

The Guide's Forecast - volume 14 issue number 11

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **March 9th – March 15th, 2012**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Spring salmon anglers on the mainstem Columbia are witnessing better results for their efforts this week. Although far from peak season success, catches should begin to ramp up in the coming two weeks depending on water conditions. Anglers are laying blame on cold water, not likely to improve much in the coming week.

Similar to a few years ago, it appears a good population of sturgeon are plying the shallow waters in the gorge. Anglers are theorizing they are avoiding sea lion predation around Bonneville, still happening at an alarming rate. Enforcement will be monitoring the area for poaching.

As of March 5th, the Willamette River flow was moderating with the temperature in mid-40s and rising. Spring chinook fishing will improve when the water temp tops 50 degrees. Recent turbidity has stalled the bite at Sellwood but it could pick back up again by the weekend. Summer and winter steelhead are crossing the falls daily but only one springer has made the trip upstream so far this season.

Level and flow at the McKenzie spiked on Monday this week but has been moderating since. It has been muddy.

A few fresh steelhead have been landed on the South Santiam this week.

Steelhead are scattered but some are being caught on the Clackamas. Sidedrifters working downstream and upstream of Barton Park are starting to see some broodstock fish enter, with a nice grade of fish being reported. Bait will continue to produce the best results until flows drop; that's when plugs become a viable option. Eagle Creek has been virtually devoid of fish recently.

Fishing has been fair on the sandy but it's the best bet in the valley to land a steelhead. Sidedrifting here has also produced the best results. Wild and some hatchery fish should be well distributed to the Marmot area, especially with the recent rise in river levels.

Northwest – Steelheaders are greeting another high water event on the north coast. Numbers continue to impress anglers and biologists but the rivers are definitely fishing better under high water conditions. The current high water event should provide the best opportunity prior to the weekend. The Wilson and Nestucca are seeing fantastic returns of hatchery steelhead right now but anglers should focus efforts in the lowest reaches, including downstream of Sollie Smith Bridge on the Wilson for the best chance at producing.

The Trask is beginning to receive a good influx of wild fish with the upper reaches producing best in higher water conditions. Drifted bait attracts the aggressive native fish but plugs will become more effective as flows drop.

Savvy steelheaders are taking advantage of low water conditions on smaller streams such as the Kilchis River. These wild steelhead rivers don't draw the attention that the hatchery options do but anglers can find productive results in solitude if they approach their quarry in a stealthy manner.

Crabbing has slowed in Tillamook Bay but Netarts remains a fair option. A few rockfish are being

taken off the jetty. The offshore forecast for tomorrow looks favorable for bottomfishers and ocean crabbers. Weather is subject to change at a moment's notice however so proceed with extreme caution.

Southwest – Charters did well for lingcod over the past weekend with most anglers taking two-fish limits. Catches of rockfish have been slow, however.

Sturgeon fishing is slow at Winchester Bay but crabbing has been fair to good. Steelheading has been fair to good on the North Umpqua and reliably productive on the South Umpqua.

Crabbing has been good from boats in Coos Bay and from Charleston docks with Dungeness in excellent condition.

A few spring chinook are being caught by anglers anchored on the lower Rogue but it's slow this early in the run. On most years, the first springer isn't caught until mid-March. Water is forecast to be dropping over the coming weekend. Low water has resulted in slow fishing on the middle Rogue for a mix of spawned-out summers and fresh winters. The upper Rogue has been spotty at best.

Winter steelheading has been very good on the Chetco and at the rate fresh fish are entering the system the run has yet to show sign of waning. The water level will be dropping this week but is forecast to start rising with precipitation over the weekend to come.

Dry weather this week will result in the Elk and Sixes Rivers being too low to fish well.

Eastern – Trout fishing is fair to good on the lower Deschutes with Caddis, BWOs and midges hatching mid-day. Summer steelhead are on the spawning beds and shouldn't be targeted.

Despite low, clear water conditions, fly fishing remains excellent on the Crooked River. It's best when the weather is warm.

The challenging Metolius is giving up a few bull trout to fly anglers throwing nymphs and streamers.

Soapbox Update: Are you interested in learning the upper reaches of Tillamook Bay when targeting fall chinook this year? Are you also an advocate for a good forest management plan on the Tillamook State Forest to grow more wild fish for you to catch? **Pro guide Bob Rees** is offering a **FREE** 3 to 4 hour on-the-water seminar in early September for the first 6 to 12 anglers that sign up to testify in support of sound forest policy for a July 26th Board of Forestry meeting in Tillamook this summer. Just email Bob at brees@pacifier.com or call (503) 812-9036 to sign up today. You can learn more about the work we're doing on behalf of the Association of NW Steelheaders and the Wild Salmon Center here: <http://www.thetillamook.net/>. You'll learn the guide secrets of the upper bay while advocating for good forest management that will grow more fish for all of us. Sign up NOW!

SW Washington – Serious anglers are beginning to focus their efforts on mainstem spring chinook but steelhead remain a good option on the Kalama, Cowlitz and Lewis Rivers. Some quality sized wild fish begin to show on the Lewis this time of year.

This will be the last full open week for some steelhead streams in the district. Check local listing for closures that start on March 15th.

Sturgeon anglers working the mainstem Columbia near Bonneville have been producing an occasional spring chinook.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Anglers are beginning to see the benefits of putting in some time in pursuit of spring chinook. Catch rates are on the increase from Kalama to Portland. Cold water temperatures still have a grip on the mainstem Columbia which will dictate angler success in the sportfishing fleet. Catch rates stats are as follows:

Troutdale Boats:

Weekend checking showed one adipose fin-clipped spring chinook kept for 11 boats (22 anglers).

Portland to Longview Bank:

Weekend checking showed two adipose fin-clipped spring chinook and one adipose fin-clipped steelhead kept, plus one unclipped steelhead released for 231 bank anglers.

Portland to Longview boats:

Weekend checking showed 10 adipose fin-clipped spring chinook kept, plus four unclipped spring Chinook released for 144 boats (334 anglers).

