

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 21st – December 27th, 2012**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- A myriad of weather has kept the Willamette Valley rivers high and rolling. In between fronts, there have been a few short lived opportunities to get on the water when conditions allow.

Both the Sandy and Clackamas Rivers produced a few of steelhead last week for anglers dodging the storms. On the Sandy, the stretch between Dodge Park and Oxbow Park has been holding up well despite the amount of rain and reports have come in of a few good fishing days..

On the Clackamas, slightly higher flows than optimum have been the norm but most days the color has been "steelhead green". The river from McIver Park down to Carver has been producing and fishes the best when flows are on the high side.

A few steelhead were caught at Meldrum Bar on the Willamette River last week when the water approached "green", but a brown stain is back and will likely stick around for another week. Still, opportunity remains if anglers fish close to shore with bright fluorescent, spinning lures doused with scent and/or bait.

Sturgeon fishing in the Portland Harbor has slowed a bit as did the effort, but good numbers of fish should be available through April till the Columbia begins to warm a few degrees. Weather and cold water have kept the pressure on the Columbia River to an absolute minimum.

Northwest – Highway 30 streams will once again fish after the most recent high water event. The streams have received a large portion of their early returning steelhead but more fish should be on the way. These rivers fish the best when other larger systems are too high to effectively pursue steelhead.

Further south, the Necanicum River deserves a good look. Although boat anglers have had a difficult time accessing the lower reaches, fish were taken there last week in the lower flows. Willing fish are most often found at the heads of holes and in water that is between three and 5 foot deep with a broken surface.

The Kilchis River, another small stream option in Tillamook County is also holding fish. Driftboats and bank anglers fishing the lower flows of the Kilchis over the weekend did not fare well. The Kilchis River seemingly received a poor return of chinook this fall and early winter.

The Wilson River was in much better shape over the weekend, with ideal levels for both boat and bank anglers. Traffic was high with only fair reports coming from anglers pursuing both salmon and steelhead. Most Wilson River anglers choose to fish the lower reaches of the river in pursuit of fish that ride the tide upstream. In the early morning, tailouts will hold both salmon and steelhead while later in the day, salmon and steelhead will seek different water types for the remainder of the day.

Those fishing small streams for early returning steelhead are still targeting the North Fork Nehalem as well as Three Rivers. As is typically the case, most anglers are targeting fish near the hatcheries from where they were liberated from.

The Nestucca and Trask Rivers also still have options but salmon fishing is fading to nothing. Steelhead returns to the systems are slow right now but will improve as January comes around.

Southwest- Charters reporting that high winds and heavy seas have made storm watching the only available activity. While winter bottom fishing and ocean crabbing are usually excellent, a break in conditions will be required to get out.

Now that coastal rivers have recovered from storm front passage, the salinity level in bays and estuaries is returning to normal and, with it, good catches of crab.

The Siletz, Alsea and Siuslaw rivers have been producing winter steelhead with a few large hatchery fish reported over the past week.

Steelhead will be good when the Umpqua recovers from heavy rain early this week.

Winter steelheading was good on the Coos River until water levels came up on Monday this week.

Steelheading was worthwhile on the lower Rogue until another storm front raised water levels overnight on December 18th. When flows recover, fishing will be worthwhile river-wide. Most of the winter steelhead hooked on the lower Rogue recently have been wild, requiring release, but good numbers of hookups have certainly made the effort worthwhile.

While the winter steelhead run has yet to peak on the Chetco River, catches were good over the past week. With plugs a top producer, the occasional hookup with a late chinook has been a real handful. Drifted roe has also been effective for some steelheaders.

Anglers on the Elk River caught decent numbers of chinook and steelhead over the past week but results stalled over the weekend. High winds are often challenging here.

Eastern – Water level, flow and temperature are good with the river a little colored from recent rain. Steelheading has been slow. Fishing for reddsides has been fair to good, however, with caddis and Blue-Winged-Olives hatching mid-day.

As long as Crooked River flows remain low, fishing will be reliable here. Check weather conditions as snow has been falling periodically.

SW Washington- Although returns to local area hatcheries are less than half of what they were last season, catches are still coming from the Cowlitz when flows cooperate. Most of the action is around the trout hatchery which is common for this time of year.

The Lewis, Kalama and Washougal systems are also options for early returning steelhead but returns are also reflecting another down year for adults. Chinook remain an option on the Lewis River but the condition and quantity of fish are fading.

