

The Guide's Forecast - volume 15 issue number 10

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **March 1st – March 7th, 2013**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- The Willamette River continues to put out the occasional, early spring chinook despite a slight rise and increased turbidity. Reported catches have come in from the Multnomah Channel all the way up to Oregon City, with Sellwood and Willamette Park being the hot spots. Green label herring is the bait of choice for the majority of anglers, but as you move upriver from Milwaukie, prawns, sand shrimp and cured roe are more prevalent. The random steelhead continues to get caught up at Meldrum Bar and the blacktop, but most anglers here are targeting salmon by now.

Catch and release sturgeon fishing remains good, when anglers put their time in on the outgoing tides. Smelt, herring, sand shrimp and earthworms are the baits that get bites.

McKenzie water levels are variable this week but the river will be productive whenever the water level is dropping. Caddis patterns will be effective for reddsides.

The South Santiam is recovering from a spike in the water level, which occurred late last week. Boats are drifting the North Santiam from Mehama to Stayton during which a few steelhead have been caught.

On the Clackamas River, the water conditions are at optimum but the steelhead fishing could be better. Local anglers are getting a few and resident guides are having a hit or miss season, but the river has seen better seasons. Expect water conditions to remain steady through the weekend.

On the Sandy River, steelhead fishermen are enjoying better days despite the fluctuating river levels. This season, the Sandy River could be called NW Oregon's "bright spot" for steelhead. The recent rains brought the river back up to healthy level and good reports have come in since the river began its drop. It's been a mix of about 50/50 wild fish to hatchery fish and they have been averaging a bit on the large side.

Henry Hagg Lake opens for the season on Saturday, March 2nd. It will be stocked with 18,000 legal-sized trout this week.

Northwest – Despite ideal conditions over the weekend, steelheaders were largely disappointed with the meager showing of what should have been a big kick-off for late season wild and broodstock fish. Despite the disappointment, fair numbers of wild and hatchery fish were taken on the top two favorites; the Wilson and Nestucca with some fish nearing the 20-pound class.

Jamie Duval of Bay City took a 9-pound broodstock fish on the new orange Corkie Cluster on Sunday, drifting from Siskeyville to Mills Bridge on the Wilson River. Side-drifters fared best using small clusters of bait and drift bobbers.

Wild fish should be well distributed in all north coast systems but March will remain the top prospect for those seeking late season steelhead options.

Offshore season setting options will take place for industry stakeholders in Newport on February 28th. With the likelihood of another strong showing of chinook and a rebound of hatchery coho this year, seasons could be generous.

No sign of a calming ocean in the near future so bottomfishing and offshore crabbing remain untapped.

Bay crabbing remains fair at best with better tides anticipated over the weekend. Hopefully, the weather cooperates.

Southwest- Rough ocean conditions this week have prevented effort by charter or recreational anglers and crabbers.

South coast beach casters are taking good numbers of pinkfin perch when the surf is lying down. The best time is two hours before high tide with the bite often continuing into the first hour of the ebb.

Crabbing has been slow to fair at Winchester Bay. The mainstem and North Umpqua are providing decent catch-and-release fishing for native steelhead while pressure for hatchery fish is increasing on the South Umpqua.

Charleston remains the top port for crabbers. Even those crabbing from docks have been doing well here.

How about a great spring chinook run on the Rogue River this season? That's the prediction with the first Rogue springer of 2013 likely to be landed this week. Most anglers are concentrating on winter steelhead now and rightly so, as adults and half-pounders are being landed regularly in the lower river. Side-drifters and plug-pullers in the middle Rogue are taking winters from the Applegate River to Drift Creek. A fresh batch of winters hit the upper Rogue following rain over the past weekend.

Low, clear water that has challenged Chetco steelheaders recently will turn around with rain this week. The river closes at the end of March so anglers are hoping for good water conditions in the coming weeks.

Rain off and on this week in the southwest corner of the state should provide some winter steelheading on the Elk River. Cured eggs or drifted corkies will take fish here. The season ends on March 31st on both the Elk and Sixes with no further opportunities until fall chinook starts in November.

Ice at Diamond Lake is about a foot thick now with several inches of packed snow on the surface. Expect to put in a couple of hours for every trout but they're typically large here.

Eastern – The Deschutes is in good condition and excellent color although there was snow on the banks early this week and it has been windy. Fishing for reddsides has been fair with mid-day the best time to try. While a few Skwalas are hatching, trout are not yet keyed on them. Caddis and midge patterns remain the mainstays.

Skwala stoneflies are getting attention from trout on the Metolius where fly fishers are taking reddsides on large dries and nymphs.

Lake Billy Chinook is producing kokanee averaging 11 inches for trollers using small hoochies on downriggers in about 70 feet of water.

SW Washington- Most anglers in the district are focusing their efforts on an early spring chinook. Effort and catches should begin to ramp up in the coming weeks, especially if water

conditions continue to warm and flows remain stable. Anglers in the Cathlamet area are taking a rare chinook on herring.

Steelheaders in the area are focused on wild fish primarily. Hatchery returns to the Cowlitz, Kalama, Lewis and Washougal remain low. For clarification, only the North Fork of the Lewis from Johnson Creek upstream is closed. The mainstem Lewis remains open.

Klineline Pond was planted with 1,500 rainbows averaging 2/3 pound each Feb. 19 and anglers are catching some.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Reports of more frequent spring chinook catches are trickling in over the last week. Effort is beginning to ramp up and hopefully, water temperatures and flow remain stable so anglers can get after the much prized cold water favorite.

