

The Guide's Forecast - volume 14 issue number 50

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 7<sup>th</sup> – December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2012**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** Again the rains have left the rivers high and dirty, leaving little opportunity (if any) to go fishing locally. Catch and release sturgeon fishing on the Willamette and Columbia Rivers remains the only option left until we get a break from the weather and the rivers have a chance to drop. Right now the Willamette is by far the more productive of the two rivers and is producing very good action despite the high water. Fish smelt, sand shrimp or pickled herring for these bottom dwellers in 20-80 ft of water. If you are fishing from a boat, remember to anchor out of the debris lanes or you risk getting taken out by a drifting tree.

When the rivers do begin to drop, look to the Sandy, Clackamas and Meldrum bar to produce some fresh winter steelhead although action won't be all that great until later into the winter.

McKenzie River levels have been too high to fish this week, approaching bank full at times.

The Santiam system will be too high and swift to fish for a while.

**Northwest –** Like most of Northwest Oregon, district rivers have been too high to effectively fish. If river models remain accurate, systems should come back into check by the weekend. This leaves both chinook and steelhead an option but late season chinook success has not impressed anglers lately. Most north coast streams will close for chinook at the end of the month.

The Wilson and Kilchis are the remaining late season chinook options. Tillamook Bay may also produce a few fish through the weekend.

Smaller systems such as the North Fork Nehalem, Necanicum, Kilchis and Three Rivers should clear prior to the weekend with winter steelhead primarily on tap. If the early run is going to materialize, this should be a productive week for steelheaders. Following the recent chain of storms, these more dynamic smaller streams will be littered with debris. The lower Necanicum is impassable due to downed trees.

Tides are favorable for sturgeon this weekend and Tillamook Bay should have a few available. It may be some of the last consumptive opportunity that anglers get for the foreseeable future.

With exception of the lower Columbia, bay crabbing should be poor given the amount of fresh water that has recently inundated the north coast.

**Southwest-** Recreational ocean crabbing opened on December 1st. Offshore conditions haven't been friendly, however, as it's been over a week since any boats have launched. Commercial efforts will be delayed at least until December 15th to allow Dungeness quality to improve.

Fresh water washing into coastal estuaries has virtually shut down bay crabbing this week.

The wild coho fishery in river systems closed on December 1st but will continue through December 31st in Tenmile, Tahkenitch and Siltcoos lakes.

Rogue levels were on the drop Sunday and Monday this week but started rising again on Tuesday, December 4th. The water is predicted to approach flood stage at Agness, then drop into the coming weekend. The Rogue will still be high but should be fishable for plunkers by

Saturday or Sunday if the forecast remains accurate. In any case, the upper river will be a good prospect for summer steelhead with a good return to Cole River hatchery this year.

While Umpqua levels are on the rise this week, a break in the weather will have water levels dropping and clearing. The South Umpqua should reward steelheaders with hatchery winter fish over the coming weekend. Salmon and steelhead are accessing the North Umpqua above Soda Springs Dam for the first time in 60 years thanks to a new fish ladder.

When the Coquille comes back into shape late this week, fresh winter steelhead should be available.

Chetco flows swelled to well over 34,000 cfs near Brookings mid-week. A rapid drop is expected that should allow fishing late this week. As the water drops and clears, there should be decent numbers of winter steelhead to catch. Slides upstream will delay clearing this week.

The Elk River was dropping and clearing early this week. Waters of the Sixes take a little longer to clear but with only light showers alternating with dry periods in the forecast, there should be opportunities in these systems for late-run chinook and early winter steelhead.

**Eastern** – Steelheading has been slow on the lower Deschutes with fewer summers returning this season. Anglers prepared to put in their time to locate fish should see a little action, however. Just keep in mind that the stretch from Pelton Dam to the Northern Reservation boundary will close on the last day of December.

The Crooked River continues to fish well.

**Soapbox Update:** Copied from our trusted allies of the Association of NW Steelheaders:

**Process to reform CR fisheries culminates Friday**

*Rulemaking calls for improved conservation and more opportunity. Please attend meeting and/or contact your state's wildlife commission*

The Northwest Steelheaders have been strong supporters and allies of the Governor's directive to reform Lower Columbia River fisheries. Many of the concepts outlined in the Governor's vision are concepts that we have been working on since our inception more than 50 years ago, and others are consistent with our policy decisions since 2003. We feel the Governor's vision as presented in his August letter was spot on correct in the direction we support, and we have supported the Governor, the Commissions and their agencies through this process.

The joint ODFW/WDFW work group that met three times over the last few months have made their recommendations to agency staff, and ODFW now has a draft rulemaking. The ODFW Commission will vote on the rulemaking at their meeting in Portland on Friday. There needs to be strong showing from anglers and conservationists. This is the last and most important meeting, hope to see you there! Here are the details to Commission meeting:

8 am Friday, Dec. 7

Holiday Inn Portland Airport, Willamette Room

8439 NE Columbia Blvd.

Portland, OR

For agenda and background materials click **HERE** (See Appendix H):

[http://www.dfw.state.or.us/agency/commission/minutes/12/12\\_dec/index.asp](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/agency/commission/minutes/12/12_dec/index.asp)

Here are the key concepts that Steelheaders supports in the draft rulemaking:

- The majority of the changes to allocation, and especially spring and summer chinook allocation. We believe these will provide much more opportunity, including longer seasons and better catch rates.
- The development and implementation of alternative selective gear such as purse and beach seines, and the removal of all gillnets from the mainstem by the end of the transition period.

Here is what we do not support:

- Sportfishing exclusion zone in front of Youngs Bay.
- Rules requiring the use of barbless hooks in the Columbia and select lower river tributary areas.
- Any fee collected from sport anglers that is given to commercial fishermen to switch gear.

Steelheaders has communicated in detail with the Governor's Office, both Commissions and agency staff. To see our comments to the ODFW Commission, please click [HERE](#).