Estuary Bank (Clatsop Spit to Wauna Powerlines):

Weekend checking showed two adipose fin-clipped steelhead kept for three bank anglers.

Estuary Boats (Tongue Point to Wauna Powerlines):

Weekend checking showed no catch for 12 boats (27 anglers).

Although this is significantly better than the previous week, no one expected it to bust wide open despite a large return forecasted this spring. As temperatures increase, so will effort and catch but timing will play the biggest role in angler success. It's particularly interesting that we're starting to see a larger portion of "black-faces"; fish that are clearly destined for the upper Columbia reaches versus the Willamette River which we term as "snow-bellies". Given the bulk of the run is supposed to be these black-faced salmon, it's important to begin to sample a larger portion of this stock to verify that this run will actually come in as predicted this year.

Recent reports indicate sporadic catches from Davis and Frenchman's Bar to Caterpillar Island. One thing that is pretty consistent, almost all catches are coming off of herring with many riggings including flashers to draw extra attention in the off-colored water in the blue and green variety. Those that are fishing are also talking about marking numerous fish on their fish finders, just not a lot of biters. Most anglers are fishing in 16 to 24 feet of water, trolling downstream with the flow.

Anglers are starting to target salmon a bit more in the lower reaches of the Columbia with Clifton Channel and Altoona beginning to ramp up effort. These folks down here spend more time employing plugs such as Kwikfish and Flatfish but with the water as cold as it is, anglers may want to seriously consider targeting these ocean fresh fish using herring, whether trolling OR anchored. More than one springer has been taken on a plunked herring.

Salmon anglers, particularly bank anglers, are intercepting steelhead, which are most likely to travel the beaches than even salmon are. Anglers may want to consider using smaller spin-n-glos to target salmon as they have almost as good of a chance of catching steelhead. Flame colors work well for steelhead while spin-n-glos in the green shades often work best for salmon. I've had luck on purple spin-n-glos as well.

Sturgeon anglers are still predictably struggling for keepers on the mainstem Columbia but some keepers are starting to show in the sport catch at Bonneville Dam. There's a discussion currently going on, on the www.ifish.net site that talks about snagging and hopefully legal catching, going on in the gorge on the Washington side. It can be viewed here: <http://www.ifish.net/board/showthread.php?p=4035557#post4035557>.

In other areas of the river, two keepers were reported for 10 boats in the Portland to Longview stretch. A handful of shakers were reported in the catch as well. It's clear, the bulk of the population remain in the mainstem Willamette where effort is quickly shifting over to spring chinook.

No recent reports of bottomfish out of the Columbia, mostly because it's been a deadly sea out there. Hopefully, that will change in the near future but the timing is right for good action out there when ocean conditions allow.

The Guide's Forecast – Salmon fishing is only going to get better in the coming weeks. Run timing alone will allow for improved catches but the cold weather forecast for the week ahead won't do a lot to improve water temperatures. None-the-less, it's time to more seriously consider putting in some effort for the region's most revered species.

The Portland area will continue to be one of the more targeted areas for salmon hopefuls with Davis Bar and Frenchman's Bar along with Caterpillar Island a prime location. Trolled herring behind flashers will remain the prime bait of choice for most anglers but sometimes, herring alone will produce the best catches. Most anglers are using green label herring as smaller is typically better when fishing for these smaller mainstem salmon. Some anglers fish red label herring with a high degree of confidence.

Whatever your offering, keep it near the bottom and pay attention to what depth other anglers are catching their fish at. These fish clearly travel at different depths as they migrate upstream and it can make the difference between a good boating day on the water and a good catching day on the water. With water conditions more normal so far, 16 to 24 feet of water should be your likely target range for traveling chinook. Don't be afraid to drag those baits on the bottom. As a fish-checker a long time ago, I vividly remember one of the most productive anglers came in with a cannon ball lead that had been dragged on the bottom so often, that is more closely resembled a pyramid lead than a cannon ball one.

If you're feeling adventuresome and just want to see a different piece of water, maybe Tenasillahe Island/Clifton Channel near Westport Oregon is the place for you. It's an easy place to troll and a beautiful place to look at. Westport, for those that don't know, is located between Clatskanie and Wauna near the paper mill on Highway 30. The boat ramp is down a road opposite of the convenience store right in Westport. Trolled herring in Clifton Channel is common place on incoming tide although I've had good luck on outgoing tide as well. Oftentimes, boats anchor at the top end of Tenasillahe Island working plugs off of the back of their boats on the outgoing tide, a relaxing way to fish.

If sturgeon remains your focus, there aren't a lot of options for consumptive users. The gorge however is putting out some keepers but you have to know where to look to find them. I can't say I know exactly myself but shallow water fishing on the Washington side is rumored to be good. Shrimp or smelt should be equally effective if they're still biting in that area. Anglers that know the Portland to Longview stretch may also get lucky and find a keeper.

The offshore forecast just isn't matching up for a bottom fishing excursion. Combined seas will be big through the weekend so don't even think about it.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Cold water at Willamette Falls has contributed to lower steelhead counts and high water periods stalled crossing completely. Over the past week or so, water temps have increased from the high 30s but only up to the low 40s. Of the roughly 4,100 steelhead which have crossed at the Falls, just over 100 are of the summer variety. One springer crossed on February 21st while a second was counted on March 7th. As water temperature increases, so will counts at the Falls and spring Chinook results in the lower Willamette.

Level and flow at the McKenzie River have recovered completely from the last round of rain storms, putting the river in good condition for the coming weekend.

North Santiam levels will be dropping through the coming weekend while the South Santiam will start to rise. The entire system

The Northwest Fly Tying & Fly Fishing Expo will be held March 9th & 10th at the Linn County Expo Center in Albany. See **Random Links**, below, for details. Admission is just five bucks.

Alton Baker Canal is scheduled to be stocked with trout this week.

