

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- A valid 2013 fishing and shellfish license is required for the new year; available both at local retail stores and through the ODF&W web site.

Water conditions have stabilized on the valley rivers and anglers will observe a slow drop for the next few days. The Willamette is clearing up and should provide some better fishing for the start of the New Year for both sturgeon and winter steelhead. Steelhead fishing at Meldrum Bar will likely improve with this week's dryer weather. Catch and release sturgeon fishing is fair but steady.

The Clackamas River is holding at optimum flow for boaters and bank anglers alike. "Average" would be a good word to describe last week's steelhead catch and this week should produce similar results.

Sandy River anglers experienced respectable steelhead fishing last week and that will likely continue through the middle of this week when flows drop below prime. Low water tactics will then be in order and should account for a few fish till the next rainstorm. East winds have been a problem this week.

Water levels will be dropping over the coming week on the Santiam system. There are few steelhead around although winter counts have started to pick up at Willamette Falls.

Northwest – With a dramatic improvement in the weather, anglers have taken to area streams with steelhead on tap for the next several months. Although anglers will transition from the early run steelhead to later returning wild and hatchery broodstock fish, both are available during the month of January.

Larger systems will fish well into the weekend with the Wilson, Nestucca and Trask offering the best opportunities for quality wild and hatchery steelhead. Several wild fish were taken at the Dam Hole on the Trask River late last week; this spot often produces best in higher flows. The Wilson produced fair results for anglers targeting steelhead using high water techniques.

Smaller systems such as the North Fork Nehalem, Necanicum, Kilchis and Three Rivers all have fish but are skittish due to low, clear water. Bobber and jigs or small baits may still take fish throughout the week and weekend. The peak return of adults to these systems has passed and anglers will start to find more spent fish in the coming weeks.

A late-season flurry of winter chinook were taken in the Ghost Hole last week, a last hurrah as these fish are no longer allowed to be pursued on any north coast system until early April. Steelhead anglers may still encounter chinook while pursuing steelhead on north coast systems but chinook must be released unharmed.

Soft late-afternoon high tides will bode well for crabbers but the commercial season has

opened which will slow the recreational catch. Larger adult males often move offshore this time of year anyway. Tillamook was slow for crabbing last weekend but the lower Columbia still produced fair results. Commercial gear is working the lower Columbia at this time however.

Despite a cool, east wind influence, no reprieve is in sight for offshore recreation.

Southwest- Winter steelhead have started entering most southwest rivers. With little precipitation in the forecast, they should remain in good condition and productive for the coming week.

As good as offshore bottom fishing can be in the winter, opportunities are rare and ocean forecasts for the coming week aren't optimistic.

Steelheading has been fair to good on the Alsea over the past week.

Large steelhead have been spotted at the fish ladder on the North Umpqua at Roseburg. While these steelhead are predominately wild, the South Umpqua offers the best shot at a hatchery keeper. The Umpqua system will be dropping and clearing this week.

The Coos River is coming into good condition for fishing. Millicoma steelheaders have been reporting spotty results.

Good fishing on the Coquille over the past Sunday made for a crowded river on New Year's Eve but steelheading slowed.

Winter steelhead have been entering the lower Rogue for weeks. The level will be dropping this week with flows optimum and fairly stable by the coming weekend. Expect low clear water on the Grants Pass stretch with flows fairly steady and winters passing through. Expect low, clear water on the upper Rogue.

While plunking was the order of the day on the Chetco over the past weekend, with the water dropping and clearing this week, side-drifters are likely to be most successful through the coming weekend.

The Elk River has produced a mix of late chinook and winter steelhead over the past weekend but is now low and clear.

Diamond Lake opened to year-around fishing on New Year's Day. About two inches of ice is covering the lakes surface under three feet of snow. Access is with snowshoes only until the ice thickens but fishing should be good.

Eastern – Results for redsides are fair to good on the lower Deschutes with midge, caddis and Blue-Winged-Olive patterns effective. Steelheading is slow. Middle Deschutes waters will be gradually on the rise this week.

Crooked River fly anglers are doing well with best results coming on Blue-Winged-Olive patterns during the afternoons when air temperatures have increased although some

days it doesn't get above freezing.

SW Washington- As is typical this time of year, early season steelheading is slowing for quality fish with just a few fresh fish remaining on the Cowlitz, Lewis, Kalama and Washougal systems, in order of preference. Returns were unimpressive in the early season, likely to mimic late season returns as well.

Smelt often make their way into the mainstem Columbia this time of year but will remain off-limits to dippers and netters again this year. There will have to be substantial evidence of a burgeoning population in order to justify another consumptive opportunity.

Soapbox Update: Here's a great op-ed article from Carmen McDonald:

<http://www.ifish.net/board/blog.php?b=40>

Columbia River Fishing Report – Nothing has changed from last week although you need to have the new 2013 license to angle these waters.

Ooops, another significant change from last week is the fact that anglers are now required to use barbless hooks on the mainstem in pursuit of salmon and steelhead. Numerous tributary fisheries are also included in the new barbless hood rule. Here are some of the tributaries now requiring the use of barbless hooks:

FISHING

Fall chinook fishing closed Dec. 31.

Beginning Jan. 1, 2013 the following tributaries of the Columbia will be restricted to barbless hooks when fishing for salmon, steelhead and trout:

- Youngs River from Hwy 101 bridge upstream to markers at confluence with Klaskanine River.
- Lewis and Clark River from Hwy 101 bridge upstream to Alternate Hwy 101 bridge.
- Walluski River from confluence with Youngs River upstream to Hwy 202 bridge.
- Gnat Creek from railroad bridge upstream to Aldrich Point Road.
- Knappa/Blind Slough select areas.

The Guide's Forecast – The commercial crab fleet has entered the lower Columbia. This will put a serious damper on lower Columbia recreational effort and success. Tides this week are big anyway. Don't count on banner results.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reports, "Water conditions have stabilized on the valley rivers and anglers will observe a slow drop for the next few days. The Willamette is clearing up and should provide some better fishing for the start of the new year for both sturgeon and winter steelhead. Steelhead fishing at Meldrum Bar will likely improve with this week's drier weather. The Clackamas River is holding at optimum flow for boaters and bank anglers alike. "Average" would be a good word to describe last week's steelhead catch and this week should produce similar results. Sandy River anglers experienced respectable steelhead fishing last week and that will

likely continue through the middle of this week when flows drop below prime. Low water tactics will then be in order and should account for a few fish till the next rainstorm."

Steelheaders are reminded that as of January 1, 2013, only barbless hooks may be used on the lower Willamette and in the Multnomah Channel. The ODFW will meet on January 30th to determine when (and if) sturgeon retention will be allowed on the lower Willamette.