[http://www.nwsteelheaders.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/ANWS letter to ODFW Commission re CR fisheries management 30 Nov12.pdf](http://www.nwsteelheaders.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/ANWS%20letter%20to%20ODFW%20Commission%20re%20CR%20fisheries%20management%2030%20Nov12.pdf)

This really is a historic moment. Sure, it's not perfect, and we will have to make a few small sacrifices, but Steelheaders believes this process to be an overall win for sport fishing and conservation, and we encourage you to show support by attending the meeting and/or writing the Commissions.

In Washington, send your message to: Miranda Wecker, Chair, Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission, [commission@dfw.wa.gov](mailto:commission@dfw.wa.gov)

In Oregon, send your message to Bobby Levy, Chair Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Commission, [odfw.commission@state.or.us](mailto:odfw.commission@state.or.us)

**SW Washington-** District rivers remain too high for successful fishing but could drop back into shape by the weekend. Chinook remain an option on the Lewis but anglers will primarily focus their efforts on winter steelhead.

The Cowlitz, Lewis, Kalama and Washougal should all hold steelhead by the weekend. It's too early to tell how the 2013 run is materializing.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – With nothing worth pursuing on the lower Columbia River, you'll continually see this section of our newsletter predictably drab for the next several weeks. With the onset of inclement weather and no remaining options for catch and keep, effort for sturgeon is next to non-existent.

Steelheaders remain active in the John Day Pool with some still impressive catches coming from the pool and John Day Arm itself. Here is the creel check from the weekend, you can see that wild fish still dominate the catch:

Weekly checking showed one unclipped steelhead released for one bank angler; and 11 adipose fin-clipped steelhead kept, plus 17 unclipped steelhead released for 26 boats.

Although not a surprise that this fishery is still holding up, catches remain surprisingly strong going into the first week of December. It won't last much longer.

Crabbing remains great in the lower Columbia when weather and tides permit. We'll look at the weekend opportunities in the forecast section.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Die-hard trollers will still be working the John Day Pool this week for some of the last remaining opportunities for late run summer steelhead. The catch will still likely impress trollers and those venturing into the John Day Arm also hold fair opportunity using bobbers and jigs or bait. These fish seem to prefer a more subtle offering (versus spinners) in the dropping temperatures of the region. This fishery may still have a few weeks left in it but anglers should witness a slow-down of catch rates.

Tides remain pretty extreme over the weekend but crabbers can take advantage of an early morning high tide in the lower Columbia. Weather permitting, you'll have to be motivated to set your pots ultra-early and pick them before the tide starts running out hard. It may be wise to bring less gear (minimizing your chance for losing gear) but bring large quantities of quality bait to stuff the pots with. It does make a difference in this fishery. Post-sunset high tides are more subtle but night crabbing poses many more risks than day crabbing does and is not recommended this time of year (although I've done it).

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** reports, "Again the rains have left the rivers high and dirty, leaving little opportunity (if any) to go fishing locally. Catch and release sturgeon fishing on the Willamette and Columbia Rivers remains the only option left until we get a break from the weather and the rivers have a chance to drop. Right now the Willamette is by far the more productive of the two rivers and is producing very good action despite the high water. Fish smelt, sand shrimp or pickled herring for these bottom dwellers in 20-80 ft of water. If you are fishing from a boat, remember to anchor out of the debris lanes or you risk getting taken out by a drifting tree. When the rivers do begin to drop, look to the Sandy, Clackamas and Meldrum bar to produce some fresh winter steelhead."

A few winter steelhead are trickling over Willamette Falls with the total fewer than 150. While flows have started to moderate at the Falls, it's still ripping at 96,000 cfs as of December 6th. Use caution when anchoring on the lower river in flows this strong, wear your PFD and carry a knife to cut the anchor line should a log drift over your anchor line. Otherwise, it can take your boat down. Keep an eye upstream as there is a \*lot\* of debris washing downstream including logs, whole trees and root wads.

McKenzie River water levels once again went over bank full during nighttime hours on December 5th. It once again dropped inside the banks in the early morning hours on Thursday, December 6th.

While the North Santiam dropped below the Action Stage at Mehama on Wednesday this week, it's still very high and swift. The South Santiam is forecast to drop below the seven foot depth at Waterloo by the weekend but will still have some kickin' flows.

According the ODFW, there has been a delay in the printed version of the fishing regulations pamphlet which is normally available at this time of year. There are some new rules of which anglers should apprise themselves lest they inadvertently break said rules (as ignorance is no excuse). See **Random Links**, below for the whole shebang online. Some of the new regulations for 2013 include:

- Opening of Diamond Lake to year round fishing.

- Establishing winter fishing opportunity on Lemolo Reservoir.
- Reducing the annual sturgeon catch limit to two.
- Restricting the use of bait on the McKenzie River from Hayden Bridge upstream to Hendricks Bridge.
- Increasing the daily bag limit for smallmouth bass on the Umpqua River.
- Adjusting the daily bag limit on Crane Prairie Reservoir to help create a trophy trout fishery.
- Setting largemouth bass bag limits for Wickiup Reservoir.

Incidentally, while the dead tree version of the new synopsis is not yet out yet, 2013 licenses and tags are available, either online or at most sporting goods retailers.

**Boaters:** If you haven't done so already, be sure to winterize your boat. If your craft is powered by an outboard, be certain to store it vertically to prevent water accumulating in the lower unit. Freezing weather isn't far off.

**The Guide's Forecast – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** predicts, "Thanksgiving has traditionally been the kick-off for winter steelhead season in the NW, but on the Willamette Valley streams New Year's day might be more appropriate. Now, this is not to say that there aren't any fresh fish available, or that there haven't been any caught. But for a decent chance of hooking up, anglers might spend more time prepping and plan on plying the waters sometime after Christmas. So you ask why does the steelhead run here in the valley drag its feet, up to a month later than normal? Not even ten years ago fishermen could count on seeing and landing good numbers of fresh hatchery steelhead on the Sandy and Clackamas Rivers by December One.