The Guide's Forecast – Results for boat trolling herring for spring Chinook have been poor this week and there's not likely much improvement until the water warms several degrees. Trolled herring, with or without a flasher, is the best early season technique but low water temps will shut down the bite. Bank fishers along Meldrum Bar will catch the occasional winter steelhead bound for the Clackamas River. Spin 'N' Glos are used for the most part but a prawn spinner will attract springers at times.

Trout fishing should be fair on the McKenzie this weekend with fair weather and good water conditions.

Numbers of steelhead upstream from Willamette Falls are still too low to provide a decent population available for anglers to target in the Santiams. Give it some time to hopefully improve.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – As water and flow on the Clackamas River were dropping slightly this week, effort for steelhead picked up. Both boat and bank fishers enjoyed fair success for steelhead.

The water is in great condition on the Sandy River with the level forecast to be gradually dropping over the coming weekend. Decent numbers of winter steelhead are scattered throughout the system.

The Guide's Forecast – The Clackamas is forecast to rise slightly over the coming weekend which may impact steelheading results. Winters are scattered throughout the river, making it difficult to recommend one stretch over another. Eagle creek is not a good bet as it has been slow at its best so far this season.

Prospects are good for steelheaders over the coming weekend with the Sandy showing good color and the water level continuing to drop. Boat fishers from Oxbow Park to Lewis and Clark and bank anglers from Cedar Creek down to Dabney stand a good chance at a hookup. Broodstock winter steelhead catches will hold up well through March and into April when most anglers will switch to targeting spring Chinook.

Cape Meares Lake, Coffenbury Lake, Hebo Lake, Lake Lytle, Lost Lake (Clatsop County), Spring Lake, Town Lake and Vernonia Pond are scheduled to be planted with hatchery trout.

North Coast Fishing Report – Steelheaders have had their way with north coast chrome in recent days. Although last weekend was angler-rich and fish poor, the latest rain freshet has revitalized the action and consistent catches are once again common. The Wilson River remains a highlight although just like any given day, everyone comes up with a different report.

Few can dispute the fact this has been an excellent season however. Anglers working the Wilson on Wednesday found better action in the warming afternoon than they did in the morning. It seems the cool weather kept fish from actively biting but **pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** ended his Wednesday hooking 5 fish and landing 4. Several of his fish were broodstock keepers with one tipping the scales at nearly 13 pounds. Large fish continue to be common although the bulk still remain in the 6 to 9 pound class. Several other boats reported success on the Wilson on Wednesday as well.

The Nestucca has been quite good lately. Anglers are welcoming peak season fishing with double-digit opportunities on a fairly regular basis when water conditions permit. Both this river and the Wilson have been fishing better at higher flows, when fish seem to be moving and aren't as skittish as they would normally be in lower flows. All drifts are producing well under the current water level with a nice mix of wild and hatchery fish on the Nestucca. Sidedrifters continue to dominate the catch but in lower flows, plugs do have a place. We took 3 steelhead in short order on the Wilson last Thursday, each fish taking the K-11x metallic red/black back and chrome/red stripe in about 6 feet of water. Most boats were sidedrifted and ignoring the offerings but these fish clearly appreciated the territorial invaders.

The Trask is starting to see more consistent catches although the vast majority of those fish are wild strain. This accounts for the low number of anglers fishing these streams, relatively speaking that is. The lower reaches have been most productive recently.

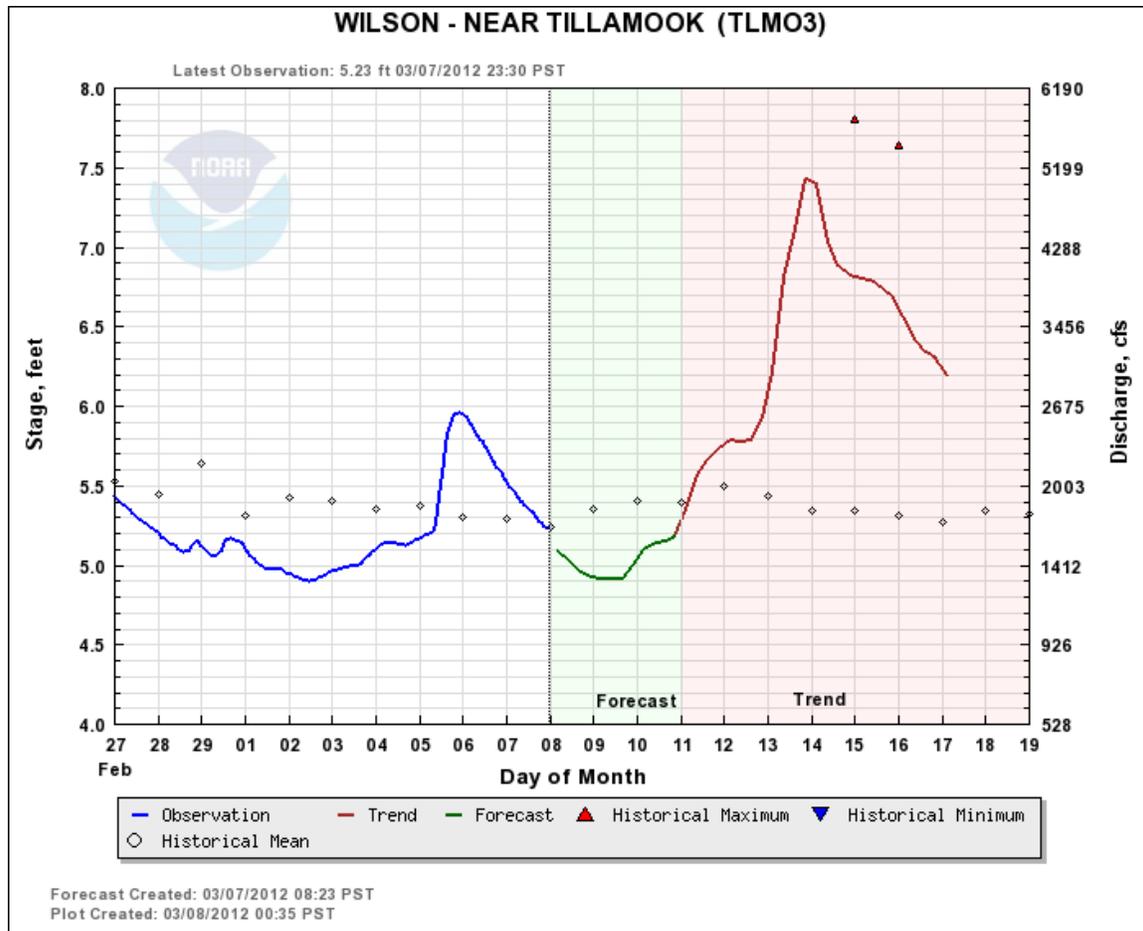
There have been anglers working the Kilchis River recently and reporting fair success. Even though this smaller drainage doesn't obviously get the same number as their neighboring systems, fewer people can translate into more productive results. It's harder to sidedrift the smaller system but bobber and baits can be effective, as well as pulling plugs.