McKenzie flows have dropped below 4,000 cfs at Vida with dry weather this week although the water temperature is very low.

Detroit Reservoir often fishes well in the winter time and that has been the case over the past week. Be aware that any snow or ice will make a four-wheel-drive vehicle a necessity to launch and retrieve a boat. Bank anglers using Power Bait and boat trollers are taking good numbers of nice-sized trout.

The Guide's Forecast – More great tips and techniques from **pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** who writes this week on Plugging for winter steelhead:

"Plugging, or "hot-shotting" as it used to be called is one of my favorite methods for catching winter steelhead. It took hold in Northern California and Southern Oregon about fifty years ago with the introduction of the Edie Pope Hot Shot. Fishermen on the Klamath River had been catching steelhead on bass plugs like the Tadpolly, so Edie Pope had the bright idea to make a diving plug that sported steelhead and salmon friendly colors. Soon after, "hot-shotting" was a standard drift boat technique from the NorCal to B.C and still today it's a very effective and often deadly method.

"The Reason: In a nutshell, the concept of back-trolling plugs is to back your offering straight down the fish holding water and force the fish to either retreat or attack. When you have two to five wiggling, rattling and annoying intruders slowly backing down the river, the steelhead get agitated and usually start their retreat downstream. Only the most aggressive (often large males) steelhead attack at first sight of the lure. If they try to move sideways, they only run into another pesky plug, so the only alternative is downstream. As the retreating fish or fishes slip downstream and their tails start to touch the rocks as they near the tail out, a quick decision has to be made and it can go either way. Get out of Dodge and slip over the edge to find more peaceful holding water.....or attack the little SOB that's trying to run the steelhead out of his/her territory. I have always thought that's why most plug takes happen closer to the tail-out than in the upper and middle sections of the drift. It's the fact that salmonids are very territorial when on their freshwater spawning run that makes them so vulnerable to the "wall of death", or plugging as we know it.

The Approach: "It's super important that all your plugs are fished the same distance below the boat. Not to say that if you stagger them that you won't catch any, but your catch rate will be significantly higher if you run them all the same length; that length should be anywhere from 30-60 feet. In murky, shallow water 30 feet is usually sufficient, in clearer or deeper water 45-60 works better. There are many variables that dictate the distance. Individual lure brands, sizes, line and leader diameter, water depth and speed and as mentioned the degree of clarity of the water all determine proper distance. Also of great importance in the approach is to work your plugs as slowly as possible. A speedy passer-by might not be as threatening but a slow moving, loitering intruder will more often get the boot. Work your lure deep into the tail-out until they are digging into the gravel before you pull them back in, as many takes are in less than two feet of water.

The Strategy: "As you come down into a new run, be looking for the most likely holding water. Sometimes it's river left and other times its down the center or river right, just make sure you have a plan before you get into the hole. Keep in mind that your lure will be fishing 30-60 feet downstream of the boat, so you want to get them in the water and hunting before you run over the fish. Once all the plugs are deployed, take a few good dig's with the oars to get the plugs down to the steelhead's level, then deliver the onslaught in a slow, rhythmic crawl downstream. The best pluggers find a lane and work it over with little side to side variance, but sometimes moving laterally from one side to the other pays off.

The Weapons: "There are so many steelhead and salmon plugs on the market now, that to go over each of them in this short article would be impossible. But what I will do and to make it easier for those wanting to take up the art of plugging. I will simply list three or four of my favorite models. #1 the Luhr Jensen K-11X Kwifish, it fishes well in the deeper runs of medium to slow speeds. #2 the Heddon/Pradco "Tadpolly", with or without a rattle it's deadly in most situations. #3 the Luhr Jensen size 30 Hot Shot, this highly buoyant plug works best in lower flows and in shallower faster runs, it also works great well into the tail-out where other plugs just dig into the rocks. #4 the new Yakima Bait Co. 3.5 Mag Lip, another deep diver, that runs true in slow, medium and faster flows, a very universal lure. I will always pick lure color AFTER I pick the proper size and diving ability of a lure. In other words, color is a secondary decision, but I constantly do well with metallic finishes in blue, red, pink and silver. On darker days or when the water is murky I like Fluorescent red, white and black. I also believe some contrast to the lure makes it more life-like, so combinations of these colors is usually a theme on most of the lures in my tackle box. Polka dots or eyes are a hot tip and a Sharpie permanent marker can help you achieve this.

The Pay-Off: "Plugging for steelhead will put fish in the boat when other methods prove difficult for an array of reasons. For a guide with clients that are unable to accurately cast into the wind, or when introducing kids to steelhead fishing, or when the weather is just too stinkin' cold to expose your fingers to the elements. Whatever the reason, plugging has put tens of thousands of steelhead in the coffin and accounted for almost as many released native brutes that swam away with a sore lip. Plus, it's an easy technique to master, for both the beginner or seasoned steelheader alike. Even with the more popular methods of side drifting or bobber and jig fishing taking center stage, plugging will always be a solid strategy that gets it done.

"For a more in-depth explanation, check out Plug Fishing for Steelhead by Mike Laverty, available through Amato Publications. Just remember to be courteous and if there are bank anglers present or other boats already fishing with a other methods, give way and find another piece of water.

"Good luck and tight lines."

Try brightly colored flies in larger sizes to tempt winter trout on the McKenzie. It will be on the drop over the week to come.

There will be little of interest to anglers on the Santiams until sufficient numbers of native steelhead cross Willamette Falls to create a decent catch-and-release fishery here.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – ODFW sez, "Beginning Jan. 1, 2013, barbless hooks will be required from the mouth to the 99E Bridge when fishing for salmon, steelhead and trout."

North Coast Fishing Report – With dropping and clearing conditions on the north coast, steelheaders will finally get to fish some of the larger systems containing a higher percentage of wild and broodstock fish. Smaller systems will begin to get too clear to expect success and cooler air temperatures will make early morning traveling dangerous and first light fish a bit more reluctant than late morning/early afternoon fish.

Fishing this week has been fair but most experienced anglers putting in time have found a mix of spent early season fish with an occasional fresh run hatchery fish. We'll detail each north coast stream in the forecast section but reports coming in from small streams are showing results typical of low, cold and clear conditions; a rare take-home fish. These small systems include the North Fork Nehalem, Necanicum, Kilchis and Three Rivers. All have fish but most are reluctant to bite and the bulk of the fish in these systems entered in late November or early December, making them less than ideal for table fare.

Larger systems are getting the most attention right now with the Wilson, Trask and to a lesser degree, the Nestucca as an occasional broodstock fish is being taken along with an even rarer fresh early season steelhead. Spawned out hatchery fish are often willing biters this time of year and will make up the bulk of the catch for the next several weeks.