Two reasons stand out. The first being that both rivers now have hatchery broodstock programs and have phased out, or are phasing out the standard hatchery programs of the past. Each hatchery broodstock steelhead had parents that were taken from the wild and spawned to create a brood of smolts that are only once removed from native fish. They were not spawned from hatchery fish, that were spawned from more hatchery fish. Seasoned steelhead anglers historically knew that the earlier component of the winter steelhead run has been predominantly of hatchery origin and that the natives always came later in the season, usually showing up in numbers by mid-January.

Now that the ancestors of the broodstock hatchery steelhead are all of native origin, it stands to reason that they will have a bit later of an arrival compared to the semi-cloned and inbred hatchery steelhead of the past. Fish biologists commonly expect that over a few generations, the window of arrival will eventually widen on both the front and back ends, having an increasing earlier showing sometime after Halloween and a strong last hurrah well into the spring. But until the handful of generations pass, our valley steelhead will show up in earnest right after the Christmas holiday.

Expect good fishable numbers by then, with late January through mid-March being the peak time. The second reason for the later arrival of our steelhead run is more speculation, but it is increasingly becoming more widely accepted by science. That being climate change and or more appropriately "climate shift", but it seems that the term "global warming" is now passé.

It's apparent that our fall months are more like late summer months and the spring sure takes its sweet time to grace the region. The hot weather is now reserved for July and August and lasts well into September giving up no rain until sometime in October. Getting the picture yet?

Our salmon and steelhead runs do not adhere to the man-made Chippendales calendar, they follow nature's calendar and it is directly related to the prevailing temperature and weather patterns. All that being said, it's early December, the salmon are spawning and winter steel is on deck for the next five months. Spend some time preparing now, so that you are ready to go when the weather and water conditions allow. Good luck."

Catch and release sturgeon fishing has been excellent on the lower Willamette on almost any type of bait. Just be sure to use enough lead to hold bottom which, in the kind of flows we're getting, will be up to 12 ounces. Even at that you may need to find a current break where baits will be stationary. Drifting for sturgeon is not an option.

Although the McKenzie will be dropping and perhaps clearing somewhat through the coming weekend, there will still be more water here than any angler will want to see.

Since winter steelheading won't really be worthwhile on the Santiams until the second month of the New Year, water levels are moot. March will be even better and there's a chance the rivers will actually be fishable by then.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – The Clackamas got hit pretty hard from heavy rains mid-week but is currently dropping and should fish when the water clears. The hatchery on Eagle Creek has had a few winter steelhead return to the facility.

Sandy levels were high Wednesday this week but as with most valley rivers, have been dropping since then. The color was not too bad mid-week. There was a bank to bank blockade of trees and debris at the I-84 bridge and while there were plans to clear it, no word has come in one way or another since mid-week. Water level at the town of Sandy was 11.5 and dropping with about 12 inches of visibility mid-day on Thursday, December 6th. Water clarity will improve Friday and Saturday this week with the freezing level dropping.

**The Guide's Forecast** – A few winters have been taken at Barton and Carver. Expect the Clackamas to be fishable in the coming week and while it's early in the run, winters will be available from McIver to the mouth.

While too early to count on great numbers of winter steelhead, a few have been taken on the Sandy and there should be some fish in the system from Oxbow downstream.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – The entire week was a wash for anglers on the north coast. Storm system after storm system pummeled the northern watersheds, not allowing for much recreation in the outdoors. When the rain wasn't falling, the wind was howling so you didn't see much "field activity" this week on the north coast. We'll report in much more detail in the Forecast section since it seems as if the rain will give us enough reprieve to offer salmon and steelhead anglers an opportunity this weekend.

**The Guide's Forecast** – It's been a long while since we've seen a fleet of driftboats in trailers here in Tillamook County; or at least it seems so given we're still in peak season. With heavy rains keeping even the smaller streams for effectively fishing, there hasn't been much interest all week.

That should change this week however as the weather systems appear to give Northwestern steelheaders a chance to pursue their quarry. We'll give a river by river run-down on what look like the best options for the weekend/week ahead. Let's get right to it!

Highway 30 streams (Klaskanine, Big Creek, Gnat Creek)- These small streams should all have steelhead in their systems. There is a tremendous amount of private land on these systems so watch where you step. These systems are also quite snaggy so plan on bringing a lot of gear if you work the pocket water. Like most systems, the more water you work, the higher your chances of finding success. Keep moving and fishing different runs or pockets, especially in the higher flows as fish are more likely to be on the move under these conditions.

Necanicum River- One of my personal favorites, this fishery should be well underway but windfall is littering the system, making for some hazardous boating conditions. Fish will hold in every kind of water and should be pretty receptive to shrimp or eggs. Bank anglers will have the best access above Klootch Creek while boaters will do best downstream of that. This river doesn't fish well for driftboats when the flows start to subside and with the additional gravel input on this falls events, there is likely to be lots of shallow sandbars in the tail-outs.

North Fork Nehalem – Heavily planted with hatchery steelhead, this is a signature north coast opportunity that as you will witness, most steelheaders in NW Oregon take advantage of. It should have good numbers of steelhead available in the lower reaches and recycling is already taking place with some steelhead already being planted in Lake Lytle. Hatchery workers handled almost 150 adults this week and the river came into perfect shape on Thursday with action likely to be good into the weekend. You won't be fishing alone here unless you are launching your raft in this area, to get away from the crowds. It can be a hazardous reach however; lives have been claimed here before.

Mainstem Nehalem – Occasionally gets stray hatchery fish but wild fish make up the bulk of this catch. This system fishes best when other north coast streams are low and clear so with that in mind, that won't be anytime soon. This system won't get much attention until flows lower and January rolls around when we're more likely to find a few more wild fish in the system.