Check the WDF&W web site for additional trout fishing opportunities this time of year.

Columbia River Fishing Report – About the only thing left to pursue on the mainstem Columbia is Dungeness crab. With cooler water temperatures and competition from stellar sea lions, sturgeon is a very poor option right now. Most sturgeon tend to congregate in the lower Willamette River this time of year where water temperatures are typically 2 to 4° warmer than the mainstem Columbia.

Back to Dungeness crab, success over the weekend was spotty but those that pursued crab in deeper water, closer to the river channel did quite well around the tide exchange. Weekend crabbers did not have an overabundance of opportunity with the extreme tide exchange but those that were patient working the tide changes did well. Crabbers will have to make sure that they have adequate length of rope on the crab traps and good bait is always a must if you expect good catches.

For those wondering about consumptive opportunity above Bonneville Dam, here is a “hot off the press” press release from ODF&W:

NEWS RELEASE

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Dec. 20, 2012

States adopt sturgeon season above Bonneville

CLACKAMAS, Ore. – Bonneville Pool sturgeon anglers will again see a split season for white sturgeon on the Columbia River in 2013. Fisheries managers from Oregon and Washington this week approved a white sturgeon retention season in Bonneville Pool consisting of winter and summer periods. The winter retention period will take place from Jan. 1 through Feb. 10, or until a harvest guideline of approximately 1,150 fish is achieved. The summer season is expected to begin in mid-June to harvest the balance of the 2,000 fish harvest guideline.

In The Dalles and John Day Pools, white sturgeon retention will open Jan. 1 and continue seven days per week until harvest guidelines are achieved as follows: The Dalles Pool – 300 fish; John Day Pool – 500 fish.

In the area from McNary Dam upstream to the Oregon-Washington border, white sturgeon retention is allowed Feb. 1 through July 31.

Under permanent rules, white sturgeon retention below Bonneville will open Jan. 1 seven days per week from the river mouth upstream to the Wauna power lines at river mile 40. From the Wauna power lines upstream to Bonneville Dam, the season will open Jan. 1 three days per week, Thursday through Saturday. Modifications to the 2013 retention seasons in the lower Columbia will be adopted by the Oregon and Washington Departments of Fish and Wildlife at a Joint State hearing scheduled for Jan. 30 at the Sheraton Airport Hotel in Portland.

The size limit is 38-54 inches fork length from the mouth of the Columbia upstream to The Dalles Dam and 43-54 inches fork length from The Dalles Dam upstream to the Oregon/Washington border.

Anglers are reminded that under Oregon fishing rules, the annual bag limit in 2013 will be one white sturgeon per year in all waters under state jurisdiction, down from the five fish annual bag limit in previous years. The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted the reduced bag limit at its Dec. 7 meeting in response to the continued decline of legal-size white sturgeon in the Columbia and Willamette rivers.

The lower Willamette River downstream of Willamette Falls (including Multnomah Channel and the Gilbert River) will remain closed to sturgeon retention on Jan. 1, Oregon fishery managers will consider a retention season for this area at the Joint State hearing on Jan. 30. Upstream of Willamette Falls, white sturgeon retention is open year round under permanent rules.

The Guide's Forecast – The fresh water inundation may start to take a toll on crabbers in the lower Columbia but the bigger factor is always the commercial crab fleet starting their season. They'll get to drop their pots closer to the end of the month (12/28) but until then, action should be great for crab for those fishing fresh bait and lots of it.

Weekend tides are great, except for the fact that the best ones occur in the darkness of night. Daylight tides are ok but they won't offer the same sort of opportunity that the night ones offer. It's just too dangerous this time of year to pursue crab in the darkness on the lower Columbia. Have you seen the weather outside? It does appear however that if you were to crab the last few hours of the afternoon, the tides should provide some fair to good opportunity for quality crab. If the weather forecast holds true, don't even think about it. Here's a sampling:

FRI

S WIND 20 TO 25 KT WITH GUSTS TO 30 KT. WIND WAVES 6 FT.
W SWELL 14 FT AT 15 SECONDS...SUBSIDING TO 12 FT AT 15 SECONDS
IN THE AFTERNOON. SECONDARY SWELL S 7 FT. SHOWERS LIKELY.