Chinook season on the north coast is now closed but it closed with a bang. Several late season chinook were taken in the Ghost Hole last week and a few biters made it into the lower Wilson as well. There will be a few straggler chinook maybe even into March but anglers are reminded that all salmon must be released unharmed through April 1st.

With the good chinook bite, bay anglers have been pursuing salmon of sturgeon. Now that salmon season is closed, when tides favor sturgeon fishers again, anglers will be back out there.

Crabbing was poor this week with fair effort over the weekend in preparation for the New Year's holiday. Tillamook Bay crabbers had to work for a single limit on the incoming tide and the commercial fleet put their pots out 3 days prior to the December 31st opener. It was a bountiful first day for the commercial crabbers. I've only had one opportunity to sport crab in early December and my observation is that the large keeper males tend to move offshore this time of year, making it difficult for the sport fleet to access them.

Another round of rough seas kept bars closed to recreational boaters. Maybe that will change soon.

The Guide's Forecast – We'll break up the north coast rivers and give anglers some insight as to what systems should produce best this week. Be SURE to check the Sandy and Clack sections too however as **pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** gives excellent detail on plug pulling this week. Chris has been a TGF contributor for many months now, giving excellent insight on the Sandy, Clack and Willamette River fisheries as well as insider tips on how to get the job done using different techniques in our NW fisheries.

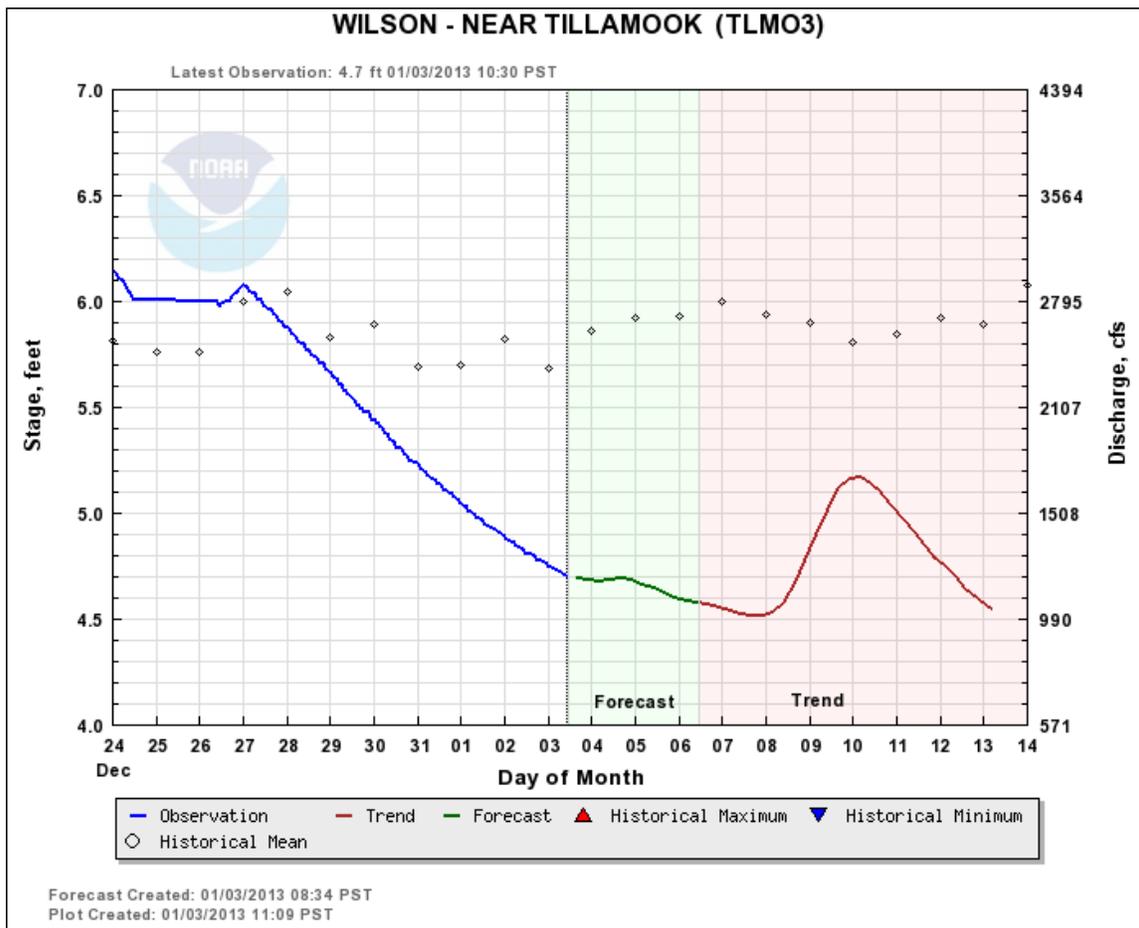
Back to the NW corner, small systems will all produce the same results this week with low clear water conditions underway. The Highway 30 streams along with the Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem, Kilchis and Three Rivers will all begin to produce mostly spent early run steelhead, making their way back downstream, past a gauntlet of predators. A rare fresh fish will be in the mix but it will be a rare occasion. Bright hens are quite common here and some may even have orange flesh but if you see a sunken belly, it's a pretty clear indication that this fish has spawned. Oftentimes, the belly doesn't sink until after you've dispatched the fish.

These rivers will be low and clear this week and fish especially spooky. They're already small so given the current and forecasted water conditions, you'll have to look to the deepest, darkest water to find any willing biters. You'll also have to approach them rather stealthily. Bobbers and jigs cast from a distance or very small baits with light leaders will be a necessary approach. You'll have to fish amongst the snags so plan on losing a lot of gear. One angler spoke of early morning success using split-shot and shrimp tails this week to give you an idea how light of lead you should consider.

Most anglers this week will focus on the larger systems as they will finally begin to fish effectively. The problem here is that anglers will largely experience what we are seeing on the smaller systems; a lack of fresh fish.

The Wilson, Nestucca and to a lesser degree the Trask should all harbor a mix of a rare fresh and plenty of spent early run steelhead, an occasional early broodstock steelhead and a rare colored up chinook. The water will look good however! If I was to choose the best option of those listed, the Wilson will likely be a top prospect. With fair amounts of snow still in the mountains, flows are forecasted to remain stable through the weekend with even the upper drifts still attainable although boaters need to be aware of the "Rock Garden" when the Wilson begins to drop below 4.7' on the river gauge. All drifts on these three systems should be producing but the upper Trask would be hazardous at this stage too however.