Kilchis River- Is still likely to get some hatchery fish back to it but plants have moderated in recent years. There may be more interest in late-run chinook salmon here although that run hasn't materialized in any large number this year either. This system will likely be fishing fairly before the weekend. Plugs and bait both work well on this system and to have a possibility at both, guides often choose to run Tadpolly plugs. In higher flows, you'll often find fish in the tail-out sections of pools; both chinook and steelhead.

Wilson River - Still the best north coast chinook option, anglers will be pretty anxious to begin effectively pursuing steelhead on this system. The steelhead run typically shows more strength later in February and into March but early run, Alsea stock fish should be peaking in the next few weeks. Although these fish aren't known for their more aggressive qualities, there should be catchable numbers around. As we've mentioned in other systems, in the higher flows, don't hesitate to target both chinook and steelhead in the shallower tail-outs. Tadpolly's or smaller Flatfish or Kwikfish should produce results. Side-drifting should begin to produce consistent results by the weekend.

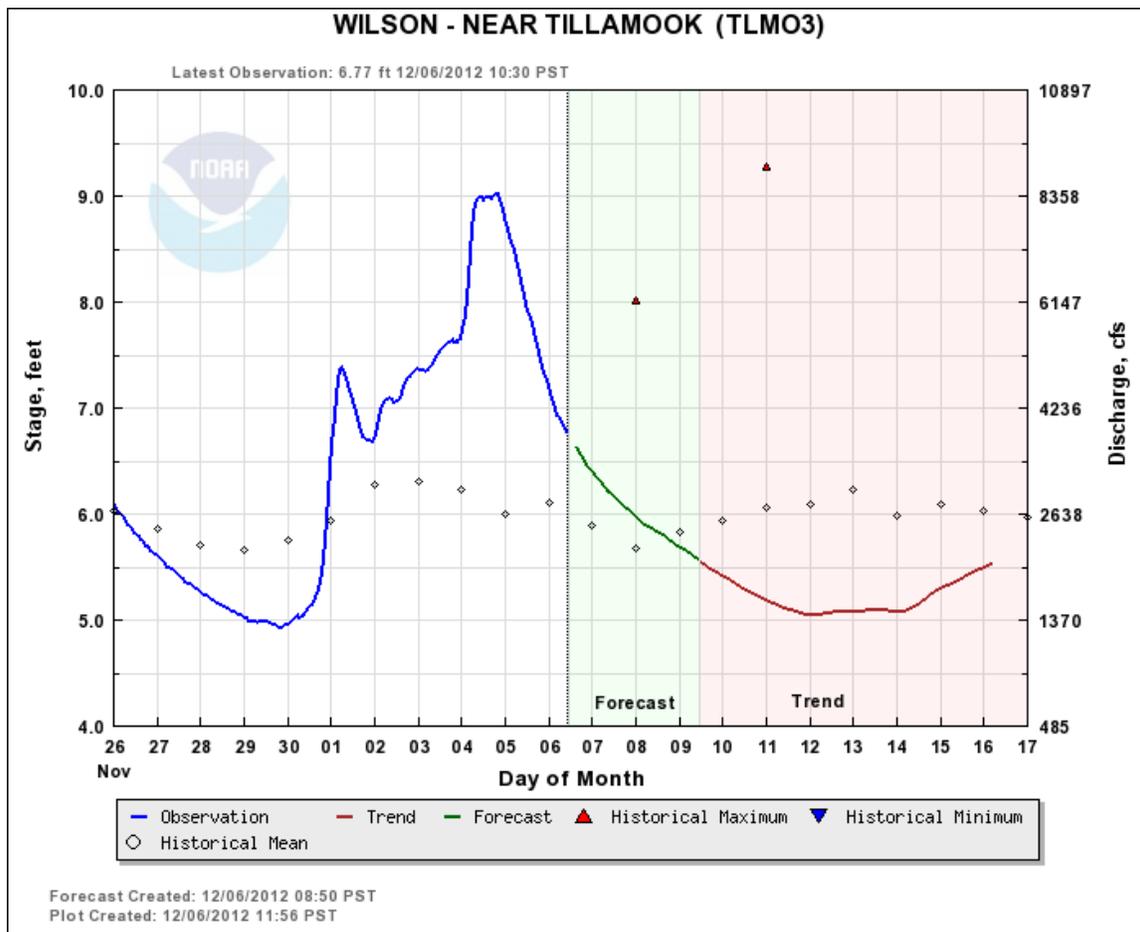
Trask River – Mostly wild fish this time of year, there should also be a few hatchery steelhead strays here and far less people fishing. Steelhead and chinook should be well distributed throughout the system. A rare winter Chinook may be in the mix.

Three Rivers/Nestucca system - Three Rivers is in great shape to receive a good shot of hatchery steelhead right now. Although the highest concentration of fish will remain near the deadline, fish should be holding in the entire stretch of which some small stretches have good

bank access. This could be a very good week on this system. Small clusters of eggs will likely produce the best results, especially if those clusters are chinook eggs.

Although action is likely to pick up significantly in Three Rivers and downstream of its mouth on the mainstem Nestucca, the mainstem Nestucca itself won't likely see a significant improvement until later in January and late February when broodstock returns hit the river. Wild fish should make up a significant component of the catch as well this time of year. It's all a Three Rivers show in the early part of the season here and it should be a pretty good show.

Here's the hydrograph model for the Wilson River this week, plan your outing accordingly, things should start to get interesting by the weekend:



Trollers still looking for Tillamook Bay Chinook are not out of luck yet but interest based on previous weeks success will likely not inspire hoards of anglers to try their skills. Strong morning incoming tides will offer up some opportunity for those working the Bay City piling and the Ghost Hole over the weekend and into next week. Large herring with or without flashers should take a few fish but don't count in big numbers as we've seen in some past seasons. Most of the fish entering the system now are destined for the Kilchis or more likely, the Wilson Rivers.