FRI NIGHT

SE WIND 20 TO 25 KT WITH GUSTS TO 30 KT. WIND
WAVES 6 FT. S SWELL 11 FT AT 10 SECONDS... SUBSIDING TO 9 FT AT
10 SECONDS AFTER MIDNIGHT. SECONDARY SWELL W 8 FT. SHOWERS.

SAT

S WIND 20 TO 25 KT WITH GUSTS TO 35 KT. COMBINED SEAS
13 FT DOMINANT PERIOD 10 SECONDS. SHOWERS LIKELY.

SAT NIGHT

S WIND 20 TO 25 KT WITH GUSTS TO 30 KT. WIND WAVES
7 FT...SUBSIDING TO 5 FT AFTER MIDNIGHT. SW SWELL 11 FT. RAIN.

SUN

SW WIND 20 TO 25 KT. WIND WAVES 5 FT. SW SWELL 10 FT.

MON

SW WIND 15 TO 20 KT. WIND WAVES 4 FT. W SWELL 7 FT.

Sound like fun? I don't think so.....

With the ocean delay for the commercial fleet, it's too bad that the weather isn't MUCH more friendly offshore as recreational crabbing IS open and it would likely be very productive.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reports, "A myriad of weather has kept the Willamette Valley rivers high and rolling. In between fronts, there have been a few short lived opportunities to get on the water when conditions allow. Both the Sandy and Clackamas rivers produced a few of steelhead last week for anglers dodging the storms. On the Sandy, the stretch between Dodge Park and Oxbow Park has been holding up well despite the amount of rain and reports have come in of a few good fishing days. Below Oxbow the river picks up more sediment left over from the Marmot dam removal and keeps it off color much of the time. On the Clack, slightly higher flows than optimum have been the norm but most days the color has been "steelhead green". The river from McIver Park down to Carver has been producing and fishes the best when flows are on the high side. A few steelhead were caught at Meldrum Bar on the Willamette River last week when the water approached "green", but "the brown" is back and will likely stick around for another week. Still opportunity remains if anglers fish close to shore with bright fluorescent, spinning lures doused with scent and/or bait. Sturgeon fishing in the Portland Harbor has slowed a bit as did the effort, but good numbers of fish should be available through April till the Columbia begins to warm a few degrees. Weather and cold water have kept the pressure on the Columbia river to a absolute minimum and no reports are available."

Water temperatures have dropped below the mid-40s at Willamette Falls as the water starts to rise once again. Winter steelhead counts which were in double digits for a few days mid-month have dropped to the level of insignificance with fewer than 300 having been counted. Steelhead are all natives above the Falls.

Too high to fish this week, water level and flow are increasing on the McKenzie River.

North and South Santiam river levels are rising and will remain high through the weekend.

Huddelston Pond and Junction City Pond are scheduled for trout planting this week.

Don't wait any longer to winterize your boat if you have not yet done so. It's getting cold outside!

Having trouble with guides icing up? Try aerosol non-stick cooking spray.

The Guide's Forecast – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) predicts and shares his winter steelheading experience, "This week should see some good steelhead fishing conditions as the valley rivers drop into shape. Both the Clackamas and Sandy will fall into prime condition by Thursday or Friday, but the Willamette won't likely green up till next week. Even so, fish will still be caught at Meldrum Bar as savvy anglers know to fish close to shore with big, bright, scented offerings. On the tributaries however, there are so many techniques an angler can employ to catch the spunky steelhead, it often gets confusing as to which one an angler should use. Let's first differentiate between bank fishing and boat fishing strategies. Bank fishermen are more limited, have fewer techniques to choose from and obviously less mobility. The boat angler can employ all the techniques a boat angler has in his arsenal..... PLUS all the tactics a bank fisherman has, just by tossing his anchor and rendering himself stationary. Now sometimes, because of the popularity of specific techniques on certain rivers, i.e. "side-drifting", this isn't always kosher, but for simplicity sake, lets run with it for now. Let's first differentiate between bank fishing and boat fishing strategies and this week I will list and give a brief overview of the philosophy of basic bank fisherman's set of tactics.

"The bank fisherperson has four standard, tried and true steelhead techniques at his disposal. 1. Drift fishing, 2. Hardware fishing, 3. Bobber fishing and 4. Plunking. I will give a brief overview of

all of them but keep in mind there are variations within all of them that are sometimes regional, sometimes more personal.