Most effort is taking place downstream of Portland with reported catches coming from as low as Clifton Channel alongside Tenasillahe Island out of Westport. You can bet if fish are there, they'll be along Puget Island as well but let's keep things in perspective, it's early and we're still several weeks away from peak fishing; of which we're unlikely to actually get to prosecute a fishery during that peak period. None-the-less, one can dream of early spring chinook, can't we?

Reports of a push of fish through the middle river around Kalama has interest running high. Trollers are reporting some fair catches of nice sized salmon taking green label herring with the use of a flasher. Any color from pink to of course green seems to be attracting an occasional early fish. With catch rates this good in February, one might think that the departments actually under-predicted the run this year. There is a discrepancy of the agency forecast and NOAA's forecast. It would be fun to be on the underside for a change but that prediction alone, will harm our early season opportunities. Sport anglers will have to wait for the run size update in early May before any additional opportunity comes our way if the run was under-predicted; that's also assuming run timing is similar this year to the previous 5 or 6 years. Anglers are targeting 18 to 20 foot of water around Davis Bar but really only scoring an occasional fish. Of course, some days are better than others but in a fleet of 20 boats, anglers may witness between 2 and 4 fish taken on a typical day. Effort will only ramp up from here as pictures continue to hit the web on a more regular basis.

Sturgeon anglers sure didn't have much to report recently. Despite rumors of good numbers of smelt in the river, sturgeon catches are not impressive. If there are fish present, I guess they have plenty of forage to choose from, and it's likely not yours as you're not likely (or legally) to have fresh smelt on board to use for bait.

The upriver reservoirs remain the best options for catch and release AND consumptive opportunity for sturgeon anglers. Here are the creel checks from those impoundments:

Gorge Bank:

Weekend checking showed no catch for three bank anglers.

Gorge Boats:

No report.

Troutdale Boats:

Weekend checking showed no catch for one boat (two anglers).

Portland to Longview Bank:

No report.

Portland to Longview Boats:

No report.

The Dalles Pool:

Weekly checking showed no catch for 10 bank anglers.

John Day Pool:

Weekly checking showed no catch for 12 bank anglers; and three legal white sturgeon kept, plus 14 sublegal sturgeon released for 17 boats (36 anglers).

Sturgeon creel sampling summaries and catch estimates for Bonneville, The Dalles, and John Day pools can be found at the following link:

[WDFW Mid-Columbia River mainstem sport sampling summary](#)

The Guide's Forecast – Spring Chinook fishing will remain the focal point for most trollers in the area but don't count on catches to jump significantly. Success remains a rare commodity but for the season's early run spring salmon, the rewards are worth the effort.

Trolled green label herring will remain the top bait but sensibly, anglers this time of year utilize flashers to enhance their presentations. Although anglers will eventually find success on several different colors, green is often the go-to flasher in the dark colored water of late winter.

Anglers will need to make sure that their gear is fishing deep, as in the very bottom of the river; the question is, at what depth line are the fish running today? Anglers working Davis Bar across from the mouth of the Willamette River often target bottom depths of 17 to 22 feet. Trollers will work the very bottom of the river with the leads actually dragging the river bottom.

It is a bit early for anchor fishing although some are already pursuing salmon with this method. Kwikfish or flatfish are the general rule for anchor anglers but plunkers would be wise to use herring for bait assuming the current is strong enough to actually work the bait.

Sturgeon anglers will likely continue to be disappointed unless you plan an excursion upstream of the Bonneville Dam. The numbers may be present downstream of Bonneville but fish are not willing to engage anglers. Warming river temperatures will change that but we are weeks away from significant increases in water temperatures.

The Columbia River is getting better but much better salmon and sturgeon fishing lies ahead. By the third week in March, assuming flows don't pick up significantly and temperatures don't drop out of the bottom, action should pick up significantly for sturgeon but especially spring chinook.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reports, "The Willamette River continues to put out the occasional, early spring Chinook despite a slight rise in river levels and increased turbidity. Reported catches have come in from the Multnomah Channel all the way up to Oregon City, with Sellwood and Willamette Park being the hottest spots. Green label herring is the bait of choice for the majority of anglers, but as you move upriver from Milwaukie, prawns, sand shrimp and cured roe are more prevalent. The random steelhead continues to get caught up at Meldrum Bar and the blacktop, but most anglers here are targeting salmon by now. Catch and Release sturgeon fishing remains good when anglers put their time in on the outgoing tides. Smelt, herring, sand shrimp and earthworms are the baits that get bites."

A huge tree is across south channel on the McKenzie River and is blocking it at a point about one-half mile below Taylor Landing. Boaters are advised to avoid this swift stretch of the river until the obstruction can be removed.

North Santiam water flows should remain fairly steady at Mehama although the water is fairly high at Jefferson. The south Santiam level came up over the past weekend but has been steadily dropping since. A "learn the river" trip with experienced boaters from the Northwest Steelheaders and the North Santiam River Guides Association will take place on Saturday, March 2nd with boats launching at 10 AM from Green's Bridge (although those requiring a shuttle should be at that location at 9 AM). Leaders will demonstrate which channels to take, with safety on the river a primary emphasis. Boats will land at The Santiam Rest Stop around 2 PM. For more information call Bill Sanderson at 503-897-3301.

The McKenzie River is at decent level and flow and fly anglers do fairly well here at this time of year.

There are a few long-in-the-tooth summer steelhead lingering in the Santiam system but very few winters. Willamette Falls counts are barely over the 1,500 mark, about half of the 10-year average for this time of year.