If you want to make a day of it, you can look to the afternoon outgoing tide to pursue what is likely a historic end to consumptive sturgeon opportunity. Oregon will likely adopt a full closure to catch and keep sturgeon in 2013 so pursuit of these fish for table fare is likely at an end. Soak shrimp on the bottom of the bay in the west or middle channels for your best chance.

There is no sign of friendly seas in the forecast ahead. It would have been fun taking advantage of a sport only opening for the offshore crabbing season. No such luck. The commercial season will likely open around mid-month.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – Ocean crabbing opened on December 1st. Does it matter? Not so far. As a charter skipper quipped, they've been "tied to the boards" since the first of December.

Recreational boaters hoping to take advantage of the oceans' bounty of rockfish and ling cod without depth restrictions, the fishing for which is excellent in the winter, or crab which should be large and plentiful, may have the opportunity to do so on Sunday, December 12th if offshore forecasts remain accurate.

While river systems closed to fishing for wild coho at the first of December, lakes open to this species remain open through the end of the year. With Siltcoos receiving an early run, fishing has slowed dramatically. Action is somewhat better at Tahkenitch but the best bet for spinners or plugs to take a native silver is Tenmile. This late in the year, however, there will be a percentage of coho that are turning or too dark to keep. Fresh winter steelhead will be entering Tenmile Creek, however, creating an alternative to the waning coho fishery.

As the Umpqua River drops over the coming week, salinity will return to Winchester Bay and crabbing will improve. Half Moon Bay will be the first area to produce well, particularly as incoming tides bring salt water into the area. Plunkers will be the first to hook up with winter steelhead on the Umpqua mainstem as natives bound for the North and a few hatchery fish bound for the south are heading upstream. When the South Umpqua becomes fishable, that's the best bet for fin-clipped keepers as the hatchery is located on that fork. Summer steelhead fishing is on the wane at the North Umpqua and catch-and-release fishing for native winters won't get underway until February next year.

Due to its sheer size, Coos Bay is less susceptible to heavy rains causing a negative effect on crabbing. Nonetheless, the recent deluge did have some impact although crabbing will be improving in the week to come. A few winter steelhead were caught in the Coos system prior to the freshet, but the run is just starting here. As water levels drop, try the East and West forks of the Millicoma as well as the South Fork of the Coos River. Steelheading will improve in weeks to come. The East Fork Coquille is likely to have a few fresh winter steelhead available as the water drops and clears.

Despite the lower Rogue going over flood stage on Wednesday this week, steelheaders should have an opportunity to plunk from the bank for fresh winters as the water drops through the coming weekend. The middle stretch of the Rogue has dropped and should continue to do so slightly although the level will remain somewhat high. It should fish over the coming week if the water clears from its current muddy condition. Waters of the upper Rogue are fishable now despite a little color and results have been good for anglers using bait in the stretch above the Shady Cove Boat Ramp where it's legal.

Chetco flows topped 32,000 cfs at Brookings mid-week but have been moderating rapidly since then. At the rate it's dropping, plunkers will take fish by Friday this week and it should be on for all by the weekend.

Precipitation has all but ceased in the southwest corner of Oregon, which means the volatile Elk and Sixes systems will be rapidly dropping and clearing. There should be late Chinook about as well as early winter steelhead for anglers to target. Take advantage of these opportunities as this

dry spell is forecast through the weekend and into the week to come which is likely to result in these rivers becoming too low to fish well.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** - The lower Deschutes is slow to fair for steelhead. Flies and hardware are about equally effective with perseverance required with either method. The stretch below Benham Falls has been fair for rainbow trout and is producing the occasional large brown.

Steelheading has been relatively productive for summer steelhead, given the lackluster run this year.

Lake Billy Chinook is producing bull trout for trollers.

### **Washington fishing reports:**

***From the WDF&W Weekender Report for December 2012***

### **North Puget Sound**

(Island, King, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish and Whatcom counties)

Regional waters offer plenty of gifts for fishers — from river steelhead fishing to Puget Sound's crab and blackmouth salmon.

Marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands) and 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) are open for hatchery chinook **salmon** fishing in December. Anglers fishing those marine areas have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook salmon.

Traditionally, anglers find success fishing for blackmouth in the San Juans at this time of year, depending on weather conditions. Before heading out, anglers can check [creel reports](#) for information on catch and effort in Puget Sound. Recreational fishery samplers with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) collect the information each week at fishing access sites throughout Puget Sound.

**Crabbing** is open throughout December in some marine areas of Puget Sound, including marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu), 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 7, 8-1 (Deception Pass), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) and 9 (Admiralty Inlet).

In each area, crabbing is allowed seven days a week through Dec. 31.

The daily catch limit in Puget Sound is five Dungeness crab, males only, in hard-shell condition with a minimum carapace width of 6¼ inches. In addition, fishers may catch six red rock crab of either sex per day, provided those crab measure at least 5 inches across. Additional information is available on the [WDFW website](#).

All crab caught in the late-season fishery must be recorded on winter catch cards, which are valid until Dec. 31. Winter cards are available at fishing license vendors across the state. Catch reports are due to WDFW by Feb. 1, 2013. For more information on catch record cards, visit WDFW's [catch record card webpage](#).

For a change of pace, anglers in the region may want to venture out in the evening to jig for **squid**. Good spots include the Elliott Bay Pier in Seattle and the Edmonds Pier. Check the WDFW website for information on [squid](#) and [fishing piers](#).

In freshwater, several rivers are open for hatchery **steelhead** fishing — including the Skagit, Snohomish, Skykomish, Snoqualmie and Green (Duwamish) — although recent heavy rains have hampered activity, said Bob Leland, WDFW's steelhead program manager. "When the high waters recede, opportunities should be good as fish move upstream toward hatcheries," Leland said. "Fishing for hatchery steelhead picks up around mid-December, when we traditionally see the peak of the run."