"First, drift fishing has been around as an old time favorite since the beginning of time (in the steelheaders history book anyway). It is still and always will be a favorite because of one specific detail, "natural drift" or "presentation". Steelhead respond well to a presentation that is natural and drifting at the current's speed. If the presentation is jerky, sideways or moving laterally to the direction of the current, you begin to lose effectiveness. The object is to deploy your offering close to the bottom, usually with ten inches and keep it drifting as naturally and freely as possible. Just as a stick, twig or loose salmon egg would tumble and drift along the bottom. Achieve this and success will easily find you.

"Next on the list is hardware fishing. When we say hardware, we mean lures, usually made of metal, like spinners and spoons..... and sometimes it's accepted to list plugs in this category. These offending lures offer flash and vibration that anger and irritate a fish. Salmonids are very territorial when they enter the rivers on their spawning runs and are often observed chasing smaller fish away. That is until a sweet smelling female of the same species happens along his path, then he softens up to her, protecting her and will fight off smaller males just to keep her company exclusive to himself. This biological traits sets lure fishing apart from natural bait fishing and you are now eliciting the strike of a steelhead by his senses of aggression and territorialism, rather than triggering feeding/olfactory responses. This is often times why the LARGEST, male steelhead and salmon are taken on hardware. They are generally more aggressive just like larger men can be. Politically correct or not, this fact is hard to argue with.

"Bobber fishing for steelhead is relatively newer to the game, but has taken over as a favorite especially for beginners. Reason being that the bobber bite is VISUAL rather than being detected by "feel". For the beginner, differentiating between a rock and the light tug of a steelhead has always been the biggest challenge. But when a bobber goes down, all an angler has to do is see it and react accordingly to make the connection. Bobber fishing lends itself best to slower water speeds and pocket water areas of a stream. Your lure or bait is usually inanimate unlike the offering you would use "hardware fishing". Jigs and bait are both used equally and both get their share of the pie. Like drift fishing you employ a natural, drag free drift but your lure/bait is suspended and moving downstream without dragging bottom. This is as natural as it gets, as long as you can mend your line properly to achieve an un-impeded drift.

"Lastly, plunking for steelhead is a strategy of the early years of the sport and can best be described as, "sit and wait for Mr. Steelhead to come to you". All you have to do is position your bait or lure in a well-travelled lane and patiently wait for a willing contender to run into it. A technique often used in high, colored water where and when the steelhead travel close to shore. Look for the seams adjacent to both eddies and faster moving water that are three to eight feet deep. Favored by old-timers and handicapped fisher people, it is also a more social technique that can include camaraderie, bon fires, a bottle of hooch and sometimes even shelters from the elements.

"At one time or another, a master steelheader has likely tried his or her hand at all these basic approaches (with or without a reasonable amount of success). Pick your favorite style or try them all, they all have their place and time. Next week we will talk about steelhead fishing from a boat and all the basic strategies. Good luck."

North Coast Fishing Report – Highway 30 streams will once again fish after the most recent high water event. The streams have received a large portion of their early returning steelhead but more fish should be on the way. Gnat Creek, Big Creek and the Klaskanine River will all

receive some additional fish but big numbers are not expected. These rivers fish the best when other larger systems are too high to effectively pursue steelhead. Most anglers will target fish up close to the hatchery although fish can be found throughout the river system. The lower portions of these rivers are dominated by private land making access difficult. Steelhead typically are not recycled on these river systems so there really is not a second chance for these fish.

Further south, the Necanicum River deserves a good look. Although boat anglers have had a difficult time accessing the lower reaches, fish were taken there last week in the lower flows. Bank anglers working the upper reaches where there is more public access had better catches. The lower flows in the smaller streams presented their own set of problems as it is much more challenging drift fishing under these conditions. Small baits seem to be the staple for winter steelhead but the lower flows allow for some effective bobber and jig fishing also. Willing fish are most often found at the heads of holes and in water that is between three and 5 foot deep with a broken surface.

The Kilchis River, another small stream option in Tillamook County is also holding fish. There were easily about two dozen steelhead below the logger bridge on the Kilchis over the weekend but no matter what anglers were throwing at them there was very little interest in their offering. Drift boats fishing the lower flows of the Kilchis over the weekend did not fare much better. The Kilchis River seemingly received a poor return of chinook salmon this fall and early winter.

