

The Guide's Forecast - volume 15 issue number 5

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 25th – January 31st, 2013**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Continued cold, icy conditions have made for tough fishing and reduced effort on the valley rivers and streams. The Willamette at Oregon City has squeaked out a few steelhead from Meldrum Bar but anglers are spread thin like the fish. Water clarity is about optimum but the temperature is less than, making for a slow bite. A few sturgeon are bending rods down in the Portland harbor, but effort here is diminishing as well.

Snowmelt pushed the McKenzie levels to the 4,000 cfs range this week. It offers fair winter fishing for reddsides.

North Santiam levels are forecast to be rising this week while the South Santiam will gradually drop. There are a few steelhead in the system.

The Clackamas has dropped below prime level and although pressure is light, a few steelies are being checked. Most anglers are reporting a lack of clipped hatchery steelhead in contrast to the abundance of native fish. Low water techniques will sometime prevail, with a "nightmare" pattern jig under a bobber being the go-to.

Although very low and clear, the Sandy River still has been kicking out a smattering of winter steelhead. The hatchery keepers are more abundant here and have rendered the catch about 50/50 wild to hatchery reared. Bobber and jig set-ups will shine best here with the drought like conditions.

Northwest – All systems except the mainstem Nehalem have been running low and clear causing anglers to employ low-water tactics for minimal success.

Despite a fair tide series, it appears that few fish came in over the weekend but anglers still took to the rivers in pursuit of faint hopes.

The Wilson River, one of the top prospects on the North coast for fresh steelhead, produced poorly from top to bottom under these conditions. An occasional broodstock fish was caught with a mix of some spent hatchery fish that are in poor condition.

The Nestucca River produced much the same results with only a few fish taken over the weekend that were of any quality or size.

Some native steelhead are beginning to show and that will be the case for most North coast rivers. The exception is the Wilson and the Nestucca, which will produce fresh hatchery late-run fish as well as natives, into early April.

Rain is in the forecast along with warming temperatures which could spur another shot of fish over the weekend.

Anglers should expect a lull in fresh fish until mid-February.

With a good tide series over the weekend, sturgeon anglers pursued keepers on Tillamook Bay with limited success.

Despite an ocean free of wind waves, anglers were not allowed over the Tillamook Bay bar to pursue offshore species such as rockfish and crab. A significant swell persisted through the weekend. Don't look for offshore opportunities to improve anytime soon.

Southwest- Boats have been unable to launch recently out of Newport and Depoe Bay, a common problem in the wintertime. Good fishing and crabbing awaits when offshore conditions allow.

North Umpqua anglers are catching a few steelhead and while most fish here are natives, an 18-pounder was caught and released late last week.

Coos Bay crabbing is good. The Coos as well as the Coquille Rivers will fish well for steelhead as they drop following rainfall this week.

Steelhead catches have been spotty on the lower Rogue as anchor fishers using plugs are taking only a few fish here and there. Low, cold water is blamed for lackluster results but this situation will turn around as rainfall resumes this week, raising water levels and temperatures.

A few winters are being taken on the middle Rogue while upper river anglers are hooking summers which are not of table (or smoker) quality.

Boats launching out of the Port of Brookings in friendly seas over the past week have enjoyed good catches of rockfish, lingcod and ocean crab. Steelheading had been good before the water dropped, yielding some large specimens including a 21-pound hatchery fish taken earlier this month. Look for results to improve with rainfall this week.

Despite record rainfall at the Elk River hatchery facility, without recent rain, the river remained low and clear as of Tuesday this week. Precipitation forecast this week will rejuvenate winter steelheading here.

Eastern – The clear waters of the lower Deschutes are providing fair results for reddsides but steelheading remains dismal.

The Crooked River dropped further over the last week to even lower levels and continues to fish well. Midge patterns predominate with Blue-Winged-Olive hatches sporadic. Nymphs are effective in the absence of hatch activity.

SW Washington- Southwest Washington rivers are done for a while as early run steelhead continue to near their spawning phase.