**Rainbow trout** are another option for freshwater anglers, who might want to try casting for lunkers at Beaver Lake near Issaquah. About 2,000 hatchery rainbows – averaging 2 to 3 pounds each – were released into the lake in late October. Beaver Lake, which is one of several westside lowland lakes open to fishing year-round, is best fished by small boat, although anglers also can be successful fishing from shore.

Other good bets during December are Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish, where anglers can hook **perch, cutthroat** and **smallmouth bass**. Anglers targeting perch should fish near deep ledges, using nightcrawlers. For cutthroat or smallmouth bass, try trolling deep, 30-100 feet or more. Anglers may have to put in some time to hook a smallmouth, but they could catch a big fish.

## South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

(Clallam, Grays Harbor, Jefferson, Kitsap, Mason, Pierce, Thurston and Pacific counties)

The holiday season has arrived and with it comes opportunities to hook hatchery steelhead on several coastal streams, catch crab and salmon in Puget Sound and dig razor clams on ocean beaches.

Early in December, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) will proceed with an evening razor clam dig at several ocean beaches. Opening dates and evening low tides are:

- Dec. 11, Tuesday, 4:51 p.m., -1.1 ft., Twin Harbors
- Dec. 12, Wednesday, 5:40 p.m., -1.6 ft., Twin Harbors
- Dec. 13, Thursday, 6:29 p.m., -1.9 ft., Twin Harbors
- Dec. 14, Friday, 7:15 p.m., -1.8 ft., Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Dec. 15, Saturday, 8:01 p.m., -1.6 ft., Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Dec. 16, Sunday, 8:47 p.m., -1.0 ft., Twin Harbors, Mocrocks

Another digging opportunity is tentatively scheduled later in December. Tentative opening dates and evening low tides for that dig are:

- Dec. 28, Friday, 6:42 p.m., -0.3 ft., Twin Harbors
- Dec. 29, Saturday, 7:15 p.m., -0.3 ft., Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
- Dec. 30, Sunday, 7:47 p.m., -0.2 ft., Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Dec. 31, Monday, 8:20 p.m., 0.0., Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks

Clam diggers are reminded that they should take lights or lanterns for nighttime digs and 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 2012-13 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](http://www.WDFW.com) and from license vendors around the state.

Meanwhile, fishing for **hatchery steelhead** in the region is usually at its best in December. "Of course weather is always a big factor this time of year," said Kirt Hughes, regional fishery manager for WDFW. "As long as the weather cooperates and the rivers stay in shape, fishing should be pretty good throughout the month."

Anglers fishing the Quillayute and portions of the Bogachiel, Calawah, Hoh, and Sol Duc rivers have a daily limit of three hatchery steelhead. In the Grays Harbor area, anglers fishing the Chehalis, Humptulips, Satsop and Wynoochee have a daily limit of two hatchery steelhead.

Rather catch **salmon**? Anglers can find **late-run hatchery coho** salmon in some of the region's rivers, including the Chehalis and Satsop. For **winter chum** salmon, anglers might want to try fishing the Nisqually River. The late-chum run hits full stride mid- to late December and generally remains strong until at least mid-January, said Hughes.

Portions of Puget Sound also are open for salmon. In the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Marine Area 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca) reopens for salmon Dec. 1. Anglers fishing that area have a daily limit of two salmon, but must release wild chinook. Marine Area 5 (Sekiu) remains closed for salmon fishing.

Farther south, anglers fishing marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon Island) and 13 (South Puget Sound) can keep one chinook as part of a two-salmon daily limit. On Hood Canal (Marine Area 12), anglers have a daily limit of four salmon, but only two of those fish can be a chinook, and all wild chinook must be released.

"This time of year anglers fishing for blackmouth need to put some time in on the water," said John Long, statewide salmon manager for WDFW, who recommends fishing the waters around Point Defiance. "But it can be worth it for an opportunity to hook a nice-size fish."

Before heading out, anglers can check [creel reports](#) for information on catch and effort in Puget Sound on WDFW's website.

**Crabbing** also is open in some marine areas of Puget Sound, including in marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu), 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 7 (San Juan Islands), 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island, and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner), 9 (Admiralty Inlet), 12 (Hood Canal), and 13 (South Puget Sound).

In each area, crabbing is allowed seven days a week through Dec. 31.

The daily catch limit in Puget Sound is five Dungeness crab, males only, in hard-shell condition with a minimum carapace width of 6¼ inches. In addition, fishers may catch six red rock crab of either sex per day, provided those crab measure at least 5 inches across. Additional information is available on the [WDFW website](#).

All crab caught in the late-season fishery should be recorded on winter catch cards, which are valid until Dec. 31. Winter cards are available at license vendors across the state. Those catch reports are due to WDFW by Feb. 1, 2013. For more information on catch record cards, visit WDFW's [catch record card webpage](#).

## Southwest Washington

(Clark, Cowlitz, Klickitat, Lewis, Skamania and Wahkiakum counties)

This year's **winter steelhead** season got off to a promising start just before Thanksgiving, when the first wave of fish started taking anglers' lures in several tributaries to the lower Columbia River. With decent river conditions, catch rates should continue to improve in the weeks ahead, said Joe Hymer, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

"Despite recent high water, that first jag of winter steelhead was definitely on the bite," Hymer said. "So long as the rivers don't rise too high or fall too low, we could be looking at a darn good fishery this year."

Before planning a steelheading trip, anglers should be aware that WDFW plans to stock 10,000 rainbow trout in Lacamas Lake this month, 5,000 in Battleground Lake and another 5,000 in Kline Pond. At Scanewa Lake (Cowlitz Falls Reservoir), the daily limit for adipose-clipped rainbows is 10 fish through the last day in April.