Here is the forecast for the Wilson River into next week:



Water temperatures are dropping, and that's not such a good thing. As you can see by this graph, it's below 40 degrees now, making many fish rather lethargic. Once temperatures stabilize however, action should pick up and especially when they start on the rise too:



Although side-drifting will remain the most likely technique for boaters to employ, plug pulling should also be an effective method in the dropping flows and can at times be quite effective when everyone is side-drifting. Bank anglers should stick to driftfishing bait but on some systems, bobber and jigs may become effective, especially in the upper reaches where fish are more likely to hold and flows aren't as intense as they are in the lower reaches. Don't overlook the fabled pink worm either as it becomes a favorite under these water conditions.

Wrapping up the north coast options is the Nehalem. This system gets mostly wild fish and action should start to pick up this month, particularly towards the latter half. But, you have to take it when you can get it and this system hasn't fished at all this season and should be coming into shape by the weekend. Flows will still be high however and given the fact there won't be a lot of steelhead present, it's not a hot prospect but those versed in the secrets of this north coast gem should find some opportunities here throughout the month, when the flows and color allow.

Although not a minus tide, sturgeon fishing is an option on Tillamook Bay this weekend. Sand shrimp in the west and middle channels should produce on the outgoing tide, especially with the likely exit of most of the crab population due to the abundance of fresh water this winter.

For the first time in a long time, the offshore forecast seems to hold promise. Still too far to feel confident, if the prediction comes through, Saturday could offer some offshore opportunity for both crab and rockfish. Here is the offshore weather breakdown:

FRI

S WIND 5 TO 10 KT...BACKING TO SE IN THE AFTERNOON. WIND WAVES 1 FT. W SWELL 8 FT AT 10 SECONDS.

FRI NIGHT

SE WIND 5 TO 10 KT WITH GUSTS TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 1 FT. W SWELL 6 FT AT 12 SECONDS.

SAT

SE WIND 5 TO 10 KT...RISING TO 10 TO 15 KT IN THE AFTERNOON. WIND WAVES 1 FT. W SWELL 6 FT AT 12 SECONDS. CHANCE OF RAIN.

SAT NIGHT

S WIND 5 TO 10 KT. WIND WAVES 1 FT. W SWELL 8 FT AT 15 SECONDS. CHANCE OF RAIN.

SUN

S WIND 5 TO 10 KT. WIND WAVES 1 FT. W SWELL 12 FT.

MON

S WIND 10 TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 10 FT.

Central & South Coast Reports – Following two delays in December, Commercial crabbers got to work this week. Tens of thousands of pounds of Dungeness have been brought to ports although crabbers claim there aren't as many as they had hoped nor are they as large as last season.

New for 2013 is the requirement to obtain a permit and use a free harvest card to record recreational rock scallops. This is actually the same form required for recreational abalone takes since 1996 with space for scallops. These forms allow the ODFW to gain knowledge and monitor these critters.

Some folks love 'em, some do not but for those who target purple varnish calms, the limit is doubled to 72 in 2013.

Winter steelhead fishing has been worthwhile on the Siletz River where side-drifters are taking some very nice fish.

Bottom fishing is fair to good out of Newport, lingcod catches have been slow to fair while ocean crabbing is fair. Crabbing has been decent in Yaquina Bay, yielding limits or near-limits of nice, hard winter Dungeness.

Winter steelhead catches have been decent on the Alsea for both boat and bank anglers. There seems to be a mix of one, two and three salt fish in the system.

The Siuslaw River has produced steelhead this week and amongst them, a few big ones. Fishing pressure has been high here, however.

Other options for winter steelhead action include lower Tenmile Creek which has been providing fair to good fishing for a while and Eel Creek which opened January 1st and should have fresh fish present.

Winchester Bay is producing fair numbers of Dungeness for boaters who report having to sort many undersized crab. The Umpqua mainstem is clear after weeks of running off-color. Water is predicted to be gradually dropping through the coming weekend. Targeting steelhead on the South Umpqua will offer the best shot at a hatchery keeper but this fishery really doesn't get underway until February. Incidentally, instructions on the reverse of the 2013 salmon/steelhead harvest cards, which explain how to properly enter catches, use the flies-only section of the North Umpqua as an example and state that retaining a native fish is allowed on that stretch. That is incorrect. No non-hatchery steelhead may be retained anywhere on the Umpqua.

ODFW sez, "Starting on Jan. 1, 2013, steelhead anglers in the Coos, Coquille, and Tenmile basins will be able to retain one additional adipose fin-clipped steelhead per day for a total aggregate of 3 adult fish harvested daily."

While there have been few trying, boats launching at Coos Bay and crabbing deeper areas of the bay have been taking good numbers of Dungeness. The East and West Forks of the Millicoma have been getting quite a bit of pressure recently and while it's not producing great numbers of steelhead, the ones that have been taken are good-sized.

Water conditions on the lower Rogue should be conducive to catching the fresh winter steelhead making their way upriver now. Levels are forecast to be gradually dropping over the next several days and the color is good. Water conditions are good on the middle Rogue with the better chance for a steelhead encounter in the stretch below Grants Pass. The Applegate River, a tributary which empties into the Rogue about six miles below Grants Pass, opened January 1st and is producing a few trout. According to the 2013 regulations, steelhead may also be taken and anglers report hooking a few. As of the New Year, anglers on the upper Rogue are once again allowed to use bait. With light pressure, decent water conditions and the hatchery reporting that summer steelhead are continuing to return to the facility, the upper river could be worth the trip. Small clusters of cured eggs will get the attention of steelhead. It is worth taking note that the delineation of the upper Rogue has changed since the removal of Gold Ray Dam. It now officially starts downriver at the Fishers Ferry Boat Ramp.

As the Chetco has dropped and cleared, winter steelhead catches have been picking up. Flows are predicted to continue moderating into the coming week.

While the winter run is just getting started on the Winchuck River, stealthy steelheaders have been taking a few from the crystal clear water here. This one will be a good bet as the next round of rainfall puts a little color in it.

Without precipitation in southwest Oregon, the Elk River is low and clear. Prior to the river dropping, catches of Chinook were slowing as winter steelhead numbers picked up. Once some rainfall puts a little more water and color in the river, it should be on for steelheaders.

There has been no update on Diamond Lake conditions which indicated 10 inches of compacted snow atop two inches of ice as of January 1st. Anglers in snow shoes will be safe to ice fish in these conditions, however. A life jacket might be a good idea as well. Stay clear of areas where feeder streams enter as well as the lake outlet. The few who tried ice fishing Diamond since the opener on January 1st have caught fish. Trout are running 12 to 16 inches and a few eight fish

limits have been taken. The lake will remain open for year around fishing. See **Random Links**, below, to check local roads.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Steelhead have been caught on the lower Deschutes this week although numbers are down this year & the latest reports indicate it's still slow. On the other hand, fishing for reddsides has been good, particularly in the 11 AM to 2 PM window when midges, Blue-Winged-Olives and caddis are hatching. The water level is a little high this week to fish at its best. Middle Deschutes fishers are taking fair numbers of whitefish and the occasional brown trout in icy conditions.

