said.

Anglers fishing the Columbia River can also catch and keep legal-size **white sturgeon** in areas both below and above Bonneville Dam. Anglers can keep one fish measuring 38-54 inches (fork length) per day from The Dalles Dam downstream. The minimum size is 43-54 inches (fork length) upstream from The Dalles Dam.

Below Bonneville Dam, the retention fishery downstream from the Wauna powerlines is open on a daily basis. Waters above the powerlines to the dam are open for sturgeon retention Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays only.

Sturgeon retention is also open in all three pools – Bonneville, The Dalles and John Day – on a daily basis. However, anglers should be aware that the catch in the Bonneville Pool is approaching the 2,000-fish quota established last year and that fishery managers from Washington and Oregon are scheduled to assess sturgeon seasons in all three pools Feb. 7. Any updates will be posted here and on WDFW's [Fishing Rule Website](#).

At a public meeting late last month, the two states set joint sturgeon-fishing seasons below Bonneville Dam that are designed to reduce the harvest for the third straight year. Concerned by the continued decline of sturgeon below the dam, fishing seasons were tightened to reduce this

year's catch by 38 percent. For more information about summer and fall sturgeon seasons, see WDFW's [news release](#) outlining the results of the Jan. 26 meeting of the Columbia River Compact.

Fishing for **Columbia River smelt** will remain closed in both fresh and saltwater statewide. In 2010, the federal government declared eulachon a "threatened" species under the Endangered Species Act.

Rainbow trout, on the other hand, are readily available in lakes throughout southwest Washington. WDFW stocked tens of thousands of them in 15 area lakes last month, and is following up with several thousand more in February. In Clark County, Battle Ground Lake and Klineline Pond are each scheduled to receive 2,000 more rainbows this month, and Horseshoe Lake in Cowlitz County will receive 500 half-pound rainbow broodstock to augment fishing there.

"Most of the fish we've planted so far this year should be available to anglers through February," said John Weinheimer, a WDFW fish biologist. Weinheimer said he's also getting reports of **kokanee** being caught at Merwin Reservoir, adding that the action should pick up throughout the month.

Eastern Washington

Recent snow is keeping winter fishing wintery, at least in some parts of the region, and that can make access difficult. But fish are available for hardy anglers at several year-round and winter-only waters.

Anglers are reminded to be especially careful on iced-over lakes or around icy shorelines. Repeated thawing and re-freezing can make ice unsafe. Tips to help keep an outing safe include:

- Don't fish alone. Let others know exactly where you and your fishing partners are going and when you plan to return.
- Keep fishing holes small and few. When drilling fishing holes with an ice auger, keep the diameter under eight inches. Bigger holes are not necessary to land fish and can create a safety hazard for others.
- Watch your step. Avoid ice fishing near feeder streams or known springs; brush, logs, plants or docks; multiple ice cracks or ice that is popping or otherwise audible; and dark-colored ice that may be weak.
- Spread out. Too many people congregated in one area may be more than the ice can safely support. Disperse weight and fishing holes.
- Be prepared with appropriate clothing and equipment for weather conditions and emergencies.

Stevens County's two winter-only lakes – Hatch and Williams – are still providing some catches through the ice, according to Bill Baker, WDFW northeast district fish biologist. Hatch Lake, about five miles southeast of Colville, was producing some carry-over rainbow trout up to 15 inches and others around 11 inches that were stocked last year as fry. Williams Lake, 14 miles north of Colville, hasn't been checked recently, but usually provides 14-inch-plus rainbows through the season.

Year-round-open Lake Roosevelt, the Columbia River reservoir off Grand Coulee Dam, has net-pen-reared **rainbow trout** that run 15 to 22 inches. But Baker reports that Roosevelt fishing was slow at the end of January. Anglers fishing the reservoir's deeper water near river mouths, like the Colville River, Hawk Creek, or near the Spokane arm, are catching **burbot**.