The **2013 Saltwater Sportsmen's Show** will be taking place March 2 and 3 at the Oregon Exposition Center located at 2330 17th Street NE in Salem. This event is for the serious saltwater angler or novices. This is a great place for those who would just like more information on saltwater fishing. Seminars and demonstrations will be held on halibut, salmon, albacore, the proper use of marine electronics and ocean safety as well as other topics. The show is open 9 AM to 6 PM. Saturday and 9 AM to 4 PM on Sunday.

The **2013 Northwest Fly Tier and Fly Fishing Expo** is scheduled for March 8th and 9th at the Linn County Expo Center in Albany. This will be the 25th year for this event which was created by the Oregon Council of Federation of Fly Fishers and is one of the largest such fly fishing shows on the west coast. Over 200 fly tiers are doing demonstrations.

Henry Hagg Lake, which is scheduled to receive 18,000 legal-sized rainbows, will open for the season on Saturday, March 2nd, and is always a well-attended event. Other waters being planted with hatchery trout this week include Huddelston Pond, St. Louis Pond, Cottage Grove Pond, Cottage Grove Reservoir, Dexter Reservoir, E. E. Wilson Pond, Junction City Pond, Sunnyside Park Pond, Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake.

The Guide's Forecast – On the Willamette River, springer fishing is underway for the serious salmon aficionados. After a two day stretch of murky water hampering the action on Tuesday and Wednesday, the water was in good shape for Thursday (and improving). I spent Thursday morning with "The Sultan" at Sellwood, we witnessed three springers brought to the net, and one lost at the net. Unfortunately none of those four encounters happened with us. Most of that action was in a half an hour or so right after the tide started its ebb. The Sultan knows every boat that hooked up and is "cellularly" with each and every one of them. All those fish were hooked on plug cut green label herring without flashers. The water is expected to continue to clear and fishing should follow suit. Fish have been reported from the lower, mid and upper Multnomah Channel, the lower harbor, the Spaghetti Factory, Willamette Park, Sellwood, Milwaukie and Meldrum bar. It's apparent there are fish spread throughout the system and things are only going to get better.

A few steelhead continue to sacrifice themselves at Meldrum Bar, most have had their adipose fins. Many of the bank anglers here have switched to salmon gear, hoping for a springer. Generally, the only necessary change is the addition of a sand shrimp or a prawn to the mix and both species will still succumb to either or. A size 4 or 6 chartreuse and flame spin-n-glow, with mylar wings is a favorite, affectionately known as the Willamette special. Add a prawn or sand shrimp and you're in business.

Sturgeon are still in the game in the lower river and anglers willing to catch and release are enjoying good times. Smelt, sand shrimp and herring are getting bit and the deeper holes of 30-80 feet in depth are providing the best action as of late. The gas tanks and the Toyota dock are favorite spots in the lower harbor.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reports, "On the Clackamas River, with the high freezing level, the water level remains stable, but anglers are struggling with the clear water. Steelhead are there to be had but stealthier presentations are required for any success. Smaller, more subtle offerings are going to attract more strikes. Most of the catch is being taken from between Barton and Riverside Park.

"Sandy River anglers continue to catch winter steelhead, despite the low clear water. The best action has been reported from Oxbow Park down to Dabney, with a few taken between Dabney and Lewis and Clark State Park. Small baits and lures on lighter leaders are called for, until the next rain adds color to the water."

The Guide's Forecast – Few good reports are coming in from the Clackamas River, but water conditions have been on the decent side. The winter steelhead run on the Clackamas has seen better days, but a few anglers and guides are scoring a couple here and a couple there. The returning broodstock fish have been holding best in the section between Barton and Carver Parks, a result of where most of them were stocked as smolts. No coincidence, the most angling pressure is here as well. It's not too late for success, as March and April have traditionally been the prime months for both broodstock and native steelhead on the Clackamas. A rise is expected by the weekend and the catch will likely fall off until conditions drop back to optimum.

The Sandy River put out decent numbers early in the week, but recent rains brought the river level back up, well above prime. Warmer temps will keep the river on the high side until the freezing level comes back down. Until then, the upper river above Oxbow Park will provide the best action. Fish will also find plunkers baits in the lower river below the Stark Street Bridge. When the water drops again, expect the fish to be there and also expect a few summer steelhead to show up in the catch. Reports have already come in of a handful of summers that have been taken.

North Coast Fishing Report – Steelhead anglers finally got their long awaited rain freshet that they had been waiting for during the last several weeks. The rains hit late last week enabling anxious anglers to come out in full force by the weekend. Weekend anglers however left largely disappointed after pursuing their iconic Oregon game fish under ideal conditions. Limits were far from the rule although fishing was certainly better than it has been the previous couple of weeks.

Most anglers know by now that the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers will produce the best hatchery options but wild fish should be strewn into every North Coast stream system. By the weekend, anglers would've found challenging low-water conditions on most smaller systems such as the Necanicum River near Seaside and the Kilchis River in Tillamook County but the bank anglers still had a fair shot at them over the weekend. Admittedly, still weeks away from productive wild

steelhead fishing, there still should've been better catches than what most witnessed over the weekend; the early returning hatchery stock on these systems is long gone.

I had the pleasure of again fishing with Northwest icon Buzz Ramsey on Sunday. We put in at Siskeyville and floated to Mills Bridge twice by noon time. We had a crack of dawn departure for the first float although we certainly were not the first boat down the stretch. We managed to hook two steelhead, one of which I lost and another which a friend landed yielding about a 9 - pound hatchery hen. The one I hooked was on a big, bright orange corky but after fighting the fish for about three minutes, it threw the hook. The second fish came to Jamie on Yakama Bait's new "corky cluster" also colored orange. That fish along with a few others we saw caught was retained just above Mills Bridge. There were several bank anglers working this reach indicating there probably was some fish caught earlier that morning. We also pulled plugs in this stretch of river but yielded no results in the slightly higher than optimum levels that I prefer pulling plugs. Nonetheless, given these conditions we had much higher expectations, only to be dashed, along with several other avid anglers on the river. Early in the week, fishing was not significantly better but only dropped off slightly from the weekend's success.