The Cowlitz River will remain the best bet especially as the hatchery program focuses more emphasis on later returning Fish.

The Kalama River is really slow and the Lewis River can produce nice sized late running wild steelhead but they often come later in February.

Efforts remains somewhat high for sturgeon in the Longview area but success rates have slowed recently.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Another “non-factor” week for Columbia River anglers as the lack of any run of anything this time of year doesn't justify any effort for any species. There

have been reports of a few winter steelhead taken recently by lower Columbia beach plunkers. This is not a common occurrence this time of year however; it's honestly a crap shoot.

Some sturgeon effort remains in the Longview stretch as anglers continue to theorize that there may be sturgeon present and awaiting a smelt run that may or may not show. Catches have been light however.

The Bonneville Pool is starting to show some results. The warmer weather may spur more activity but anglers that know this pool fishery well can expect some action, even for keepers.

The Guide's Forecast – The Columbia is still a dead horse but anglers that have specialized in harvesting fish this time of year (both steelhead and sturgeon) certainly will not come across any stiff competition.

Winter steelhead should be available to some bank anglers and sturgeon fishers are best to try their luck in the Bonneville Pool or in the Longview stretch. Luck will still play a large part in any angler's success.

Crabbing continue to taper in the estuary.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reports, "Continued cold, icy conditions have made for tough fishing and reduced effort on the valley rivers and streams. The Willamette at Oregon city has squeaked out a few steelhead form Meldrum bar but anglers are spread thin like the fish. Water clarity is about optimum but the temperature is less than, making for a slow bite. A few sturgeon are bending rods down in the Portland harbor, but effort here is diminishing as well."

McKenzie levels are on the rise as of mid-day Thursday this week and with rain forecast daily, will probably be out of shape for a while.

The Santiam system will be rising over the weekend to come, offering little in the way of appealing conditions or interest to anglers.

A Winter Steelhead Clinic featuring **pro guide Trevor Storlie** will take place at Dick's Sporting Goods, 700 N.W. Eastman Pkwy. In Gresham on January 31st at 6:30 PM.

Mark your Calendars - the Pacific Northwest Sportsmen's Show® runs February 6th through 10th this year. For details and discount coupons, check **Random Links**, below.

A free fly-tying clinic will take place at the Caddis Fly in Eugene on Saturday, January 26th. Jay Nicholas will provide information and tech tips as he ties from 9 AM 'til noon. Adrian Cortes will be tying married wing Salmon and Steelhead flies without a vise from 1 PM to 3 PM.

ODFW sez, "The last stocking of rainbow trout brood trout [sic] for the season takes place this week with releases of 40 to 50 fish each at Mt. Hood Pond, Junction City Pond, Timber-Linn Lake, Walter Wirth Lake and Waverly Pond. Alton Baker Canoe Canal and East Freeway Lake will be stocked this week with rainbow trout in the one-pound or larger class."

The Guide's Forecast – Catch and release fishing for sturgeon on the lower Willamette is certainly one of the more rewarding option for anglers. Results have been good with the Oregon City stretch most productive recently. When available, smelt seems to be the best option with sand shrimp a close second. This fishery is as near a 'sure thing' as one is likely to find at this

time of year. Fishing is slow for plunkers one the back below the mouth of the Clackamas at the Blacktop and Meldrum Bar. Winter steelhead counts are underwhelming at Willamette Falls with single digits indicated for the past 10 days and the total as of January 22nd only 721. There were Well over 1,200 at this time last year and more than twice this year's total were counted as of the same date in 2011 and 2010. Sure, the counts are influenced by weather and water conditions but, sheesh, it's almost February. Small comfort that 2009 counts sucked worst of all. Seriously, though, winter steelhead will continue to cross the Falls in decent number through February and March with counts maintained through May so there may be hope for the 2013 Willamette winter run and for those upstream tribbs which provide C&R opportunities. The least rewarding option might be trolling for spring Chinook. It seems nuts to even mention it but a few are trying (often accompanying a story about 'testing out the boat') but it won't be long until one of these guys hooks up. Then watch the fever spread. As we often say, it's early yet. The 2013 run forecast is for 59,800 spring Chinook to enter the Willamette. A couple have been taken on the Columbia, the first Willamette fish is generally taken mid-February with more reliable results occurring in mid-April.