In addition, the department has scheduled two multi-day razor clam digs at Long Beach and other razor clam beaches this month. For current information, check WDFW's [razor clam website](#).

But for those intent on catching steelhead, Hymer recommends the the Cowlitz, Lewis (including north and east fork), Kalama, Grays, Washougal, Elochoman rivers, along with Salmon Creek in Clark County. All have a two-fish daily limit, but anglers should check the [Fishing in Washington](#) rules pamphlet for additional rules specific to each river.

As with all steelhead fisheries in southwest Washington, only hatchery fish with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar may be retained. All wild steelhead must be released.

Hymer notes that water conditions – often highly variable at this time of year – can make a big difference when it comes to catching fish. “If the water is too low, the fish get spooky – if it’s too high it can be dangerous to be out there,” he said.

As basic preparation for a steelheading trip, Hymer recommends checking the [Northwest River Forecast](#) or other sources for river conditions before heading out. “Most anglers do best when water levels are rising or dropping,” Hymer said. “It’s a lot harder to catch steelhead in the peaks and troughs.”

In deciding where to fish, it also helps to know how many smolts were planted in specific rivers and how many adult fish have returned to area hatcheries. In the first case, Hymer recommends checking WDFW’s [smolt-planting schedule for 2011](#). WDFW also posts [hatchery returns](#) on a weekly basis.

While winter steelhead are the main attraction right now, **late-stock coho** will continue to bite through December. Most of those fish are too dark for consumption, but Hymer said some bright fish are still available. As he sees it, the best bet for coho is the Cowlitz River where over 9,000 fish returned through the middle of November. For **fall chinook**, the North Fork Lewis should continue to produce catchable fish through December. Any chinook, adipose fin clipped or not, may be retained on the Lewis.

Hymer flagged several new fishing regulations that take effect Dec. 1 on those and other rivers:

- **Grays River** – Opens to fishing for hatchery steelhead, hatchery coho and adipose and/or ventral fin clipped chinook from the Highway 4 Bridge to the South Fork. Also on Dec. 1, the open area on the West Fork also expands from the hatchery intake/footbridge to the mouth that day.
- **Green River, North Fork Toutle River, and the mainstem Toutle** from the mouth to the forks will all be closed to fishing for steelhead and salmon.
- **South Fork Toutle River** – Closes to fishing for steelhead from the 4100 Bridge upstream. Fishing remains open from the mouth to the bridge under selective gear rules.
- **North Fork Lewis River** – The night closure and anti-snagging rules are lifted from Johnson Creek to Colvin Creek. In addition, the area from Colvin Creek upstream to the overhead powerlines below Merwin Dam reopens for hatchery steelhead, chinook, and hatchery coho Dec. 16.
- **Cowlitz River from Mill Creek to the barrier dam** – Night closure and anti-snagging rules are lifted.
- **Mill and Blue creeks (tributaries to Cowlitz River)** – Mill Creek opens to fishing for hatchery steelhead under permanent rules. Blue Creek opened to fishing for hatchery steelhead and sea-run cutthroats from the mouth to the posted signs just above the rearing pond outlet in mid-November. Night fishing closures and anti-snagging rules are in effect on both streams.
- **Wind River** – Catch-and-release fishing closes for game fish above Shipherd Falls.
- **Klickitat River** – Closes to fishing for trout, hatchery steelhead and salmon, except for salmon fishing from the Fisher Hill Bridge downstream, which remains open through January. The night closure remains in effect. The whitefish-only fishery opens from 400 feet upstream from #5 fishway upstream to the Yakama Reservation. Whitefish gear rules will be in effect.
- **Merwin Reservoir** – Trout daily limit (including kokanee) goes back to five fish.
- **Swift Reservoir** – Closes to fishing.

Meanwhile, catch-and-release rules are in effect through December for sturgeon fishing in all waters below McNary Dam. Fishery managers from Washington and Oregon are scheduled to meet in mid-December to discuss retention rules for the pools above Bonneville Dam, but the outlook for retention fisheries below the dam is less certain.

Following declines in the white sturgeon population below Bonneville, both states are considering a proposal to keep catch-and-release rules in place in those and other waters as part of a broad-based effort to restructure fisheries in the lower Columbia River. Information about that effort and its implications for the sturgeon fishery is available on the [WDFW website](#).

## Eastern Washington

(Asotin, Columbia, Ferry, Garfield, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens, Walla Walla and Whitman counties)

**Rainbow trout** are healthy, hungry, plentiful and waiting to be caught during the winter-only fishing season that opens Dec. 1 at four lakes in the region.

That's the report from Randy Osborne, fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, who recently sampled the catch at Hog Canyon Lake and Fourth of July Lake near Sprague.

"Anglers can expect to catch rainbows at Hog Canyon ranging from nine to 21 inches," Osborne said. "The average size of fish we caught Nov. 26 was 16.4 inches. All the fish look great and are in top condition."

At Fourth of July Lake, the rainbows sampled Nov. 27 ranged from 12 to 23-inch rainbows, with an average size of 17.8 inches, Osborne said.

"With rain in the forecast and temperatures reaching to the mid 40s, it looks like anglers will have open water conditions for the opener," said Osborne, noting that neither lake had any ice at the time of the sampling effort.

The daily limit on both Hog Canyon Lake and Fourth of July Lake is five trout, but only two fish catch over 14 inches may be retained. Both lakes offer shoreline and boat access, but boaters should be aware that internal combustion motors are prohibited on Fourth of July Lake.

"Also, with the colder water temperatures at this time of year, boaters should make sure that everyone on board wears a life jacket," Osborne said.

WDFW northeast district fish biologist Bill Baker of Colville also recently sampled Hatch and Williams lakes in Stevens County, which also open Dec. 1.