As is often the case, winter trout fishing is decent on the Metolius although this challenging river can test an angler's patience and technique. Fishing during the mid-day Blue-Winged-Olive hatch will tip the odds in your favor. Just be certain to stay below the Allingham Bridge as it's closed upstream of that point.

Fall River is fishing well now for fly anglers who are taking fair-sized rainbows and the occasional brook trout.

Lake Billy Chinook has been productive for bull trout. Over the past weekend, optimistic trollers without downriggers caught some keepers. Using downriggers will take better numbers and larger fish as LBC bulls can and will top 10 pounds. Be prepared for cold and snow with morning temperatures in the single digits.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report for January 2013

Updated on December 28, 2012

North Puget Sound

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

Winter has arrived, but anglers still have opportunities to hook hatchery steelhead on several streams and blackmouth salmon in Puget Sound. Weather will be a major factor in deciding where to fish; if rivers are out of shape from heavy rain, anglers may want to head out onto Puget Sound for blackmouth salmon.

The San Juan Islands traditionally reward salmon fishers with some of the highest catches during winter months. Before heading out, anglers can check [creel reports](#) for information on catch and effort in Puget Sound. Recreational fishery samplers with WDFW collect the information each week at fishing access sites throughout Puget Sound.

Areas open throughout January for **salmon** fishing include marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands), 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner), Edmonds Fishing Pier in Marine Area 9 and Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton). Anglers fishing those marine areas have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook salmon. The rest of Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet) opens for salmon fishing Jan. 16 under the same rules.

In freshwater, several rivers are open for hatchery steelhead fishing, including the Nooksack, Skagit, Stillaguamish, Snohomish, Skykomish, Snoqualmie and Green rivers. "If the rivers fall

back into shape, fishing for hatchery steelhead should be decent in early January," said Bob Leland, steelhead program manager for WDFW. "Anglers usually find bright fish through the month."

Leland reminds anglers that fishing for steelhead and other game fish will close in January in Puget Sound and along the Strait of Juan de Fuca to protect wild steelhead. The early closures will affect the Nooksack, Skagit, Stillaguamish, Snohomish, Green and Puyallup river systems, along with several streams along the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

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

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

Meanwhile, a section of Tokul Creek – from the Fish Hatchery Road Bridge to the posted cable boundary marker downstream of the hatchery intake – has opened for trout, hatchery steelhead and other game fish, ahead of its Jan. 15 scheduled opening date. The early opener was possible because the hatchery facility is ahead of schedule collecting winter steelhead broodstock.

For more information on Puget Sound and Strait of Juan de Fuca steelhead seasons, check fishing regulations and emergency rule changes on the [WDFW website](#).

Winter is prime time to jig for **squid** in Puget Sound. Good spots include the Elliott Bay Pier in Seattle and the Edmonds Pier. More information is available on the department's [squid fishing webpage](#). Information on fishing piers is available [here](#).

The **Puget Sound crab fishery** closes at sunset Dec. 31. Crab fishers are required to report their activity to WDFW by Feb. 1, whether or not they actually fished or caught Dungeness crab. To submit catch reports, crabbers may send their catch record card to WDFW by mail or file their report on the department's licensing website. The mailing address is WDFW CRC Unit, 600 Capitol Way N., Olympia, WA 98501-1091. The [online reporting system](#) is available Jan. 1-Feb. 1. For more information on catch record cards, visit WDFW's [catch record card webpage](#).

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

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

Anglers have several winter fishing opportunities, including salmon in the marine waters of Puget Sound, hatchery steelhead on several streams, and razor clams at ocean beaches.

Early in January, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) will proceed with an evening **razor clam** dig at several ocean beaches if marine toxin tests are favorable. The tentative opening dates and evening low tides are:

- Jan. 8, Tuesday, 3:44 p.m., -0.2 ft., Twin Harbors
- Jan. 9, Wednesday, 4:38 p.m., -0.9 ft., Twin Harbors
- Jan. 10, Thursday, 5:27 p.m., -1.3 ft., Twin Harbors, Long Beach, Copalis,
- Jan. 11, Friday, 6:14 p.m., -1.6 ft., Twin Harbors, Long Beach, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Jan. 12, Saturday, 6:58 p.m., -1.5 ft., Twin Harbors, Long Beach, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Jan. 13, Sunday, 7:41 p.m., -1.2 ft., Twin Harbors

- Jan. 14, Monday, 8:22 p.m., -0.6 ft., Twin Harbors

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

- Jan. 25, Friday, 5:44 p.m., +0.0 ft., Long Beach, Twin Harbors
- Jan. 26, Saturday, 6:18 p.m., -0.2 ft., Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Jan. 27, Sunday, 6:50 p.m., -0.2 ft., Long Beach, Twin Harbors

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, January is typically one of the best months for **hatchery steelhead** fishing on the north coast rivers, said Kirt Hughes, regional fishery manager for WDFW. "The rivers are running cold and the snow is sticking to the higher elevations," he said. "If the weather holds up, fishing for hatchery steelhead should be great through 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**. Information on weekly steelhead catches in the Quillayute River system and the Hoh River are available on [WDFW's website](#).

Hughes reminds anglers that they will not be allowed to catch and keep **wild steelhead** on eight Olympic Peninsula rivers until mid-February. The annual opening date for wild steelhead retention is Feb. 16 on the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc rivers. Those eight rivers are the only waters in Washington where wild steelhead retention is allowed.

Later in January, anglers might want to try fishing for hatchery steelhead in the Chehalis River Basin, said Hughes. "Anglers who don't want to make the trip to the north coast rivers should find some good fishing for hatchery steelhead in the basin, particularly at the Chehalis, Satsop and Wynoochee rivers," he said.

Freshwater anglers looking to hook salmon also have opportunities in January. Anglers can find **late-run hatchery coho** salmon in some of the region's rivers, including the Humptulips, Satsop and Willapa, said Hughes.

On Puget Sound, Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound) remains open for **salmon**. However, regulations for Marine Area 13 change Jan. 1, when anglers will have a daily limit of one salmon. Anglers should be aware that salmon fisheries in marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon Island) and 12 (Hood Canal) are closed in January.

In the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Marine Area 6 (Eastern Strait) remains open for salmon through April 10. Anglers fishing Marine Area 6 have a daily limit of two salmon, but must release wild chinook. Marine Area 5 (Seiku) is closed to salmon fishing.

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

Anglers can also check [creel reports](#) for information on catch and effort in Puget Sound. Recreational fishery samplers with WDFW collect the information each week at fishing access sites throughout Puget Sound.