The McKenzie will be too high to fish but will offer decent winter trout fishing as it recovers.

With Willamette fish counts low and the water high, pass on the Santiams this week. It will get better later in the year. Hopefully.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reports, " The Clackamas has dropped below prime level and although pressure is light, a few steelies are being checked. Most anglers are reporting a lack of clipped hatchery steelhead in contrast to the abundance of native fish. Low water techniques will sometime prevail, with a "nightmare" pattern jig under a bobber being the go-to.

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The Guide's Forecast – Steelheaders will finally get relief from low, clear flows on the Clackamas. Expect to see a fairly impressive rise in the water level – it's forecast to come up over three feet to well over 14 feet at Estacada virtually overnight on Friday, January 25th. This rise will be accompanied by an increase in flow from 2,000 to over 6,000 cfs. Moderation in level and flow is predicted to occur rapidly, starting over the coming weekend, so this will be a good time to take advantage of dropping water levels and improved water temperatures. Winter steelhead will be moving upstream and this freshet should encourage fresh fish to enter the system. Corky and yarn is a classic here although with the additional flows boaters should do well with plugs. The Barton to Carver drift is obstacle-free.

Rainfall this week is having little impact on the level and flow of the Sandy River but is serving to put a little color in the water. Boat anglers, particularly those pulling plugs, will fare better the those confined to the bank. Try small baits of cured eggs fished with yarn or a glo ball. Bobber and jig will also tempt winter fish. Be aware that a steelhead clinic will be taking place in the flood plain area of Oxbow Park this Saturday, January 25th so this area will have more than the usual number of anglers.

North Coast Fishing Report – All week, rivers remained low and clear for anglers to try and pursue steelhead on the north coast. Needless to say, between the less than ideal water

conditions and the fact we're between peak seasons for the distinct 2 runs of steelhead that come back to these systems, action wasn't all that great.

We drifted the Wilson River on Sunday with the late afternoon start to avoid the crowds. We were surprised by the number of people fishing later but with cold early-morning temperatures and expected crowding we thought it was the best bet. That strategy however did not pay dividends as we went without a bite for about a 3 hour effort. Noteworthy however is that we talked to several other boats on the float and they also struggled for success.

We employed two technique, both back trolling plugs and side drifting egg imitations neither of which got a grab.

Under these conditions, the lower river downstream of Solly Smith bridge is typically the better producing water. Reports from this stretch of river have been dismal lately however. Anglers that traditionally catch a lot of fish down here have been recording very poor results.

Most rivers in the Tillamook District warranted lower reach effort but expectedly, success rates reflect the fact that we are in between the peak periods for winter steelhead. As we enter February, the Nehalem system becomes a much stronger option in these low and clear water conditions.

Anglers should expect to find some wild fish, some darker early run hatchery fish, and a rare broodstock steelhead on the two systems that support these late run hatchery fish; the Wilson and Nestucca. Conditions are forecasted to improve in the coming week.

With steelhead action on the down, anglers were looking for alternative options last week. The sturgeon tides were good on Tillamook Bay and the ocean was flat calm late last week with no wind waves through the weekend an early this week too. The problem for offshore fishing was that there was a wicked swell for most of the weekend and even now that kept anglers from crossing the bar. Larger boats were allowed mid-week but that didn't do most of the sportfleet any good. It would have been a nice ocean to recreate on if the swell had cooperated. Sturgeon effort was light but there were some keepers taken last week on Tillamook Bay. Tides don't justify much of an effort this weekend however.

The Guide's Forecast – With a warming and wetter trend on the horizon for the weekend, anglers can expect better fishing conditions for the near future. Water temperatures are already on the rise (up 3 degrees) and that will certainly bode well for anglers.