The Nehalem is coming into its own although remains a bit high for big expectations. It's been a high water year for even the smaller streams, which often puts the mainstem out of reach for much of the late winter fishery. When it does drop down, the action should be good.

There's only a rare boat targeting sturgeon in the estuary. They are catching an occasional keeper however but it definitely wasn't a high number year.

We finished off our day (after an a.m. steelhead float) with a crab pot soak and bottomfishing excursion along the north jetty of Tillamook Bay. The results were less than impressive but my fishing buddy Pat Vining did take 3 smaller sea-bass jigging along the bottom. Crabbing wasn't all that great either but 7 keepers for 6 pots beats hot dogs for dinner again.

The Guide's Forecast – It looks as if steelheaders will have a fair shot at good water conditions through the weekend although as mentioned above, these systems have been fishing better in higher water rather than lower. The Wilson is forecasted to drop below 5 foot by the weekend.



This may mean the plug pulling gear could come out as sidedrifting gear will become tiresome for all these fish to see. If you do plan on sidedrifting, it may pay to innovate since so many anglers are using the standard yarnie and egg combos these days.

The Wilson and Nestucca will remain top targets but anglers may want to strongly consider working the lowest stretches for the best chance at catching chrome. On the Nestucca, that would be downstream of Three Rivers and on the Wilson, downstream of Sollie Smith. We're in peak season right now and it should pay dividends for those that are persistent. Anglers may want to look to the pink worm and bobber too. Switching it up with so much competition will be important this weekend.

If the river spikes as predicted, smaller streams such as the Necanicum and Kilchis Rivers should produce fair to good catches of wild winter steelhead. You'll have to watch out for the river blockage on the Necanicum however- be prepared to drag your boat across about 40 feet of gravel. These systems will be in fine shape in higher flows as a nice influx of fish is likely holding in tidewater.

And speaking of wild fish, the Trask should continue to put out quality fish this week with the lower reaches fishing best until a high water event takes place. Drifted bait will likely produce best but if flows drop as low as they are forecasted to by the weekend, plugs may become an effective tool.

The mainstem Nehalem will remain a bit high for my tastes but there should be ample numbers of fish present for those savvy to fishing off-colored water. Target fish near tributary mouths and don't overlook the Salmonberry River as a good bank angling option.

The offshore forecast doesn't look favorable for any ocean or estuary recreational opportunities. See for yourself below....

FRI

S WIND 20 TO 25 KT WITH GUSTS TO 30 KT...EASING TO 15 TO 20 KT IN THE AFTERNOON. WIND WAVES 6 FT...SUBSIDING TO 4 FT IN THE AFTERNOON. W SWELL 6 FT. RAIN.

FRI NIGHT

SW WIND 15 TO 20 KT...EASING TO 10 TO 15 KT AFTER MIDNIGHT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 12 FT. RAIN LIKELY.

SAT

SW WIND 10 TO 15 KT...BECOMING S 20 TO 25 KT IN THE AFTERNOON. GUSTS TO 30 KT. WIND WAVES 6 FT. W SWELL 13 FT. RAIN LIKELY.

SAT NIGHT

S WIND 25 TO 30 KT WITH GUSTS TO 35 KT. COMBINED SEAS 15 FT. RAIN.

SUN

SW WIND 20 TO 25 KT. WIND WAVES 4 FT. W SWELL 16 FT.

MON

S WIND 35 TO 40 KT. COMBINED SEAS 17 FT.

Central & South Coast Reports – Boats have been making excellent catches of ling cod when ocean conditions have allowed. Unfortunately, offshore conditions are forecast to be rough on Saturday this week and rougher on Sunday with swells forecast to reach 10 to 15 feet. Stick to inland waters this coming weekend.

3/6/12 ACTION NOTICE: "The National Marine Fisheries Service in consultation with the Pacific Fishery Management Council, the State of Oregon, and fishery interests has reviewed the recreational Chinook salmon seasons adopted under the 2011 regulation setting process, and the season scheduled to be open for Chinook salmon from Cape Falcon to Humbug Mt. will occur as scheduled for the period of March 15 through April 30. All retained Chinook salmon must be 24 inches or larger.

"Anglers fishing in ocean waters adjacent to Tillamook Bay between Twin Rocks and Pyramid Rock and within the 15 fathom depth contour are reminded that only adipose fin clipped Chinook salmon may be retained or on board while fishing.

"Seasons from May 1, 2012 through April 30, 2013 are currently being developed. Season alternatives will be reviewed and a final season recommendation made at the Pacific Fishery Management Council public meeting in Seattle, Washington by April 6."

In a March 6th report, one guide indicated the Siletz was fishing well, producing seven to 10 fish per day for clients. Your mileage may vary greatly on that number but there are definitely some fish in the river as pictures accompanied the report.