The **Puget Sound crab fishery** closes at sunset on Dec. 31, and crabbers are reminded that they are required to report their winter catch to WDFW by Feb. 1. Reports are due for the winter season, whether or not crabbers actually fished or caught Dungeness crab. To submit catch reports, crabbers may send their catch record card to WDFW by mail or file their report on the department's licensing website. The mailing address is WDFW CRC Unit, 600 Capitol Way N., Olympia, WA 98501-1091. The [online reporting system](#) is available Jan. 1-Feb. 1. For more information on catch record cards, visit WDFW's [catch record card webpage](#).

Southwest Washington

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

Winter steelhead are still the name of the game for many anglers in the lower Columbia River Basin, although several other fisheries are beginning to compete for anglers' attention. Sturgeon fishing reopens Jan. 1 from the mouth of the Columbia to McNary Dam, and more than 30,000 catchable-size rainbow trout will be planted along with any excess broodstock in lakes and ponds around the region by the end of the month.

Anglers opting to fish for steelhead, salmon, or cutthroat trout should be aware that **barbless hooks** will be required on a large section of the mainstem Columbia River starting Jan. 1. The new rule issued by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) in late December will be in effect from the mouth of the river – including the north jetty – to the state border with Oregon, 17 miles upstream from McNary Dam.

Anglers may still use single-point, double-point, or treble hooks in those waters, so long as any barbs have been filed off or pinched down.

State fishery managers said the rule is necessary to make Washington's fishing regulations consistent with those in Oregon, where that state's fish and wildlife commission recently banned the use of barbed hooks on the Columbia River as part of a broad-based measure to restructure the fishery.

"Fisheries can be very difficult to manage under two different sets of rules," said Guy Norman, WDFW southwest region director. "The two states have worked together for nearly a hundred years to maintain regulatory consistency on the river that serves as a common boundary."

In recent months, both states have discussed a ban on barbed hooks as part of the restructuring plan, which also includes phasing out the use of gillnets by non-tribal fishers in the mainstem Columbia River. The rule issued in December will remain in effect until further notice.

For **steelhead**, the Cowlitz River is still the best bet in January, although the Lewis, Kalama, Grays, Washougal, Elochoman rivers – and Salmon Creek in Clark County – are also producing fish, said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist stationed in Vancouver.

As usual, river conditions basically determine success at this time of year," Hymer said. "Most anglers do best when water levels are rising or dropping. It's a lot harder to catch steelhead in the peaks and troughs."

As with all steelhead fisheries in southwest Washington, only hatchery fish with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar may be retained. All wild steelhead must be released. The daily limit on all area rivers is two marked, hatchery-reared steelhead.

Starting Jan. 1, anglers may also retain up to two hatchery adult **chinook salmon** per day on the mainstem Columbia from the I-5 Bridge downstream and in the Cowlitz and Deep rivers. On the Lewis and Kalama rivers, the daily limit is one hatchery adult chinook per day.

While the bulk of the **spring chinook** run isn't expect to arrive until March, Hymer said anglers will likely start catching early-arriving fish by late January or early February. "It's good to keep the chinook regulations in mind, even if you're fishing for steelhead," he said. "Somebody has to catch the first springer of the year, and it could be you."

WDFW recently released preliminary forecasts of Columbia River salmon and steelhead returns for 2013, predicting an upriver run of 141,400 adult spring chinook, down from last year's return of 203,100 fish. Approximately 180,500 sockeye and 73,500 summer chinook are also expected to return at levels below last year. However, the outlook for upriver bright fall chinook shows improvement over 2012.

The preliminary forecasts, along with anticipated fishing seasons, are posted on [WDFW's website](#). Current fishing rules are described in 2012-13 [Fishing in Washington](#) pamphlet and river conditions are available from the [Northwest River Forecast](#).

Rather catch **sturgeon**? All fishing areas will open to anglers Jan. 1 from the mouth of the Columbia River to McNary Dam under the rules outlined in the 2012-13 [Sport Fishing Rules](#) pamphlet. Like last year, retention fishing is allowed daily in all waters except the stretch from the Wauna powerlines upstream to Bonneville Dam (including all adjacent Washington tributaries), where retention is limited to Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. The daily limit is one white sturgeon per day with an annual limit of five fish.

Angling will be prohibited in the slough formed by Sand Island along the Oregon shore east of Rooster Rock State Park on the Columbia River.

One change adopted by fishery managers from Washington and Oregon in December establishes a winter season in the Bonneville Pool that will run through Feb. 10 or until 1,150 sturgeon are caught, whichever comes first. The goal of that fishery is to preserve an estimated 850 fish for a summer fishery.

But broader **regulatory changes** may lie ahead when fishery managers meet Jan. 30 to establish new guidelines for the 2013 sturgeon and spring chinook seasons. In December, the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission held back 10 percent of the lower-river sturgeon quota for conservation purposes and reduced the annual catch limit to one legal-sized fish per angler in response to ongoing concerns about declining sturgeon populations. The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission has directed WDFW Director Phil Anderson to seek an even tighter catch quota during upcoming negotiations.

"Washington anglers won't be affected by any of these developments in January, but should keep an eye on the department's website for possible changes in the months ahead," said Brad James, a WDFW fish biologist. The upcoming season-setting meeting, which is open to the public, will be held Jan. 30 at 10 a.m. at the Sheraton Portland Airport Hotel, 8235 Northeast Airport Way, in Portland.

Another option is to head for a local lake and catch some **trout**. Through January, WDFW plans to stock more than 30,000 catchable-size rainbows – plus any available excess broodstock – in 13 lakes and reservoirs around the region.

Those trout were raised at state hatcheries in Goldendale and Vancouver with the intent of providing winter fishing opportunities in the southwest region, said John Weinheimer, another WDFW fish biologist.

“We want to give area anglers a chance to get outdoors in the wintertime and catch some fish,” Weinheimer said. “All of these waters can be fished from shore, so you don’t need a boat and a lot of gear to get in on the action.”

Weather and road conditions allowing, WDFW plans to stock catchable-size rainbows in Fort Borst Park Pond (1,500) in Lewis County; Silver Lake (4,000), Sacajawea Lake (3,000), Horseshoe Lake (2,000) and Kress Lake (2,000) in Cowlitz County; Battleground Lake (2,000) and Kline Pond (2,000) in Clark County; Icehouse Lake (817) and Little Ash Lake (1,000) in Skamania County; and Rowland Lake (3,000), Spearfish Lake (1,800) and Maryhill Pond (500) in Klickitat County.

But when it comes to **eulachon smelt**, Hymer said there will be no fishing of any kind this year. Once abundant in the Columbia River Basin, eulachon were listed for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act in May 2010. Since then, Washington and Oregon have closed all sport and commercial dipping in the Columbia River system. All marine and freshwater areas in Washington are also closed to fishing for eulachon smelt.