The Nestucca River fished much the same with the best results coming over the weekend. The reach from Sixth Bridge downstream fished best on Saturday and Sunday but after the weekend, anglers were primarily targeting steelhead below First Bridge in hopes of intercepting fresh steelhead riding the tide. Side-drifters dominated the fleet as they often do this time of year.

Despite less than impressive returns of adult fish this year, compared to the previous two years that is, anglers are taking notice that a fair percentage of fish are of exceptional size. Fish into the high teens are more common than most years with some guides reporting multiple fish over 20 pounds this year. These are once-in-a-lifetime fish and anglers may never have this good of opportunity again in the near future. Although it's unlikely anybody would target these large fish, big fish like big baits and big Lures. You're most likely to find big fish in the deeper slots as big bucks tend to hang in deep "bouldery" water. You have to make sure that your baits and lures are getting down deep enough to target these fish. Another good spot to target not just big fish but steelhead in general, are just ahead of large boulders. A pillow forms ahead of these boulders creating an opportunistic pocket for fish to hold and save themselves from burning additional calories necessary for spawning.

Interest for sturgeon fishing is waning; an indication that fishing has been fair at best. Tides have not been conducive to good action this week, but that could change by the weekend.

Anglers wishing to target bottom fish offshore were still stuck inside due to a huge ocean over the weekend. That scenario does not look like it's going to change in the near future, leaving lingcod and sea bass largely untouched for most of the winter. When the ocean does lie down and the bars open up for recreational activity the action should be hot.

Crabbing has been mediocre all week despite a productive tide series for enthusiasts. It didn't help however that North coast estuaries were inundated with fresh water from the last rain system. Those folks crabbing and moving their gear around until they find good numbers can still score fair results. It's unlikely however that limits will be attained under these current conditions.

The Guide's Forecast – River levels are expected to remain somewhat stable through the week and into the weekend. This should allow anglers fair opportunity for steelhead into next week.

It's no secret that the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers will remain a top destination for anglers seeking hatchery fish but other systems should offer their results for wild fish as well. Smaller systems such as the Kilchis, Necanicum, and North Fork of the Nehalem will likely remain too low

for good fishing. Anglers willing to employ stealthy techniques however should find mediocre results for wild fish with very little opportunity for a hatchery fish that are in good shape.

By the weekend, anglers will want to focus on the lower reaches of these larger systems as the tidal influence is most likely to draw in fresh fish. Again, the Wilson and the Nestucca Rivers will offer hatchery as well as wild fish options, but don't expect to have these systems to yourself.

On the Wilson, you should still use small baits but colorful yarn and drift bobbers targeting fish in pocket water and any water deeper than 3 feet. Target the reach from Mills Bridge to Sollie Smith, but early risers starting at Donaldson's and working their way downstream from that, will likely score the best results. Do not be afraid to use single beads with yarn or marabou feathers, especially if the water becomes low and clear. Bobber and jigs with a pink worm could also become an effective offering in dropping and clearing water conditions.

On the Nestucca River, anglers will also have to work for fish even though we are beginning to enter peak season. Anglers here should also target the lower reaches of the Nestucca, especially downstream of first bridge. Traffic will likely be heavy over the weekend because of the water conditions so what you will find is those most motivated with an early start will likely produce the best results.

The mainstem Nehalem River should also become an option especially after the weekend. The run should start to kick in pretty good here as we enter March and big fish should be available from the system as well. It is an extremely rare catch to come across a hatchery fish on this system. On the larger Nehalem, due to the fact this is a larger river, fish have a lot of opportunity to avoid your offering. An angler can't expect a double-digit day over here but a good days effort should yield results this time of year. Side-drifting bait in the bigger flows will likely be the best bet.

Bank anglers should have a fair opportunity for fish on most North Coast systems with the smaller rivers offering up the best opportunity for pocket water success.

It is likely to be another mediocre week for sturgeon. Tides are improving but there just does not seem to be a lot of fish around this year. With dropping freshwater flows, juvenile crab may become an issue making it hard to fish bait on the bottom.

Crabbers have a nice afternoon high tide to work with this weekend but don't count on easy limits. The ocean is forecast to remain rough, keeping crabbers in the estuaries and bottom fishers off the ocean.

Central & South Coast Reports – Rough ocean conditions have prevented fishing effort this week. When boats can get out, anglers can target rockfish and lingcod at any depth through the month of March.

South coast beaches are producing fair catches of pinkfin from the Reedsport area to Gold beach. This type of fishing should be planned for days when the ocean is laying down however.

The Alsea has been productive for a mix of hatchery and native steelhead and water levels are forecast to start dropping over the coming weekend. Pressure has been high at times.

Crabbers in Winchester Bay have had mixed results although persistence has produced some keepers in the Half Moon Bay area. Anglers casting from the South Jetty report that action slowed a little for rockfish but is fair to good for striped perch and greenling. The Umpqua is

fishing better since rain started falling this week. A few spring Chinook have been hooked around Scottsburg. The mainstem is forecast to be rising into the weekend and is predicted to hit 15,000 cfs in the week to come. When fishable, there have been decent numbers of winter steelhead hooked but they have been almost exclusively natives which require release here.