The Wilson River was in much better shape over the weekend, with ideal levels for both boat and bank anglers. Traffic was high with only fair reports coming from anglers pursuing both salmon and steelhead. We witnessed one bank angler take his limit of one salmon and one hatchery steelhead in one hour of fishing from the big boulder just below Mills Bridge. The steelhead was a chrome bright fish about 11 pounds. The fish looked like an early returning broodstock steelhead which may bode well for these fish that typically return later in the year. Alsea River stock fish typically dominate these Tillamook County streams this time of year. Most Wilson River anglers choose to fish the lower reaches of the river in pursuit of fish that ride the tide upstream. Plugs become a more effective tool in the dropping flows but bait typically dominates the catches this time of year for both salmon and steelhead. Anglers targeting salmon will typically back bounce larger clusters of eggs along with spin-n-glo's while backtrollers work Flatfish wrapped with sardines. Anglers that want to effectively fish all types of water will side-drift or drift fish medium-size drift bobbers such as corkies along with medium-size clusters of eggs or sand shrimp tails. In the early morning, tailouts will hold both salmon and steelhead while later in the day, salmon and steelhead will seek different water types for the remainder of the afternoon.

Those fishing small streams for early returning steelhead are still targeting the North Fork Nehalem as well as Three Rivers. As is typically the case, most anglers are targeting fish near the hatcheries from where they were liberated from.

The Nestucca and Trask Rivers also still have options but salmon fishing is fading to nothing. Steelhead returns to the systems are slow right now but will improve as January comes around. These systems will start to see more wild fish come back in mid to late January with the Nestucca River having a late broodstock steelhead option in the same timeframe. Effort and success will remain slight until we progress into the new year. Hatchery steelhead on the Nestucca River are largely bound for Three Rivers.

The Guide's Forecast – Another blow-out is currently upon us and until it peaks, we won't know when the north coast systems will fish again. But here's the river-by-river forecast anyway. Overall, early season steelheading should be slightly past peak but ample numbers should still be around and available when the water conditions allow. Let's get to it:

Highway 30 streams (Klaskanine, Big Creek, Gnat Creek)- (Reprinted from another edition but still has application). 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. (New) Like most early season steelhead systems, the bulk of returning adults should be in the system by now. With this in mind, most will congregate near their release site and will have been worked over pretty good by both ethical anglers and snaggers. There won't be much interest in anything new. It may be best to pocket water fish where you stand a chance at intercepting a new fish to the system. There is a very rare occasion when these more "resident" steelhead will get motivated for a short period of time to commit suicide. They are most likely seeking smaller tributaries or tail-outs in preparation for spawning. That will likely get underway when flows drop for these early run fish.

Necanicum River- (Reprinted from another edition but still has application). 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. (New) One boater last week reported challenging drifting in the lower flows but took a couple of steelhead in the slower drifts. Fish under these conditions don't bite all that aggressively, making him think that he was just snagged on the bottom of the river. He reported that one of the two that he landed was over 10 pounds; a rarity for the early returning fish. Flows are now over the bank but the river drops quickly and may fish as early as the weekend but more likely Sunday if we get the precipitation that is expected. Fish should be well distributed throughout the system but the steelhead returning to this river are notorious for utilizing smaller tributaries for spawning and many will likely be in these smaller systems with the high flows the watershed is now experiencing.

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. 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. (Reprinted from another edition but still has application). (New) Currently out of reach due to high water, it too may fish by the weekend but the early return was likely the strongest and not many "new" fish will be entering the system. This will make bites sporadic and fish will quickly make their way to the hatchery so it will likely remain the best reach to target biters. Bait always produces best in the higher flows and who knows, we may never see the lower flows necessary to target them with bobbers and jigs; at least not anytime soon.

Mainstem Nehalem – (Reprinted from another edition but still has application). 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- (Reprinted from another edition but still has application). 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 won't be fishing 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. (New) You should have read above that we witnessed several dozen steelhead right under the Logger Bridge. Of course those fish may very well be upstream now but my point is, there are fair numbers of fish in the system, the question is, will they bite? The chinook return this year on this system has not been impressive.

Wilson River - (Reprinted from another edition but still has application). 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. (New) It appears that there are some broodstock fish available if what I witnessed over the weekend was real; it appeared the fish I saw caught at Mills Bridge was a higher quality broodstock fish versus an early run Alsea River fish. If you look at the below hydrograph, if the river achieves its peak predicted height, it won't fish until Christmas at the earliest, but that's if you believe the weather prediction. See for yourself, anglers should start to get excited when the graph nears 6.0 feet in height with the best flows between 4.5 and 5.5 foot.