"Anglers at Hatch Lake can expect to catch 12 to 17-inch rainbow trout that are healthy and fat," Baker said. "The average size of fish we caught Nov. 26 was 14.5 inches. At Williams Lake you can expect to catch rainbows from 13 to 17 inches, also in good condition. Our test fishing averaged catches of 15.5 inch trout. Catch rates on the opener should be high because these fish are actively feeding."

The daily trout limit at both Hatch and Williams lakes is five fish. Once that daily limit is caught, fishing is catch-and-release.

Baker found no ice on either lake, and forecasts in the northeast district are also relatively mild for opening day. The season should start, with open water, so both shoreline and boat anglers will do well.

"The usual bait, like nightcrawlers, Powerbait, and marshmallows, or lures like Mepps or Roostertails, or flies like Bionic or San Juan worms, should all be good producers," Baker said.

Three year-round trout lakes also look promising: Rock Lake in Whitman County, Sprague Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line, and Lake Roosevelt.

WDFW enforcement officer Doug King said recent catches at Rock Lake are showing more rainbows and fewer **brown trout** in recent weeks. Boat fishing tends to be most productive, but King said anglers have also been catching fish from the shore at the roadside access site.

WDFW Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area manager Juli Anderson reports trout fishing also has been good at Z-Lake, located off Telford Road on the wildlife area in Lincoln County.

But Snake River **steelhead** action was slow as of late November. WDFW fish biologist Joe Bumgarner said the best catch rates recently recorded in the mainstem river were in the section between Little Goose and

Lower Granite dams, where steelheaders averaged almost 15 hours per fish. The Grand Ronde River creel in Washington last showed close to 14 hours per steelhead caught.

## Northcentral Washington

(Adams, Chelan, Douglas, Grant and Okanogan counties)

Three lakes in Okanogan County – Rat Lake near Brewster and Big and Little Green lakes near Omak – open for “catch and keep” trout fishing Dec. 1, switching from catch-and-release rules to a five-trout daily limit.

WDFW Okanogan district fish biologist Bob Jateff of Twisp says these fisheries provide good angling throughout the winter months, either open water as they mostly are now, or iced-over later in the month or season.

“Expect **rainbow trout** in the 10 to 12 inch range,” Jateff said. “Catches are made on all kinds of bait, lures, and flies.”

Fish Lake and Roses Lake in Chelan County usually provide good fishing during December and throughout the winter. WDFW Chelan district fish biologist Travis Maitland of Wenatchee said **yellow perch** and rainbow trout are the main winter targets at both lakes, which are open year-round.

Meanwhile, **steelhead fishing** on the upper Columbia River will close one hour after sunset on Dec. 1 from Wells Dam to the Highway 173 bridge at Brewster and on the Wenatchee, Icicle, Entiat, and Methow rivers.

Several whitefish fisheries scheduled to open that day will also close an hour after sunset Dec. 1, including those on the Wenatchee and Entiat rivers, as well as on the Methow River downstream from the confluence with the Chewuch River in Winthrop.

Jeff Korth, Regional Fish Manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), said the closures are necessary to keep impacts on wild steelhead within limits established under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).

He notes, however, that the closures will not affect steelhead or whitefish seasons on the mainstem Columbia River from Rock Island Dam to Wells Dam, or from the Highway 173 Bridge in Brewster to 400 feet below Chief Joseph Dam. Those fisheries, plus steelhead and whitefish seasons on the Okanogan and Similkameen rivers, will remain open until further notice under previously published rules.

“This year’s run is smaller than in recent years and contains a relatively high proportion of wild steelhead,” Korth said. “Those factors, combined with steady angler effort, increased the rate of encounters with natural-origin fish in some fishing areas this year.”

For more information see the [fishing rule change](#) notice on the WDFW website.

## Southcentral Washington

(Benton, Franklin, Kittitas and Yakima counties)

Catch rates for **hatchery steelhead** have picked up in the Hanford Reach, but are still running a little slower than normal. Paul Hoffarth, a district fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), said fishing should remain productive through March as steelhead mill around waiting for the spring spawn.

The question, though, is whether anglers will brave the elements to catch those fish as they move upriver. “Angler participation definitely drops off as we head into the winter months,” Hoffarth said. “The fish are still out there, but fishing tends to get spotty – good one day, bad the next.”

As with all area steelhead fisheries, only hatchery fish with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar may be retained. All wild steelhead must be released.

The Yakima River Basin is closed to steelhead fishing, but the **whitefish** season opens Dec. 1 on both the Yakima and Naches rivers. As in years past, the catch limit is 15 fish per day, but anglers are required to use a single-point hook, measuring no more than 3/16 inch from point to shank (hook size 14).

Anglers fishing the Yakima River from Easton Lake to Keechelus Dam can catch **eastern brook trout** under selective gear rules. No size or daily limits are in effect for eastern brook trout, but fishing is strictly catch-and-release for all other species of trout.

In other waters, WDFW will stock **half-pound rainbows** in the North Elton Pond near Selah, which opens to fishing Dec. 1 with a two-fish daily limit. In addition, the department recently planted excess rainbow trout brood stock weighing 5-10 pounds apiece in North FioRito and Mattoon Lakes near Ellensburg.

Additional waters may be stocked with the large rainbow trout brood stock in the next few weeks, depending on availability. Watch for further word on [weekly fish plants](#) on WDFW's website.

### **TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail**

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#### **Random Links**

2013 Fishing regs complete online in PDF format:

<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/docs/2013/2013%20Oregon%20Sport%20Fishing%20Regs.pdf>

Just the new stuff - All the Regulation Changes and Updates:

[http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/reg\\_changes/index.asp](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/reg_changes/index.asp)

ODFW Winter Steelhead Guide:

[http://www.dfw.state.or.us/RR/steelhead\\_guide/index.asp](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/RR/steelhead_guide/index.asp)

**GOOD LUCK!**