Coos Bay crabbing slowed this week with numerous females showing up in nets and traps. Though it's getting late in the winter steelhead season, many rivers will continue to receive fresh, bright fish. The Coos River system is one of them. Steelheaders were successful to varying degrees even through the recent low water period. With rain falling on the southwest coastal region, drifting bait or floating a bobber and jig are particularly effective techniques here.

Coquille River steelhead should be productive as the level drops following rain this week. Cured eggs or corkies have been producing fish here.

Sunday appears to offer the best chance of fishable conditions on the lower Rogue as it is forecast to start dropping following an increase in flows on Friday and Saturday this week. The stretch below Elk Creek has been most productive and should provide some catches with rain this week bringing fresh fish into the system. While no reports of spring Chinook catches have come in, the first one is expected to be landed any day now. The middle river was rising on Friday, dropping on Saturday and Sunday. One wild fish 24 inches or better per day up to five in the year may be kept on the Rogue from Gold Beach up to Cole River hatchery.

Low, clear water has slowed the Chetco for winter steelhead but that is starting to change with the river level rising on the last day of February. The increase in flows is predicted to continue but as the levels drop starting around the second week in March, conditions should be prime for steelheaders.

The Elk River should get another shot of fresh winter steel with rainfall over the next several days. When the precipitation stops, it will drop and clear rapidly.

Central and Eastern Oregon – The lower Deschutes is at good level and, as of Wednesday this week, great color with the White River running clear. Fishing for reddsides has been fair to good.

The Skwalla hatch is imitated with large dry flies and can be a fun fishery. They're due on the Owyhee River in March. This specie of stonefly is slightly smaller than a Golden Stone and a favorite snack for large brown trout.

There's snow on the ground but the ice is off the surface at Crescent Lake. Large lake trout have been cooperating with trollers this week.

Fishing has slowed for trout and kokanee at Green Peter Reservoir recently.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report for February 2013

Last updated February 7, 2013

North Puget Sound

With fishing for steelhead and other game fish closing on several rivers in the region, anglers are shifting their attention to the marine areas where blackmouth salmon fisheries are under way.

Over the last couple of years, the San Juan Islands have been the most productive for anglers fishing for **blackmouth salmon** in February, according to fish biologists with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Anglers fishing waters around the San Juan Islands (Marine Area 7)– as well as marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) and 9 (Admiralty Inlet)– have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook salmon.

Seattle/Bremerton waters (Marine Area 10) are closed to salmon fishing, except for certain fishing piers including the Elliott Bay Fishing Pier at Terminal 86, Seacrest Pier, Waterman Piers, the Bremerton Boardwalk and Illahee State Park Pier. Detailed season and rule information is available [on the WDFW website](#).

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.

Winter is also prime time to jig for **squid** in Puget Sound. Good spots include the Des Moines Pier, Redondo Pier, 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](#).

Fishing for **steelhead and other game fish** closes Feb. 1 in many regional river systems. However, some waters near WDFW fish hatcheries will remain open through Feb. 15 to provide anglers an opportunity to catch and keep hatchery steelhead. Those waters include portions of the Skagit, Wallace, Skykomish and Snoqualmie rivers. Anglers should check [WDFW's sportfishing regulations pamphlet](#) for details.

Freshwater anglers may also want to try their luck on local lakes. Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish are good spots to fish for **perch, cutthroat** and **smallmouth bass**, said WDFW fisheries biologist Danny Garrett. "Anglers have had success catching trout at both lakes recently, and bass and perch have been caught as well," he said.

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

Blackmouth fishing opportunities expand in February, when several marine areas in Puget Sound re-open for salmon. In the rivers, steelhead are still the best bet – especially on the coast, where two razor clam digs also are scheduled at ocean beaches.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has given the green light to an evening razor clam dig at several ocean beaches. The opening dates and evening low tides are:

- Feb. 7, Thursday, 4:22 p.m., -0.5 ft., Twin Harbors
- Feb. 8, Friday, 5:11 p.m., -0.9 ft., Twin Harbors, Long Beach, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Feb. 9, Saturday, 5:56 p.m., -1.0 ft., Twin Harbors, Long Beach, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Feb. 10, Sunday, 6:37 p.m., -0.9 ft., Twin Harbors, Long Beach
- Feb. 11, Monday, 7:17 p.m., -0.5 ft., Twin Harbors
- Feb. 12, Tuesday, 7:54 p.m., 0.0 ft., Twin Harbors

Later in February, WDFW will proceed with another digging opportunity if marine toxin tests are favorable. Tentative opening dates and evening low tides for that dig are:

- Feb. 23, Saturday, 5:12 p.m., +0.3 ft., Long Beach, Twin Harbors

- Feb. 24, Sunday, 5:47 p.m., +0.1 ft., Long Beach, Twin Harbors

Clam diggers are reminded that they should take lights or lanterns for the nighttime digs and to 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, anglers will have additional opportunities to fish for blackmouth in the marine areas of Puget Sound on Feb. 1, when marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon) and 12 (Hood Canal) open for salmon. Marine areas 13 (South Puget Sound) and 6 (eastern Strait) are already open for salmon fishing.

"Fishing has been very good in the eastern Strait and Marine Area 7 (San Juan Islands), especially at Coyote, Hein and Partridge banks," said Ryan Lothrop, WDFW's Puget Sound recreational salmon fishery manager. "That should continue into February."