Trask River –(Reprinted from another edition but still has application). 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 will likely receive a few more fresh run steelhead but the bulk of the fish will likely be recycled or of the residualized variety. 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 but not until flows drop back down into shape. Small clusters of eggs will likely produce the best results, especially if those clusters are chinook eggs.

Although action is likely to be fair 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 only be a fair show this late in the season.

Those thinking they may take advantage of the optimum tides in Tillamook Bay this weekend will have to re-think their strategy if the weather kicks up as predicted. Although this same tide series produced good results last year, the late run of chinook was likely in better shape than it is this year. It will be your last chance at a fresh fish before the end of year closure however. It just won't be a very good chance; that is, if you survive the weather to enjoy your fish.....

North coast crabbing? I don't think so.....Clamming.....uh, no.....Don't bother with sturgeon either. There is no worse feeling than full exposure on the bay in December; especially if there is wind and rain. Both are predicted.

Central & South Coast Reports – Whale watching (along with offshore fishing) is on hold for storm watching this week. Rough seas are predicted through the coming weekend.

While the ocean has been inaccessible to recreational crabbing more often than not (which is typical for this time of year), it has been open for this activity since December 1st. Offshore commercial crabbing, delayed to allow Dungeness to reach prime condition, will commence on December 30th.

The Siletz is on the rise at this writing on December 20th but should fish and produce worthwhile winter steelheading as it clears and settles back into shape during Christmas week. This system traditionally produces some large fish.

While the Siuslaw has produced a few winter steelhead this season, it's still early to expect great results. Further, the NOAA predicts water levels to exceed bank-full stage tomorrow, December 20th. While all this water will probably encourage some winters to enter the system, river levels are unlikely to be fishable (seven feet or lower) until after Christmas day.

Tenmile Creek has been producing fin-clipped winter steelhead for those fishing below Elk Creek, the latter of which opens January 1.

Boaters who have braved wind and rain this week to launch for crab at Winchester Bay have enjoyed fair to good results, taking Dungeness that are large, hard and full of meat. Muddy water washing into the bay from the blown Umpqua mainstem along with stormy weather has

hampered jetty fishing efforts. The Umpqua is forecast to be on the rise through the coming weekend.

Crabbing has remained worthwhile at Charleston for those launching in inclement weather.

The lower and middle Rogue will be on the rise through the weekend, during which time fishing will not be an option. Upper Rogue prospects have been decent lately but water is forecast to be rising on Saturday this week and this stretch will be unlikely to fish until the coming week.

The Elk River has been up and down with passing storm fronts this week. High winds have been hammering the southwest corner of Oregon. When it's fishable, there are still a few bright Chinook amidst the fresh winter steelhead. A few opportunities on the Sixes have been productive but so brief that you almost had to be there when they happened.

With Diamond Lake opening on January 1, 2013, ice-fishing enthusiasts will be planning forays to this location. Tens of thousands of large, fat trout await those who do. While the surface of the lake is frozen now, ice fishing will only commence on the first day of the year only if the ice is safe.

Central and Eastern Oregon – A little high and dirty early this week, water levels have started to drop on the lower Deschutes. Steelheading has been slow although catches of reddsides have been decent when the river has been in shape. Travel to the east side may be a challenge so be sure to check road conditions and travel advisories.

Crooked River remains in great shape for fishing, producing good numbers of reddsides and whitefish. Best wintertime results will come upriver near the dam.

Trollers at Crescent Lake are reporting mixed results for mackinaw although better catches seemed to occur on days when the weather moderates. Be prepared for snow and travel over slick roads to try it. Fish over 20 pounds have been landed recently.

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](#) 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.

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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

Yes, as a matter of fact, there is a free e-zine dedicated to catching carp on the fly"

<http://www.carppro.net/>

Brand-new, ad-free fly-tying website. Bookmark it & watch it grow:

<http://whatsthatfly.com/>

Fishing for sharks from the Goodyear Blimp (video!):

<http://www.grindtv.com/outdoor/blog/49297/fishing+for+sharks+from+the+good+year+blimp+it+happened+in+1934/>



GOOD LUCK!