The recent freshet has slowed crabbing in Coos Bay although rockfish catches by jetty fishers have been good when wave action has allowed safe access to the rocks. Steelhead are entered in decent number with rain and are responding well now that the system is dropping and clearing, While primarily a catch and release fishery, the mainstem and particularly North Umpqua are favorite haunts of steelheaders seeking powerful winter fish. The South Umpqua has been delivering reliable catches of primarily hatchery fish.

Crabbing has been fair this week in Coos Bay. Recent rainfall brought fresh winters into the Coos system just as many locals were retiring their steelhead gear for the season. Fresh fish are being taken this week with the promise of more to come before the run is over.

Pressure for winter steelhead dropped off on the Coquille although this system is getting fresh winters as well. Steelheading has been productive around Powers and on the Beaver Creek stretch. West Fork Coquille anglers are finding some fish as well.

The spring Chinook fishery will get underway and continue to improve through March on the lower Rogue, just as the winter steelhead season enters primetime on the middle and upper Rogue. At this time, winter steelheading is a far more optimistic endeavor than spring Chinook. The first springer is usually taken around mid March but an early fish this year and a few more here and there has set off the fever. Even when springers start entering in fishable number, it's a task best suited for the patient angler as one must put in time on anchor trailing anchovy and hope for the best. The payoff is worth it to many who practice this ritual. Water will be gradually dropping on the middle Rogue over the coming weekend which makes prospects for steelhead fair for those using plugs, yarnies or bait. Winters are nosing into the upper river where steelheaders are intercepting a few. Prospects will improve here as well over the coming weeks.

Low water at the Chetco River has caused a drop in effort although catches remain fair to good. Expect to encounter a mix of fresh, bright winter steelhead and slanky, spawned out summers. The latter are invariably aggressive, and fun to catch although unsuitable for the table. Set 'em free. Rain over the coming weekend is not reflected in river flow forecasts but a swell in the level is predicted around mid-march. While the run will begin winding down this month, fishing should remain worthwhile as levels drop following the next freshet.

Floras Lake, Garrison Lake, Ben Irving Reservoir, Cooper Creek Reservoir, Galesville Reservoir, Loon Lake and Plat 1 Reservoir are scheduled for trout stocking.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Fishing for reddsides has been worthwhile on the lower Deschutes and most productive late mornings through early afternoons.

Metolius fly fishers are seeing hatches of Blue-Winged Olives, small dark stoneflies and a few caddis but have found nymphs most effective recently.

Midges are hatching in good number on the Crooked with trout responding well to patterns matching the hatch.

Crescent Lake is producing lake trout and browns to trollers.

Trolling is producing fair to good numbers of bull trout at Lake Billy Chinook.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report for March 2012

North Puget Sound

With the region's rivers closed to steelhead fishing, anglers' attention has turned to blackmouth salmon in the marine areas of Puget Sound.

Anglers fishing marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands), 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. 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. Catch samplers with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) collect the information each week at fishing access sites throughout Puget Sound.

Anglers looking for some competition might want to participate in the **Everett Blackmouth Derby** on March 17. Prizes include \$3,000 for the largest fish, \$1,500 for second place and \$500 for third place. For details, visit the [derby's website](#).

Meanwhile, numerous rivers are closed to fishing for **steelhead** and other game fish, including the Skagit, Sauk and Samish. The three rivers, usually open in March, closed early to protect wild steelhead that are returning in low numbers this year.

Freshwater anglers, however, can wet a line at some local lakes. Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish are good spots to fish for **perch**, **cutthroat** and **smallmouth bass**. Fishing there and in many other lakes should improve in March as water temperatures increase and fish move into shallower water.

Looking forward to the **summer salmon fishing** season? There's still time to comment on proposals for this year's fisheries. Several public meetings have been scheduled throughout March as fishery managers continue to develop the 2012 salmon seasons, which will be finalized in early April. For more information on the meetings, visit WDFW's [North of Falcon website](#).

Hunting: Deer and elk hunters have until March 31 to enter their name in a drawing for a 2012 multiple-season permit, which can greatly increase their opportunities for success in the field.

In mid-April, WDFW will randomly draw names for 8,500 multiple-season deer permits and 1,000 multiple-season elk permits.

Winners of the drawing will be eligible to purchase a special tag allowing them to participate in archery, muzzleloader and modern-firearm general hunting seasons for deer or elk in 2012. Winners who purchase the multiple-season elk tag by Aug. 31 can participate in general elk-hunting season in both eastern and western Washington. They also may apply for special permits to hunt deer or elk, regardless of weapon type.

Hunters may purchase a multiple-season permit application at [authorized license dealers](#), or by calling (866) 246-9453. The permit application is \$6 for residents and \$100 for nonresidents. A 2012 hunting license is not required to submit an application, but winners of the drawing must

purchase one before they can purchase a multiple-season tag.

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

Blackmouth salmon fisheries are in full swing in Puget Sound, the lingcod season gets under way mid-March in ocean areas south of Cape Alava and several ocean beaches are tentatively scheduled to open for two razor clam digs this month.

As usual, the final word on beach openings will be announced about a week before each razor clam dig is scheduled to start, said Dan Ayres, coastal shellfish manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Unlike previous openings this season, the digs are timed to coincide with morning low tides. No digging will be allowed on any beach after noon.

Proposed beach openings, along with morning low tides, for the first dig are:

- March 10, Saturday (7:39 a.m. -0.3 ft.): Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- March 11, Sunday (9:28 a.m. -0.4 ft.): Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks

Later in the month, diggers will have another opportunity. Tentative opening dates and evening low tides for that dig are:

- March 24, Saturday (8:25 am +0.3 ft.): Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- March 25, Sunday (8:59 a.m., +0.3 ft.): Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks

Ayres notes that the dig planned at Copalis on March 24 will coincide with the sixth annual [Ocean Shores Razor Clam Festival](#), which includes a chowder cook-off and other events.

Under state law, diggers can take 15 razor clams per day, and are required to keep the first 15 they dig. Each digger's clams must be kept in a separate container.

All diggers age 15 or older must have a valid fishing license to harvest razor clams on any beach. Licensing options range from a three-day razor clam license to an annual combination fishing license, which can be purchased on [WDFW's website](#) and from license vendors around the state.