This is the last month to fish Waitts Lake, west of Valley along Hwy. 395 in southern Stevens

County. This 455-acre lake is stocked with rainbow trout catchables, **brown trout** fingerlings, net-pen-reared trout of both species, and even some brood stock – all with good winter carry-over. Waitts closes Feb. 28.

In Spokane County, year-round Eloika Lake, north of Chattaroy, was recently producing some **yellow perch** catches. WDFW Police Sgt. Dan Rahn reported checking anglers on the ice at Eloika and said catch rates were fairly slow. With more rain than snow in the forecast, Rahn noted Eloika's ice could become marginal and anglers should be cautious about venturing out on it.

Rahn also recently checked about 23 anglers at Hog Canyon Lake northeast of Sprague in southwest Spokane County and tallied an average of only about one **rainbow trout** per angler. Catch rates had been better earlier in the season, which opened Dec. 1 and runs through March. But Rahn also noted all the fish checked were over 14 inches. Anglers have a daily five-trout catch limit at Hog Canyon but only two fish over 14 inches can be retained.

Fourth of July Lake, on the Lincoln-Adams county line south of Sprague, is on the same winter-only fishing season with the same rules. Anglers there are averaging a couple of trout each, all over 14 inches.

WDFW Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area Manager Juli Anderson reports potential remains for winter trout fishing at the Lincoln County area's Z Lake. An aerated opening about half way up the lake keeps this an open-water opportunity, she said, but anglers need to walk in about a mile from the county road to get there.

Year-round Rock Lake in Whitman County has been consistent through the winter for **brown** and **rainbow trout** catches. But be prepared for wind if you go there.

WDFW Blue Mountains Wildlife Area Complex Manager Bob Dice reminds **steelhead** fishers of the recent addition of 2,200 acres in the Mountain View area in Asotin County, along two miles of the Grand Ronde River and north along Cougar Creek, open now for outdoor recreation. The acquisition is phase one of a multi-year project to put nearly 12,000 acres of the 4-O Ranch in public ownership for recreation and fish and wildlife habitat management as part of the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area. Dice says many of the new property lines have been identified with "Wildlife Area" signs, but a map is available on [WDFW's website](#).

Northcentral Washington

WDFW Chelan District Fish Biologist Travis Maitland of Wenatchee reports fishing at year-round-open Fish and Roses lakes has been "relatively good." Mostly **rainbow trout** and **yellow perch**, with the occasional **brown trout**, are being caught through the ice at both lakes. Roses Lake, about a mile north of Manson, is also producing an occasional **largemouth bass**. (Fish Lake is about 16 miles north of Leavenworth.)

Maitland reminds anglers to be aware of changing conditions at this time of year, because repeated thawing and re-freezing can make ice unsafe.

Tips to help keep an outing safe include:

- Don't fish alone. Let others know exactly where you and your fishing partners are going and when you plan to return.
- Keep fishing holes small and few. When drilling fishing holes with an ice auger, keep the diameter under eight inches. Bigger holes are not necessary to land fish and can create a safety hazard for others.
- Watch your step. Avoid ice fishing near feeder streams or known springs; brush, logs, plants or docks; multiple ice cracks or ice that is popping or otherwise audible; and dark-colored ice that may be weak.

- Spread out. Too many people congregated in one area may be more than the ice can safely support. Disperse weight and fishing holes.
- Be prepared with appropriate clothing and equipment for weather conditions and emergencies.

In Okanogan County, several winter-only ice fishing opportunities continue this month, but anglers there are also advised to watch for changing conditions.

Patterson Lake near Winthrop was recently checked by WDFW police officers who reported several ice fishers catching lots of **yellow perch** in the seven to eight-inch range. Anglers are encouraged to retain as many perch as possible out of Patterson Lake.

Davis Lake, also in the Winthrop area, Rat Lake near Brewster, and Big and Little Green lakes west of Omak have also been providing good catches of **rainbow trout** through the ice.