The Wilson River is expected to peak on Sunday reaching about 5 foot which should be ideal for Sunday and Monday anglers. The Wilson along with the Nestucca River will remain the two top options for hatchery fish clear into early spring.

Some of the smaller systems like the North Fork Nehalem and Necanicum should continue to see a rare fresh hatchery fish but they will primarily become wild fish systems into late March. The North Fork hatchery has reported slow and clear river conditions along with slow fishing.

This shot of rain should bode well for the larger rivers but smaller streams will come up slightly; not enough to float a driftboat down. Pontoon boats are ideal for the smaller systems but bank anglers will continue to have the best advantage while pursuing pocket water steelhead on these smaller systems. Continue to fish small baits and subtle offerings assuming we do not receive a lot of new precipitation. Wild fish will begin to dominate these and other systems but it should not be an overly productive week for steelheaders.

The Nehalem River should become a stronger option this week although still weeks away from peak production on this system. The forecasted precipitation may cause a slight rise in river levels but it should remain in fishable condition for much of next week.

Brace for another set of minus tides this weekend. Although this is typically good for sturgeon fishing, the low tide happens well after sunset which will put the prime part of the tide out of reach for most anglers.

The ocean looks to be out of reach once again for most anglers. Bay crabbing is fair at best; even on Netarts Bay. Clammers won't even have a good opportunity to take advantage of the minus tide series this week.

Central & South Coast Reports – Offshore forecasts are less than optimistic through the coming weekend. While launches out of central Oregon ports are not a possibility, bay crabbing has been pretty good and would certainly be a viable option for salt air and seafood for those who don't mind doing so in the rain.

Offshore bottom fishing will remain open without depth restrictions through the last day of March. There are sure to be additional windows of opportunity before the rules change to limit anglers to regulated fathom lines and lesser depths..

When ocean launches are possible, expect some company offshore, not other boaters but whales which are migrating in larger number this year than last according to coastal whale watchers. Sharing the water with these massive mammals can make the trip worthwhile, even on those days when the bite is a little slow.

With river flows increasing this week, it seems a good time to remind boaters to exercise caution and use those PFDs. A number of boats have gone down on several rivers, most recently Friday, January 18th, when three men were rescued from the North Umpqua. With the winter steelhead season just gaining momentum, more boaters will be on rivers that are at higher flows. Be careful and attentive out there.

Siletz steelheaders have been doing fairly well but results will only improve as precipitation brings in fresh fish this week. Bobber and jig is effective here as is side-drifting.

Boats launching out of Newport over the past weekend when the ocean was friendly found plenty of large ling cod and good numbers of a variety of rockfish. Crabbing has been fair to good in Yaquina Bay recently but it remains to be seen if precipitation this week negatively impacts results. Some of the crab here are sporting a green tag. If you find one, please keep the tag (even from juveniles and females) and call the number on the tag to arrange turning it in. You'll receive a hat, shirt or \$20 bill, be entered in a cash drawing and help to further a Dungeness research project.

Bobber and jig rigs were effective for steelhead on the Siuslaw when the water was low. The game will change with rain this week.

While South Jetty fishing has yielded fair to good catches of rockfish and ling cod, efforts will be hampered this week by wind and wave action. Several of the lings taken recently were spawned out.

Crabbing is only fair in Winchester Bay and but water flowing from the Umpqua this week is likely to slow results. Crabbing in the lower bay will provide the best catches. The mainstem Umpqua will be on a rapid rise over the coming weekend, not the best steelheading conditions. Once it

drops over the coming week, fishing should be worthwhile with good populations of winters in the river although the majority will be natives which must be released. Those unclipped winters can provide great sport and run of impressive size on occasion, such as the three-foot, 18-pounder and a 42-incher taken and returned to the river over the past weekend. Hatchery fish will be entering the South Umpqua in which steelheaders have the best shot at a keeper. North and South Umpqua steelhead should start to reach its stride in February.