Later in month, anglers will also have a chance to hook blackmouth in Marine Area 5 (Sekiu), where salmon fishing opens Feb. 16. "Last February, blackmouth fishing started strong at Sekiu, and anglers continued to do well over the next several weeks," Lothrop said. "Hopefully fishing will be just as good this year once the season gets under way."

Saltwater anglers in southern Puget Sound are hooking resident **coho salmon**, said Larry Phillips, district fish biologist for WDFW. "The Tacoma Narrows has been decent for resident coho, and I've heard they are finding a few blackmouth as well," he said. "The Squaxin Island area and Eld Inlet off Evergreen Beach are two other spots anglers might want to try fishing for resident coho this time of year."

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 the Sound.

Winter is prime time to jig for **squid** in Puget Sound. Good spots include the Point Defiance Park and Les Davis piers in Tacoma, and the Illahee State Park, Waterman and Indianola piers in Kitsap County. More information is available on the department's [squid fishing webpage](#). Information on fishing piers is available [here](#).

Another option is to head to a local lake and hook some trout. Anglers fishing American Lake (Pierce County) and Saint Clair Lake (Thurston County) have been doing well for rainbow trout, said Phillips. "They've been hooking some nice trout in the 13- to 16-inch range at both lakes, which have decent carry over rates for trout stocked the previous summer," he said.

In the northern rivers, the hatchery **steelhead** run is winding down, but more wild steelhead are arriving each week, said Kirt Hughes, regional fishery manager for WDFW. Beginning Feb. 16, anglers can retain one wild steelhead per license year 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.

"The abundant wild steelhead populations returning to those rivers also provide great catch-and-release fishing opportunities," Hughes said. Information on weekly steelhead catches in the Quillayute River system and the Hoh River are available on [WDFW's website](#).

Farther south, anglers can still find hatchery steelhead in the Skookumchuck, Satsop, Wynoochee and mainstem Chehalis rivers, where late-run steelhead are still being caught, said Hughes.

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

Looking for some competition? Anglers can take part in the **Olympic Peninsula Salmon Derby** over Presidents' Day Weekend near Sequim. Details are available at the [derby's website](#).

Southwest Washington

Ocean bright **spring chinook salmon** are beginning to move into the Columbia River, setting the stage for one of the state's most popular fisheries. Anglers typically start landing early-returning "springers" in early February, but the fishery usually doesn't catch fire until March.

"This is a good time to dust off your gear, order your bait, prepare your boat, and maybe do a little prospecting," said Joe Hymer, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "You want to be ready to go when the bulk of the run arrives."

The spring chinook fishery is open below the Interstate 5 Bridge until March 1, when new rules approved by fishery managers from Washington and Oregon extend the fishery further upriver. The current limit is two adult hatchery fish per day.

Barbless hooks are required to fish for salmon, steelhead and cutthroat trout in the mainstem Columbia River from the north jetty to the Washington/Oregon border above 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.

As in previous years, only hatchery-reared fish marked with a clipped adipose fin and a healed scar may be retained. All wild spring chinook, identifiable by an intact adipose fin, must be released unharmed.

Anglers may also retain two adult hatchery spring chinook per day on the Cowlitz and Deep rivers. The limit on the Lewis River, East Fork Lewis and Kalama river is one spring chinook per day through Feb. 14, after which all or part of those rivers will close to retention of spring chinook will close until further notice. See WDFW's [Emergency Rules webpage](#) for details.

"The Cowlitz River and waters near the Willamette River are probably the best bets early in the season, because spring chinook usually start showing up there first," Hymer said.

Starting March 1, the chinook fishery on the mainstem Columbia River will expand upriver to Beacon Rock – and to Bonneville Dam for bank anglers – under new fishing seasons approved in late January. The initial spring chinook fishery is scheduled to run through April 5, but could be extended if enough fish are still available under the harvest guideline, said Ron Roler, WDFW Columbia River policy manager.

According to the pre-season forecast, a total of 141,400 upriver spring chinook will return to the Columbia River Basin this year – well below last year's return and the recent 10-year average of just under 200,000 fish. Another 67,600 spring chinook are expected to return to lower-river tributaries such as the Willamette and Cowlitz rivers.

"Salmon returns are highly variable, and we'll have a better idea what the season holds once the bulk of the run starts moving upriver," Roler said. "Although the preseason forecast is smaller than in recent years, it is still twice as large as those we saw in the 1990s."

The harvest guideline through April 5 will allow anglers to catch up to 5,000 hatchery-reared upriver chinook below Bonneville Dam before the run forecast is updated in May. Another 670 adult fish will be reserved for anglers fishing between Bonneville and the Washington/Oregon state line, 17 miles upriver from McNary Dam.

For more information on the new season, see the [news release](#) and the [fishing rule change](#) on the WDFW website.

Meanwhile, anglers continue to reel in **hatchery steelhead** from waters ranging from the Cowlitz River to the John Day Pool and beyond. In general, the steelhead in the lower tributaries are winter-run fish, while those above Bonneville Dam are left over from last year's summer run, Hymer said.

"Hatchery-reared late-run winter steelhead are still moving up the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers and should be available to anglers for weeks to come," he said.

Anglers fishing the Columbia River can also catch and keep legal-size **white sturgeon** in areas both below and above Bonneville Dam. Anglers can keep one fish measuring 38-54 inches (fork length) per day from The Dalles Dam downstream and 43-54 inches (fork length) upstream from The Dalles Dam.

Below Bonneville Dam, the retention fishery downstream from the Wauna powerlines is open on a daily basis. Waters above the powerlines to the dam are open for sturgeon retention Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays only. Through April, angling is prohibited in the slough formed by Sand Island along the Oregon shore east of Rooster Rock State Park on the Columbia River.