Meanwhile, fishing for **blackmouth** – resident chinook – is an option in several areas of Puget Sound. Anglers fishing marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon) and 12 (Hood Canal) have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook. Those fishing the Strait of Juan de Fuca – marine areas 5 (Sekiu) and 6 (eastern Strait) – and Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound) have a daily limit of one salmon.

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.

Rather hook a **lingcod**? Fishing for lingcod gets under way March 17 in marine areas 1-3, south of Cape Alava. The minimum size for lingcod in these areas is 22 inches, with a daily limit of two fish per angler. For lingcod fishing regulations, check the [Fishing in Washington pamphlet](#).

Back on shore, there's still time to provide input on the **summer salmon fishing** seasons. Several public meetings have been scheduled throughout March as fishery managers continue to develop the 2012 salmon seasons, which will be finalized in early April. For more information on the meetings, visit WDFW's [North of Falcon website](#).

In the rivers, **wild steelhead** returns to northern peninsula streams reach their peak in March. As in years past, anglers may retain only one wild steelhead per license year on the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc rivers. On all other rivers,

anglers may retain only hatchery-reared steelhead marked with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar.

Anglers should be aware that wild steelhead retention closes on portions of the Dickey River in mid-March. For more information on steelhead fishing regulations, check the [Fishing in Washington pamphlet](#). Information on weekly steelhead catches in the Quillayute River system and the Hoh River are available on [WDFW's website](#).

Southwest Washington

Spring chinook fever is starting to take hold on the Columbia River. More than 100 boats were counted on the lower river one day in late February when only a single adult fish had passed Bonneville Dam. By late March – when the bulk of the run is expected to arrive – that number is expected to grow to more than 2,000 boats per day.

“At first, the fish usually arrive in fits and starts, then eventually start moving upriver in a steady flow,” said Joe Hymer, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). “Through March, we expect to see the number of boat and bank anglers on the river to increase week by week.”

According to the pre-season forecast, 314,200 upriver fish are expected to return to the Columbia River this year, which would be the fourth-largest run on record. The sport fishery below Bonneville Dam is scheduled to run through April 6, but could be extended if enough fish are available for harvest.

Harvest guidelines adopted by the two states will allow anglers fishing below Bonneville Dam to catch and keep up to 14,500 hatchery-reared spring chinook before the run forecast is updated in May. Upriver fish bound for rivers above the dam are expected to make up the majority of the catch, but salmon returning to the Cowlitz, Lewis, Willamette and other rivers below Bonneville also contribute to the fishery.

As in years past, only hatchery-reared spring chinook marked with a clipped adipose fin may be retained. Any unmarked wild spring chinook must be released unharmed.

Cindy LeFleur, WDFW Columbia River policy manager, said this year's spring chinook fishery looks promising, especially compared to last season.

“Not only is this year's 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.

Spring chinook fishing is currently open to boat and bank anglers on a daily basis from Buoy 10 near the mouth of the Columbia River upstream to the Interstate 5 bridge. Starting March 1, the sport fishery will expand upriver to Beacon Rock and run through April 6. During that period, the sport fishery will close on three Tuesdays – March 20, March 27 and April 3 – to accommodate commercial fisheries.

Starting March 1, bank anglers will also be allowed to fish from Beacon Rock up to the fishing boundary below Bonneville Dam.

Above Bonneville Dam, the fishery will be open to boat and bank anglers on a daily basis from March 16 through May 2 between the Tower Island powerlines six miles below The Dalles Dam

and the Washington/Oregon state line, 17 miles upriver from McNary Dam. Bank anglers can also fish from Bonneville Dam upriver to the powerlines during that time.

Starting March 1, anglers fishing downriver from Bonneville Dam may retain one marked hatchery-reared adult spring chinook as part of their daily catch limit. Above the dam, anglers can keep two marked adult spring chinook per day effective March 16.

To guard against overestimating this year's run, the states will again manage the fisheries with a 30 percent buffer until the forecast is updated in late April or early May.

Fishery managers from Washington and Oregon have already scheduled a meeting April 5 to review the catch and determine if the season can be extended. If the catch to that point has not reached the initial harvest guideline, the two states will consider an immediate extension, said LeFleur, the WDFW fishery manager.

Effective March 1 through May 15, the mainstem Columbia River will be open for retention of **shad**, but only on days and in areas open for retention of adipose fin-clipped spring chinook.

The Cowlitz River is currently open to fishing for spring chinook, with a daily limit of two adult chinook salmon. On the Kalama and Lewis rivers, the limit is one adult chinook salmon per day. Above Bonneville, the Wind River and Drano Lake are scheduled to open for spring chinook March 16 with a limit of two chinook per day.

All of those rivers are also open to fishing for late-run **hatchery steelhead** under rules outlined in the 2011-12 [Fishing in Washington](#) pamphlet. Hymer said fishing for winter hatchery steelhead is still going strong, particularly on the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers, noting that summer-run steelhead will start coming in right behind them later in the month.

In other waters, anglers should be aware that March 15 is the last day to fish for steelhead on Abernathy, Cedar (Clark Co.), Germany, Mill (Cowlitz Co.), Rock (Skamania Co.), Salmon (Clark Co.) creeks and on the Coweeman, Elochoman, Grays, East Fork Lewis and Washougal rivers.

Meanwhile, **sturgeon** fisheries below Bonneville Dam will be further constrained for the third straight year. Responding to the continued decline of sturgeon abundance below the dam, fishery managers adopted fishing regulations designed to reduce the catch by 9,600 fish – a 38 percent reduction from last year.

That action follows a 30 percent catch reduction in 2011 and a 40 percent reduction in 2010.

"This year's sturgeon fishery will be opening later or closing earlier on various sections of the river," LeFleur said. "Anglers should check this year's fishing rules carefully before they head out."