Bottom fishing for rockfish and big ling cod has been excellent out of Charleston when boats have been able to get out. Ocean crabbing has also been good. Coos Bay offers the best bay crabbing on the south coast as it is large and deep which aids in maintaining a decent salinity level which keeps Dungeness inside the estuary. Steelheading on the Coos system slowed with low, clear water but relief will arrive with precipitation this week.

Rainfall will not only alleviate low water and rejuvenate winter steelheading on the Coquille but will also serve to improve water temperatures which have been running cold. Three steelhead per day are allowed here, as well as on the Coos and Tenmile basins.

Lower Rogue steelheading has been fair despite low, clear, cold water but will heat up once the river recovers from the freshet this week. Plugs fished on anchor have been most effective but, depending on how much the river rises with rain this week, plunkers using Spin 'n' Glos should do well. Fishing has predictably slowed on the middle Rogue as the water level started rising on Wednesday this week. Prior to the increase in flow, steelheading providing action for anglers who hooked a mix of spawned summers running downstream and the occasional fresh winter. As the water drops following this freshet, fishing is expected to be worthwhile. Applegate steelheaders have taken a few winters but it will be several weeks before this tributary comes into its own. Upper Rogue steelheaders are hooking a fair to good number of fish but with winters yet to show in catchable numbers, these are leftover summers which are well over their pull date and not worth keeping. It's good sport, one might suppose, but with catch-and-release fisheries for native winters available elsewhere, why bother hooking these tired, old brats only to turn them loose again?

Chetco River levels at Brookings leapt from about 2.2 feet to over 4.5 feet and from just over 1,000 to 4,500 cfs overnight January 23rd which far exceeded NOAA forecasts. As of noon on Thursday, January 24th, flows are moderating but more rain is on the way. Since the forecast is not a reliable reference currently, suffice to say that when the river has been fishable, it has fished very well. Savvy anglers will keep an eye on the level and hit it as it drops. They should be well rewarded as the Chetco has been producing some dandy winter steelhead this season.

Rainfall should improve flows as well as water temperatures this week on the Elk River. As it drops, winter steelhead will be caught.

Ice fishers at Diamond Lake are encouraged to fill out catch cards which are readily available at the resort marina. Doing so will ensure that the lake is properly stocked.

ODFW sez, "Eight hundred 1 ½ pound trout were stocked into Bradley Lake last week along with ten rainbow trout weighing about 6 pounds each. These are the fish that were going to be stocked in October but were delayed due to the boat ramp construction. These trout will hang out near the boat ramp for a few day but will probably than move to deeper water. Casting a spinner should work to catch trout in the shallow water but anglers should go to a slower more vertical presentation, like fishing a jig, when fishing in the deep water this time of the year. The lake will not be stocked again until this spring."

Central and Eastern Oregon – Blue-Winged Olives are getting reddsides' attention on the Deschutes around Maupin when they're hatching mid-day. In the absence of hatches, try nymphs or egg patterns. Steelheading is slow with poor summer returns this year.

Metolius conditions are good for fly anglers who are taking bull trout and the occasional brown. Results have been best near Allingham but be certain to stay below the bridge.

Fall River fly fishers are picking up rainbows with nymphs taking fish all day and dries effective during occasional hatches.

Crescent Lake iced over with recent cold weather. Be sure to check conditions prior to making the trip. When fishable, large mackinaw are available to hearty winter trollers.

Fishing has been slow over the past week for trollers at Lake Billy Chinook. While only a few bull trout are being taken, the few that tried for them took kokanee averaging 12 inches which cut great.

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 lunger. 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.

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Random Links

Ice fishing workshop at Diamond Lake:

http://dfw.state.or.us/education/outdoor_skills/workshops/family_ice_fishing_feb_10.asp

Float Fishing Set up 101:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=vcqIZt5My4E

Pacific Northwest Sportsmen's Show® info and discount coupons:

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

Meanwhile, in Russia:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=oGaet9LSD-0

GOOD LUCK!