Sturgeon retention is also open on a daily basis in The Dalles and John Day pools, but will [close in the Bonneville Pool](#) at the end of the day Feb. 10 to preserve a portion of the 1,100-fish quota in that area for a summer fishery. Fishery managers anticipate that 850 (or more) legal-size fish will be available for that purpose after the closure this month. Catch-and-release fishing will continue in the Bonneville Pool, where dates for a summer fishery will be announced in the coming weeks.

At the same meeting where fishery managers set new spring chinook rules, they also established joint sturgeon-fishing seasons below Bonneville Dam that reflect ongoing concerns about sturgeon populations in the lower Columbia River. For more information, see the [news release](#) and [fishing rule change](#) on the WDFW website.

Fishing for **Columbia River smelt** will remain closed in both fresh and saltwater statewide. In 2010, the federal government declared eulachon a "threatened" species under the Endangered Species Act.

Rainbow trout, on the other hand, are readily available in lakes throughout southwest Washington. WDFW stocked are lakes with tens of thousands of them in the past two months, and most are still available to anglers, said John Weinheimer, another WDFW fish biologist based in Vancouver. In addition, Battle Ground Lake and Klineline Pond will each be stocked with 3,000 catchable-size trout in February.

Weinheimer said he's also getting reports of **kokanee** being caught at Merwin Reservoir, adding that the action should pick up throughout the month.

Anglers and hunters who want to get prepped for the seasons ahead might want to drop by the [Pacific Northwest Sportsmen's Show](#), which runs Feb. 6-10 at the Portland Expo Center. WDFW will have a booth at the show, which will also feature plenty of outdoor gear, a kids' trout pond and experts on topics ranging from fly fishing to elk bugling.

Eastern Washington

February fishing throughout the region can be good for those willing and equipped to brave wintery conditions.

In the central district, two winter-only **rainbow trout** lakes continue to produce decent catches. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) district fish biologist Randy Osborne reports fishing at Hog Canyon Lake, in southwest Spokane County off

the Fishtrap I-90 exit, has been slow but anglers are hooking rainbows from 11 to 18 inches. Meanwhile, Fourth of July Lake, on the Lincoln-Adams county line south of the town of Sprague, was producing catch limits of fish over 14 inches. Osborne reminds anglers that the daily catch limit at both lakes is five fish but only two fish over 14 inches may be retained.

The region's other two winter-only fishing lakes – Hatch and Williams in northern Stevens County – also continue to provide catches of rainbows through the ice.

Osborne reminds anglers to “use common sense” when ice fishing. The ice depth at Fourth of July is about eight inches at the narrows and about five inches at the south end, Osborne said. Although that ice is safe for the most part, there may be some thin sections or open water around the edges. Repeated thawing and re-freezing can make ice unsafe. Tips to help keep an outing safe include:

- 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 with appropriate clothing and equipment for weather conditions and emergencies.

Year-round-open fishing lakes in the region are also a good bet in February. The best is probably Lake Roosevelt, the huge reservoir off Grand Coulee Dam that stretches along the north border of Lincoln County and between Ferry and Stevens counties. Most of the best fishing has been lower in the reservoir near the dam.

“Rainbow trout and **kokanee** fishing has been really good for those willing to be out on the water braving the cold,” said Osborne, who was recently among those fishing at the lake. “We've heard many reports of limits of rainbows ranging from 15 to 18 inches. And although fewer and farther between, anglers have been catching kokanee weighing up to 3.5 pounds.”

Other smaller year-round waters still producing include Silver Lake in southwest Spokane County and Eloika Lake in northern Spokane County, both with good catches of **yellow perch** up to 9 inches. Rock Lake in Whitman County has been consistent through the winter for rainbow and **brown trout** catches, but anglers should be prepared for wind. Sprague Lake, on the Lincoln-Adams county line, has been fair for

rainbow trout. Bead Lake, north of Newport in Pend Oreille County, traditionally has catches of **burbot** at this time.

Waitts Lake in southern Stevens County, which has provided decent catches of both trout and perch, closes at the end of February.

Northcentral Washington

Fishing for **steelhead** in northcentral Washington continues through February on three waterways: 1) the mainstem Columbia River from Rock Island Dam to the boundary markers below Wells Dam and from Highway 173 Bridge in Brewster to 400 feet below Chief Joseph Dam; 2) the Okanogan River from the mouth upstream to the Highway 97 Bridge in Oroville; and 3) the Similkameen River from the mouth upstream to 400 feet below Enloe Dam.

"It's been slow steelheading in the mainstem Columbia River above Brewster due to cold daytime temperatures," said Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Okanogan District Fish Biologist Bob Jateff. "Fishing should pick up as things start to warm up a little this month."

Jateff reminds steelheaders that the Okanogan and Similkameen rivers are under selective gear rules, and there is a mandatory retention rule in effect for all steelhead fishing areas. The daily catch limit is two adipose-fin-clipped, hatchery-origin fish, with a minimum size of 20 inches. Any steelhead with an adipose fin must be released unharmed and can't be removed from the water.

WDFW Chelan District Fish Biologist Travis Maitland also reports steelheading on the Upper Columbia River from Rock Island Dam to Wells Dam has been slow, although a few harvestable hatchery steelhead are being caught.

Beginning Feb. 8, the **Wenatchee** and **Icicle rivers** will open for steelhead fishing. The Wenatchee River will be open from the mouth to 400 feet below Tumwater Dam, while the Icicle River will be open from the mouth to 500 feet downstream of the Leavenworth National Fish Hatchery Barrier Dam. Anglers can also fish for whitefish beginning Feb. 8 on the Wenatchee River, from the mouth to the Highway 2 Bridge at Leavenworth.