Monitoring data jointly collected by Washington and Oregon indicate that the abundance of legal-size white sturgeon has declined by nearly 50 percent since 2003. Factors often cited for the decline include increased predation by sea lions and a drop in the abundance of smelt and lamprey, which contribute to sturgeons' diet.

To keep this year's catch within the new harvest guideline, the sturgeon fishery will end 23 days earlier than last year in the estuary below the Wauna powerlines and start eight days later in the fall from the powerlines upriver to Bonneville Dam. Fishing seasons approved for 2012 in the lower Columbia River are as follows:

- **Buoy 10 to the Wauna powerlines:** Retention of white sturgeon is allowed daily from Jan. 1 through April 30 and from May 12 through July 8. From Jan. 1 through April 30, sturgeon must measure between 38 inches and 54 inches (fork length) to be retained. From May 12 through the end of the season they must measure 41 inches to 54 inches

(fork length) to be retained. Catch-and-release fishing is allowed on days when retention is prohibited.

- **Wauna powerlines to Bonneville Dam:** Retention of white sturgeon is allowed three days per week (Thursday through Saturday) from Jan. 1 through July 31 and from Oct. 20 through Dec. 31. Sturgeon must measure between 38 inches and 54 inches (fork length) to be retained. Catch-and-release fishing is allowed on days when retention is prohibited.

Sport fishing for sturgeon will be closed from May 1 through Aug. 31 in the nine-mile sturgeon sanctuary downriver from Bonneville Dam described in the *Fishing in Washington* rules pamphlet. Sand Island Slough near Rooster Rock also will be closed to fishing at least through April 30.

As in years past, 80 percent of the allowable catch will be allocated to the sport fishery and 20 percent to the commercial fishery. Under the new harvest rate, the portion of the catch available to recreational fisheries will be allocated as follows: up to 4,160 fish in the estuary, up to 2,080 above Wauna and between 1,768 and 2,022 in the Willamette River (actual catch was 1,535 fish in the two day season).

Unlike the lower river, legal-size sturgeon populations appear to be growing above Bonneville Dam, said Brad James, a WDFW fish biologist. This year's harvest guidelines for sturgeon fisheries above the dam remained the same as last year – 2,000 fish in Bonneville Pool, 300 in The Dalles Pool, and 500 in John Day Pool. Over half the Bonneville Pool guideline was reserved for the summer season as the first retention period closed Feb. 18.

Another option is **walleye**, which are now on the bite above Bonneville Dam. The **kokanee** fishery is also picking up in Merwin Reservoir and should improve throughout the month. For other freshwater fishing options, check the [stocking schedule](#) on WDFW's website for **trout** plants throughout the region.

Eastern Washington

Over a dozen trout-stocked lakes in the eastern region open to fishing March 1, and those that are ice-free should be productive.

In the southeast district, six of the seven man-made lakes off the Tucannon River in Columbia County – Big Four, Blue, Deer, Rainbow, Spring and Watson – are stocked with catchable size **rainbow trout**, including 8- to 12-inch, one-third pounders and some 14-inchers up to or over a pound each.

Glen Mendel, southeast district fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), said Beaver Lake continues to have decreased water flows due to river changes, and for the second year will not be stocked.

Fishhook Pond in Walla Walla County and Pampa Pond in Whitman County also open March 1 and are well-stocked with catchable-size rainbows. Other year-round-open waters in the southeast district are also receiving hatchery plants now. Specific fish stocking numbers are available on [WDFW's website](#).

Other waters opening March 1 further north in the region will likely provide action on a variety of fish later in the month when ice melts and access is easier. Most of these are not dependent on catchable-size fish stocking, but have fish populations that carry over through the winter. They include Downs Lake in Spokane County, with **bass, crappie, perch** and rainbow trout; Liberty Lake east of Spokane, with rainbow and **brown trout**, bass, and perch; and Medical Lake near the town of the same name, with brown and rainbow trout.

Also opening March 1 are Amber Lake in southwest Spokane County for catch-and-release of rainbow and **cutthroat trout**; Coffeepot Lake in Lincoln County for rainbows, yellow perch and black crappie under selective-gear rules; and North Silver Lake in southwest Spokane County for rainbows under selective-gear rules and a requirement to release adipose-fin-clipped fish.

Deer Lake in southern Stevens County also opens March 1, but WDFW northeast district fish biologist Bill Baker said the lake is still iced over. "With these wintery conditions, the opener might provide some ice-fishing opportunity," he said. "But as the season progresses, anglers need to be very cautious about safe ice depth." Deer Lake has bass, crappie, perch, rainbow and **lake trout**, as well as **kokanee**.

Baker also notes that northern Stevens County's two winter-season rainbow trout lakes – Williams and Hatch – are still producing catches of 13- to 14-inch fish, although catch rates are slower. Both lakes remain open through the month of March, but Baker said anglers need to be cautious about quickly changing ice conditions this late in the season.

Fishing action has also slowed at the central district's two winter-season (December through March) lakes – Hog Canyon in Spokane County and Fourth of July in Lincoln County. Fish are still available, but changing conditions may keep anglers at home.

Kokanee and rainbow trout fishing should be good all month at year-round-open Lake Roosevelt. In the Spring Canyon area of the big Columbia River reservoir, both species are usually caught near the surface.

Other year-round fisheries in the region that continue to provide good fishing include Sprague Lake for rainbows, and Rock Lake for rainbow and brown trout.

Steelhead fishing on the Grande Ronde River, especially the Shumaker and Cougar Creek areas, remains very good. The season is open through April 15 in the stretch from the county road bridge to the Oregon state line for up to three hatchery-marked steelhead daily. All tributaries are closed to steelhead fishing. In addition to a fishing license, a [Columbia River Salmon/Steelhead Endorsement](#) is required.

Another kind of fishing is available at the Inland Northwest Wildlife Council's 52nd annual [Big Horn Outdoor Adventure Show](#), March 15-18, at the Spokane County Fair and Expo Center. Some 5,000 trout are stocked in three huge indoor lakes for kids to catch at "Fishing World." The show also includes a "Virtual Reality Fishing Simulator," fishing demonstration tank, lots of fishing seminars by experts, and hundreds of fishing equipment and charter service vendors. WDFW staff will be on site selling fishing licenses and talking with visitors about all things fish and wildlife.