WDFW police checks of the Okanogan and Similkameen rivers at the end of January found both waterways almost completely iced over and therefore without **steelhead** anglers. But conditions can change quickly at this time of year. Steelheaders planning to try fishing in the coming weeks these two rivers, which remain open until further notice, should keep the following rules in mind:

- Mandatory retention of hatchery (adipose fin clipped) steelhead, daily limit two hatchery steelhead, 20-inch minimum size
- Wild (adipose fin present) steelhead must be released unharmed and cannot be removed from the water prior to release.
- Night closure and selective gear rules remain in effect.

Whitefish anglers must follow selective gear rules – including no bait allowed – in these areas open to steelhead fishing.

Southcentral Washington

While winter has put a chill on many area fisheries, the action should pick up for several species in the weeks ahead. Steelhead fishing usually starts to come alive in late February or early March and walleye fishing should improve as water temperatures rise.

But for **whitefish**, prime time is here now. Relatively hard to find during most months of the year, whitefish appear during the winter months and tend to go on the bite after the snow starts to fly. Hardy anglers are now catching whitefish on the Naches and Tieton rivers, and on the Yakima River upstream from Union Gap.

“February is a perfect time to catch whitefish,” said John Easterbrooks, southcentral regional fish manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). “Now is when they start to congregate and the catch levels rise.”

Anglers can catch and keep 15 whitefish per day, but fishing gear is restricted to one size 14 single-point hook. The standard bait is a whitefish fly and a maggot. While bony, whitefish – often served smoked -- have a dedicated following.

Easterbrooks reminds anglers that all fishing is closed on the Yakima River between the Highway 223 Bridge in Granger to the Interstate 82 Bridge in Union Gap. WDFW and the Yakama Nation closed that stretch of the river to protect steelhead listed under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Sturgeon fishing is another option, especially since the McNary Pool (also known as Lake Wallula) opened Feb. 1 for retention of legal-size fish. Drawing anglers from throughout the

region, the fishery extends from McNary Dam upstream to Priest Rapids Dam on the Columbia River and upstream to Ice Harbor Dam in the Snake River.

Paul Hoffarth, a WDFW district fish biologist located in Pasco, said the opening at Lake Wallula should take some pressure off the fishery under way at Lake Umatilla (John Day Pool), where anglers have been chiseling away at the annual quota. "That quota has been reached very early in recent years, so anglers should go soon – and keep an eye out for updates," he said.

In both areas, only sturgeon measuring 43-54 inches from their snout to the fork in their tail may be retained. "That's also the measurement anglers should note on their catch record card," Hoffarth said.

Meanwhile, anglers continue to catch some **hatchery steelhead** at Ringold, both from the bank and by boat. Although fishing has been spotty this winter, catch rates should pick up in late February or early March, Hoffarth said. 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 and barbless hooks are required.

Walleye fishing can also slow down 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. The Oregon record, just shy of 20 pounds, was taken on Lake Umatilla during the winter of 1990.

Rather catch some **trout**. Dalton Pond, east of the Tri-Cities and about five miles northeast of Ice Harbor Dam on the north side of the Snake River, is scheduled to be planted with rainbow trout from WDFW's Lyons Ferry Hatchery by the end of February if the weather stays below freezing. Quarry Pond, located in Walla Walla County near the Tri-cities, should also be stocked by the end of February.

For additional information, see the [Fishing in Washington](#) pamphlet, available online.

TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com

Michael Teague: Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com

Random Links

Eugene Boat & Sportsmen's Show, February 3-5, 2012

<http://www.exposureshows.com/eugene.html>

Pacific Northwest Sportsman Show, Feb. 8-12 Portland Expo Center:

<http://www.thesportshows.com/pnwss/>

Douglas County Sportsmen's Show, February 17 – 19

<http://www.exposureshows.com/roseburg.html>

GOOD LUCK!