The daily limit on the Wenatchee and Icicle rivers is two hatchery steelhead, marked with a clipped adipose fin and measuring at least 20 inches in length. Anglers must retain any legal hatchery steelhead they catch until they reach their daily limit of two fish. For more information, check the [fishing rule change](#).

Other fishing opportunities in the region through February are through the ice for trout and spiny-ray fish at year-round or otherwise still-open lakes.

Maitland reports quite a bit of weekend ice fishing pressure at Fish Lake north of Leavenworth, with mixed bags of **yellow perch** and **rainbow trout**. Some of the larger perch have been 11 to 12 inches, he said.

Roses Lake, just north of Manson, has been producing mostly rainbows through the ice, Maitland says, but there are some nice perch to be found also.

"Last year the perch at Roses ran on average larger than those caught out of Fish Lake," he said. "We also still have some of those large **tiger** and **brown trout** in Roses Lake. One angler told me that he had hooked into something that he could not control and eventually broke his line. Who knows what that was?"

Jateff says ice fishing is in full swing during February in Okanogan County at the following lakes:

- Davis (near Winthrop) for rainbow trout 11-13 inches
- Patterson (near Winthrop) for yellow perch 7-9 inches and kokanee to 11 inches
- Leader (near Omak) for bluegill, black crappie, bass, yellow perch, rainbow trout
- Big and Little Green (near Omak) for rainbow trout to 13 inches
- Rat (near Brewster) for rainbow and brown trout to 15 inches
- Palmer (near Loomis) for yellow perch to 10 inches and kokanee
- Sidley/Molson (near Oroville) for rainbow trout 11-14 inches
- Bonaparte (near Tonasket) for eastern brook trout and kokanee

Jateff and Maitland remind anglers to take a cautious approach when ice fishing. Repeated thawing and re-freezing can make ice unsafe. Here are some ways to reduce the risk of fishing on ice:

- 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 with appropriate clothing and equipment for weather conditions and emergencies.

WDFW staff will be available to answer fishing and other questions at the first annual Wenatchee Valley Sportsmen Show, Feb. 22-24, at the Town Toyota Center in Wenatchee. For more info see <http://www.shuylersproductions.com/wvss.php> .

Southcentral Washington

Winter has cast a chill on many area fisheries, but the action should pick up for several species in the weeks ahead. Steelhead fishing usually starts to come alive in late February or early March and walleye fishing should improve as water temperatures start to rise.

In addition, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) will start stocking Dalton Lake, Quarry Pond and the Columbia Park juvenile-fishing pond with trout next month.

But for **whitefish**, prime time is now. Relatively hard to find during most months of the year, whitefish appear during the winter months and tend to go on the bite after the snow starts to fly. Hardy anglers are now catching whitefish on the Naches and Tieton rivers, and on the Yakima River upstream from Union Gap.

"February is a perfect time to catch whitefish," said John Easterbrooks, WDFW fish manager for southcentral Washington. "Now is when they start to congregate and the catch levels rise."

Anglers can catch and keep 15 whitefish per day, but fishing gear is restricted to one size 14 single-point hook. The standard bait is a whitefish fly and a maggot. While bony, whitefish – often served smoked – have a dedicated following.

Easterbrooks reminds anglers that all fishing is closed on the Yakima River between the Highway 223 Bridge in Granger to the Interstate 82 Bridge in Union Gap. WDFW and the Yakama Nation

closed that stretch of the river to protect steelhead listed under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Sturgeon fishing is another option, especially since the McNary Pool (also known as Lake Wallula) opened Feb. 1 for retention of legal-size fish. Drawing anglers from throughout the region, the fishery extends from McNary Dam upstream to Priest Rapids Dam on the Columbia River and upstream to Ice Harbor Dam on the Snake River.

Paul Hoffarth, a WDFW district fish biologist located in Pasco, said the opening at Lake Wallula should take some pressure off the fishery under way at Lake Umatilla (John Day Pool), where anglers have been chiseling away at the annual quota. "That quota has been reached very early in recent years, so anglers should go soon – and keep an eye out for updates," he said.

In both areas, only sturgeon measuring 43-54 inches from their snout to the fork in their tail may be retained.

Meanwhile, anglers continue to catch some **hatchery steelhead** at Ringold, both from the bank and by boat. Although fishing has been spotty this winter, catch rates should pick up in late February or early March, Hoffarth said. The lower Snake River is also open for the retention of hatchery steelhead through March 31. The daily limit in the Snake River is three hatchery steelhead and barbless hooks are required.

Walleye fishing can also slow down in winter, but there's always a chance of catching a lunker. Hoffarth said 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. The Oregon record, just shy of 20 pounds, was taken on Lake Umatilla during the winter of 1990.

For additional information on all these fisheries, see the [Fishing in Washington](#) pamphlet, available online.

Anglers and hunters who want to get prepped for the seasons ahead might want to drop by the [Central Washington Sportsmen Show](#), running Feb. 15-17 at the Yakima Sundome. **WDFW will have a booth at the show, which will also feature plenty of outdoor gear, a fly-casting pool and experts on topics ranging from fly fishing to elk bugling.**

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Random Links

Humpback Whale Visits our Boat in SE Alaska:

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

3 Rivers, Lake Billy Chinook Webcam and Live Weather Information:

<http://weather.webformix.com/>

Shark Attack Video:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=ZUFwFttMNOE#!

Underwater video of Brook Trout:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=C3X9ILUKjZk

GOOD LUCK!