Northcentral Washington

Dozens of trout-stocked lakes in the Columbia Basin district of the region open to fishing March 1, and most are nearly ice-free and ready for action.

The best bets initially may be Martha and Upper Caliche lakes in Grant County, where the greatest number of March opening lakes are concentrated, said Chad Jackson, Columbia Basin district fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

"Both lakes were rehabilitated in 2010, treated to rid them of undesirable fish and re-stocked with **rainbow trout** fry in the spring and extra "catchable" size trout last fall," Jackson said.

"Both should have good catch rates on this opener for rainbows that run between 11 and 13 inches long."

Burke and Quincy lakes on the Quincy Wildlife Area southwest of the town of Quincy, were each stocked with about 11,000 catchable size (11 to 13 inches) rainbow trout last fall, Jackson said. "These fish should be slightly larger by opening day," he said. "And even earlier plants of fish should provide good opportunity for carryover trout up to and over 20 inches."

Dusty Lake, also on the Quincy Wildlife Area, should be good on the opener for rainbows that mostly run 12 to 14 inches, Jackson said. Lenice and Nunnally lakes, on the Crab Creek Wildlife Area just east of Beverly, should also fish well with similar size rainbows, although the trout at Nunnally can require some time to locate. All three lakes are under selective gear rules and a one-fish daily catch limit.

Lake Lenore, two miles north of the town of Soap Lake, typically fishes slow on the opener but picks up by mid-April, Jackson said. It's also under selective gear rules and during the first two months of the season it's catch-and-release only. "Anglers who fish from float tubes or small boats can catch five to 10 fish during an outing," he said. "The **cutthroat trout** in Lake Lenore range in size from 16 inches to pushing 30 inches."

Ice cover is still good in most Okanogan County lakes, reports WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff. Ice fishing opportunities are available at Patterson Lake near Winthrop for seven- to eight-inch **yellow perch** and 10- to 11-inch **kokanee**; Davis Lake near Winthrop for 10- to 12-inch rainbow trout; Big and Little Green lakes near Omak and Rat Lake near Brewster for 10- to 12-inch rainbow trout; Palmer Lake near Loomis for eight- to 10-inch yellow perch; and Bonaparte Lake near Tonasket for 10- to 12-inch **eastern brook trout** and **kokanee**.

"This month is the last chance to catch and keep fish at Davis, Green and Rat lakes," Jateff said. "Those lakes shift to a catch-and-release season April 1."

Winter **whitefish** seasons in Okanogan County are limited now due to current steelhead closures. Areas that remain open for whitefish through March are the Chewuch River near Winthrop from the mouth to the Pasayten Wilderness boundary; and the Similkameen River from the mouth to 400 feet downstream of Enloe Dam and from Enloe Dam to the Canadian border. Whitefish gear rules apply, except in areas that are currently open for steelhead under selective gear regulations.

Fishing for **triploid rainbows** at Rufus Woods Lake, the Columbia River reservoir off Chief Joseph Dam, has slowed recently, Jateff said. Triploids being caught are in the one- to three-pound range. Jateff reminds anglers that when fishing with bait in Rufus Woods, the first two fish caught are counted as part of the daily limit whether kept or released.

Southcentral Washington

Spring chinook salmon are moving up the Columbia River and steelhead fishing should pick up soon, but trout fishing in area lakes is probably best bet for catching fish over the next few weeks.

"We start stocking **trout** in year-round lakes in late February and continue right through June," said Eric Anderson, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "This fishery is really our bread and butter, and anglers look forward to it all year."

In March, more than 20 lakes and ponds in Yakima, Kittitas, Franklin and Benton counties are scheduled to receive thousands of "catchable size" rainbow trout, along with hundreds of jumbos and triploids. For a complete list, see the [stocking schedule](#) for southcentral Washington on the WDFW website.

Anglers should also be aware fishing for **hatchery steelhead** usually picks up right before the season closes March 31. WDFW fish biologist Paul Hoffarth said some of the highest catches of the season occur in March near the Ringold Springs Hatchery.

"A lot of steelhead that have been hanging out all winter will make their final spawning runs," Hoffarth said. "That's when catch rates start rising again."
Fisheries for hatchery steelhead are open through March on the Snake River and on the Columbia River downstream from the wooden powerline towers at the Old Hanford town site. Steelhead fishing is not permitted anywhere on the Yakima River.

Meanwhile, the sport fishery for **white sturgeon** above McNary Dam (Lake Wallula) opened on Feb. 1 and is scheduled to run through July 31. Lake Umatilla, which extends from John Day Dam to McNary Dam, is also expected to remain open through March for retention of white sturgeon.

Hoffarth notes, however, that the Lake Umatilla fishery is managed on a quota system and could close abruptly when the quota is reached. Anglers planning to fish the lake should keep an eye on the WDFW website for possible updates.

In both areas, anglers may retain only those white sturgeon that measure between 43 inches and 54 inches when measured from the tip of the snout to the fork of the tail.

Hoffarth also reminds anglers that some of the year's biggest **walleye** are caught in the spring. These fish are now preparing to spawn and are nearing their highest weight of the year, he said. Once commonly caught in Lake Umatilla below McNary Dam, walleye are now routinely caught above McNary Dam in Lake Wallula, including the lower Snake River and the Hanford Reach.

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Random Links

2012 Saltwater Sportsmen's Show Event Schedule:

http://oceaned.org/seminars_2012.html

2012 Saltwater Sportsmen's Show Discount Tickets:

http://www.oceaned.org/tickets_2012.html

Northwest Fly Tying & Fly Fishing Expo March 9th & 10th, 2012: <http://nwexpo.com/>

Warm Springs Tribal Permits available online: <http://www.tribalpermit.com/>

GOOD LUCK!