Eastern Washington

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

As wintery weather waxes and wanes throughout the month of January, anglers need to be careful about ice conditions on waterways. “Shelf ice” along the shorelines of rivers and streams can be hazardous and lake fishing on and through ice is only safe after extended day and nighttime below freezing temperatures.

Randall Osborne, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) central district fish biologist in Spokane, reports winter season **rainbow trout** lakes – Hog Canyon and Fourth of July – had been fishing well in late December when ice started forming near the shorelines.

“Given the nighttime freezing/daytime thawing patterns we’ve had, I’m pretty sure any ice out there is not safe to fish on yet,” Osborne said. “Until we get a week or more of continued freezing and ice is deep enough to safely support anglers, the fishing will be from shore if open spots can be found for casting. Finding those spots will probably require a bit of hiking.”

WDFW Enforcement Sgt. Mike Sprecher, said Hog Canyon Lake is almost completely covered with thin ice and Fourth of July Lake has thin ice on about the north third and open water on the south two-thirds. Fishing activity was very light due to those ice conditions, he said.

Bill Baker, WDFW northeast district fish biologist, relays similar caution to anglers seeking rainbows at Stevens County's two winter-only fisheries – Hatch and Williams lakes. It may not be long, but in late December ice was still not thick enough on either lake for safe ice fishing.

WDFW does not measure ice on fishing lakes and cannot guarantee ice fishing safety. But here are a few tips to help keep an outing safe:

- Don't fish alone. Let others know exactly where you and your fishing partners are going and when you plan to return.
- Keep fishing holes small and few. When drilling fishing holes with an ice auger, keep the diameter under eight inches. Bigger holes are not necessary to land fish and can create a safety hazard for others.
- Watch your step. Avoid ice fishing near feeder streams or known springs; brush, logs, plants or docks; multiple ice cracks or ice that is popping or otherwise audible; and dark-colored ice that may be weak.
- Spread out. Too many people congregated in one area may be more than the ice can safely support. Disperse weight and fishing holes.
- Be prepared for weather conditions and emergencies. Dress in layers and wear thermal underwear, fleece or wool, and wind and waterproof outerwear, especially for feet, hands and head. Take extra clothes, food, water, sand for on-ice traction, and a sled for easy on-ice transport of all equipment. Carry equipment such as ice picks or awls, rope, and personal flotation devices. Also pack a first-aid kit and matches for starting a fire.

January is a good time to fish year-round-open Lake Roosevelt, the Columbia River reservoir off Grand Coulee Dam. Anglers are catching 16- to 18-inch rainbow trout from Seven Bays downstream. "Fishing is not red-hot at Roosevelt," said Osborne. "But for those willing to put in a little time, limits of trout in that size range are not uncommon."

Osborne also reports anglers on year-round-open Long Lake (Lake Spokane) have been doing fairly well on **crappie** and **yellow perch**. Year-round Sprague Lake, on the Lincoln-Adams county line, can be good for **bluegill**, **crappie** and **trout**, but ice is forming on much of the lake and may not yet be safe for ice-fishing.

Snake River **steelhead** fishing continues, although participation has been low with recent wintery conditions. Best catch rates in late December were on the Grand Ronde River, a tributary of the Snake, where creel checks indicate about three hours of fishing effort per steelhead caught (including both released wild fish and kept hatchery-marked fish.) Anglers checked on most stretches of the mainstem Snake River have averaged about 20 hours of fishing effort per steelhead caught.

Northcentral Washington

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

Some traditional year-round fisheries in Okanogan County may now be through the ice catches – Patterson and Davis lakes in the Winthrop area, Rat Lake near Brewster, and Big and Little Green lakes west of Omak.

“It’s mostly a rainbow trout show at Davis, Rat, and Green lakes, with fish in the 10- to 12-inch range,” said Bob Jateff, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (WDFW) Okanogan District fish biologist. “Patterson Lake has **yellow perch** in the seven- to eight-inch range. Powerbait works well for trout, and small jigs tipped with mealworms work well for perch.”

Anglers are cautioned to be alert and aware of changing ice conditions at these and other waters. WDFW does not measure ice on fishing lakes and cannot guarantee ice fishing safety. But here are a few tips to help keep an outing safe:

- Don’t fish alone. Let others know exactly where you and your fishing partners are going and when you plan to return.
- Keep fishing holes small and few. When drilling fishing holes with an ice auger, keep the diameter under eight inches. Bigger holes are not necessary to land fish and can create a safety hazard for others.
- Watch your step. Avoid ice fishing near feeder streams or known springs; brush, logs, plants or docks; multiple ice cracks or ice that is popping or otherwise audible; and dark-colored ice that may be weak.
- Spread out. Too many people congregated in one area may be more than the ice can safely support. Disperse weight and fishing holes.
- Be prepared for weather conditions and emergencies. Dress in layers and wear thermal underwear, fleece or wool, and wind and waterproof outerwear, especially for feet, hands and head. Take extra clothes, food, water, sand for on-ice traction, and a sled for easy on-ice transport of all equipment. Carry

equipment such as ice picks or awls, rope, and personal flotation devices. Also pack a first-aid kit and matches for starting a fire.

Okanogan County's Leader Lake, located three miles west of the town of Okanogan on Hwy. 20, opens Jan. 1 for an extra four months of fishing. This mixed-species fishery is usually open from late April through September, but if new proposed regulations are adopted next spring, it would be open year-round.

Jateff says the new winter fishery at Leader Lake provides extra opportunity to fish for an abundance of **crappie, bluegill, largemouth** and **smallmouth bass**, and **rainbow trout**. Statewide gear and freshwater species rules are in effect for all game fish.

Rufus Woods reservoir, on the Okanogan County south boundary off Chief Joseph Dam on the Columbia River, has big **triploid rainbow trout** that can be caught throughout the winter months.

Jateff notes there are several areas upstream of Chief Joseph Dam that can be accessed by the shore angler. Boat anglers can launch at the Army Corps of Engineers boat ramp and can explore upstream any one of numerous back bays and shorelines that could hold triploids.

Steelhead fishing remains open on the Okanogan and Similkameen rivers, and parts of the mainstem Columbia River.

Southcentral Washington

(Benton, Franklin, Kittitas and Yakima counties)

Anglers continue to reel in hatchery **steelhead** from portions of the Columbia and Snake rivers, although the lure of bigger fish will undoubtedly prompt some to switch gears. Starting Jan. 1, the John Day Pool (Lake Umatilla) will reopen for retention of **white sturgeon** that measure 43 to 54 inches from their snout to the fork in their tail.

Anglers planning to go after sturgeon should be aware there is a 500-fish annual quota for sturgeon on Lake Umatilla, said Paul Hoffarth, a regional fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "In recent years, the quota has been reached in a couple of months, so I'd advise anglers to get out early if they want to take a sturgeon home for dinner," he said.

Another option is McNary Pool (Lake Wallula), including the Snake River below Ice Harbor Dam, which reopens for sturgeon retention Feb. 1. There is no quota on that pool, which often keeps anglers busy up until the area closes to sturgeon retention Aug.1.

Walleye fishing can get slow in winter, but there's always a chance of catching a lunker. Some of the largest walleye of the year are boated during the winter months near the Tri-Cities – including the 19.3-pound state record taken in Lake Wallula in 2007.

Typical of the winter fishery, **steelhead** fishing has been up and down, said Hoffarth, noting that some of the best catches on the Columbia River have been reported in the Ringold area. In the Tri-Cities area, the fishery is open for retention of hatchery steelhead from John Day Dam upstream to the wooden power line towers at the old Hanford town site through March 31, 2013.

The lower Snake River is also open for the retention of hatchery steelhead through March 31. The daily limit in the Snake is three hatchery steelhead. Barbless hooks are required.

Winter **whitefish** seasons are currently open on the Yakima, Naches, Tieton, Cle Elum and Bumping rivers. Whitefish gear rules are in effect on the the Yakima River from the Highway 223 Bridge at Granger to Keechelus Dam through Feb. 28. Whitefish seasons for the other rivers run Dec. 1 to March 31. Anglers are advised to check the Fishing in Washington [rules pamphlet](#) for regulations that apply to specific river reaches.

Eric Anderson, a WDFW fish biologist stationed in Yakima, recommends that anglers fishing for whitefish concentrate their fishing efforts in deep pools below riffles. Whitefish gear is restricted to one single-point hook with a maximum hook size of 3/16-inch from point to shank (hook size 14), and bait is allowed. Anderson said most whitefish are caught with a small fly, tipped with a maggot. The individual limit is 15 whitefish per day, most of which range from 10 to 15 inches long.

Rather catch **trout**? A catch-and-release trout fishery is open year-round above Roza Dam under selective gear and whitefish gear rules. Above Easton Lake, there is no size or catch limit for eastern brook trout.

Those interested in fishing local ponds near Yakima should know that WDFW recently stocked several of them with more than 400 brood stock rainbows, averaging 5 to 10 pounds apiece. I-82 Pond #4, Rotary, and Myron lakes and the pond at Sarg Hubbard Park all received some of the lunkers in December. Sarg Hubbard Park Pond is open only to juvenile anglers under 15 years old and anglers with a disability and reduced fee license.

Several other waters stocked with big trout in November are also still worth a try, Anderson said. North Elton Pond near Selah got 2,000 jumbo rainbows (1.5 lbs. each), while North Fio Rito and Mattoon Lakes in the Kittitas Valley got 250 rainbow brood stock (5-10 lbs. each). Anglers are reminded to check the Fishing in Washington [rules pamphlet](#) for special gear and catch limits that apply on lakes and ponds.

TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail

This week, subscriber Steve T. sent the following to TGF co-editor and **pro guide Bob Rees**, "Your comment about Eagle Creek this week - "Eagle creek also kicked out a few fish, although anglers shouldn't expect anything "banner" from this little stream as plants are a small fraction of what they used to be" - struck a chord with me.

"I'm 65 years old and have been about as avid a fisherman as it's possible to be - mostly smaller streams, and summer steelhead. I well remember the glory days of the '70's. We have a cabin on the Salmon River (Sandy system) just up from the confluence, and in its hey day, I wouldn't have asked for better fishing if I'd died and gone to heaven.

"That's all gone now, and although I wrote polite, well-reasoned letters to everyone I could think of for many years after the changes started, it did no measurable good and things only continued to get worse.

"Fifteen years ago, I pulled up stakes and moved to the south coast, thinking it had to be better down here. It is, but not by much.

"I recognize that you and many folks in the industry still are doing your best and are trying to keep the dream alive but the combination of the ODFW and the wild fish Nazis (Oregon Trout and all the rest) have pretty much killed it. I believe that there are - at most! - twenty streams in the state that will ever have any consumptive sport fishery for steelhead without significant hatchery supplementation, and probably significantly fewer. I am certain that's true of the Salmon River. And that's all I need to know to convince me that a good, aggressive hatchery program, coupled with effective predator control, is essential if sport fishing is ever to return to anything like the good old days.

"My question for you is unanswerable: why do we, the angling public, stand for it? Why have we allowed the ODFW to do this to us?

" Are we really that stupid, or are we just compliant, willing to take whatever bones they condescend to toss our way?"

Bob replied, "Thanks for your comments; they are clearly well thought out!

:It has been frustrating to see these fisheries hit the dirt. I know of the Salmon River summer steelhead program and what it used to produce, I too participated in this fishery along with the upper Sandy and Zig Zag River, landing some of my first steelhead ever from these systems. They truly imprinted on me.

"Yes, it's sad that these fisheries have gone away, thus creating what is now a new "baseline" in what is termed good fishing.

"Many other anglers would agree with you on your stance, maybe to a lesser degree me. I think you know the reasoning behind the dwindling steelhead plants, the wild fish policy, which was largely meant to bolster wild fish production, especially on streams that had no historic runs of hatchery fish (such as Salmon River summer steelhead). I have a friend that built a house up there at about the same time that run was phased out. He is a guide and carried the same beliefs that you do now. He has shifted his beliefs a bit now that he has seen the shift in the wild/hatchery component involving the wild steelhead broodstock program on the Nestucca. He has seen those hatchery fish replace what was once a strong wild component on these systems.

"I think ODF&W is doing the best job we can expect them too, seeking the latest research and implementing policy that policy makers hand down over time. I also believe these policy makers are doing the best job that they can as well but with so many factors effecting these runs, once we feel we get something right, the fish seem to shift to another direction.

"You're right, it is an unanswerable question but you're also right that the agency will listen more intently to an organized mass versus one or two individuals that make their thoughts known once

in a while. That's why I am a member of several different sportfishing organizations that embrace the same (or most of the same) values that I do. That is really the best way to make sure that your voice is heard.

"I hope that you can research one that may work for you and join them, better yet, join their steering committee or board and help guide this policy into the next era of good sportfishing. I was very active in the management shift for Columbia River fisheries from gillnets to a sportfishing priority over the last decade. Look where we are today! It DOES work!

"All the best and thanks for writing to us here at TGF!"

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Michael Teague: TGFMichael@gmail.com

Chris Vertopoulos: chrisv@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com

Random Links

ORE230 conditions at Diamond Lake:

<http://www.tripcheck.com/popups/Cam.asp?curRegion=7&camera=2293&camera=2289&camera=2297>

In Spanish, but a lovely fish tornado: <http://vimeo.com/40660113>

GOOD LUCK!