

The Guide's Forecast - volume 15 issue number 50

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 6th – December 12th, 2013**

Willamette Valley/Metro - The Columbia below Bonneville Dam has been a ghost town for fisherman. If you're willing to brave the wind, the rain and the cold (and quite possibly some snow) you could have some action catching and releasing sturgeon.

A report finally came in of a winter steelhead taken from Meldrum Bar. Although not confirmed, supposedly a few have also been taken by the back-trollers at the mouth of the Clackamas River. This is the season, catch and release sturgeon fishing in the Portland Harbor should produce solid action for anglers willing to give it a try.

McKenzie level and flows are moderating following the freshet early this week. Fish caddis patterns and Blue-winged Olives patiently. A big McKenzie River redband is a worthwhile payoff.

Waters of the North Santiam crested on December 2nd but have been dropping since that date. While steelhead are scarce and coho uncooperative, rainbow and cutthroat trout will take Caddis imitations on the Stayton to Shelburne stretch all day long.

An adventurous angler reportedly caught two winter steelhead on the Clackamas River last week. Although it's still pretty early, more fish should show once the river drops back into shape by the weekend.

Winter steelhead are finally showing up on the Sandy River. After the high water recedes, look for angler effort to increase and more fresh fish to show up in the catch.

Boaters: If you haven't done so already, be sure to winterize your craft.

Northwest – Tillamook chinook fishing remains slow. After a brief battering of storms and a quick rise in river levels, anglers were forced to take a few days off of effort. Swollen rivers are now coming back into shape but steelhead will be on the minds of most, following a poor showing of late season chinook.

The Wilson and Kilchis Rivers will remain prime late season options for chinook with some returning early hatchery steelhead as well. The early component of steelhead will give us an idea as to how the rest of the season will perform. The first streams to fish after significant rainfall are the North Fork Nehalem and Three Rivers. Effort was high for Three Rivers anglers on Tuesday but conditions will improve by Wednesday and Thursday for most North Coast streams. After the strong deluge and high winds, rivers can become hazardous to drift. Rumors of a downed tree on the North Fork Nehalem might make it impossible to safely float this weekend. The Necanicum River is much the same although apparently did not get the rainfall that Tillamook County streams received.

With dropping water temperatures and an east wind influence, the bite likely won't take off but late mornings and early afternoons should produce best. Steelhead should be present in most north coast streams.

The lower Columbia River remains a strong crabbing option with a good tide series happening over the weekend. Clam digging will be best before the weekend; especially with the forecasted mild surf. Diggers will need lanterns and warm clothes to produce catches.

With the east wind knocking down the ocean swell, offshore crabbing and bottomfishing should be a strong option if you can tolerate the cool temperatures. Lingcod and seabass should be willing and

available on most rocky reefs but the south jetty out of Astoria is reporting poor catches. Adult Dungeness males are more likely to be found at depths greater than 35 feet this time of year.

Southwest- Long-range central Oregon offshore forecasts indicate friendly launch conditions for the coming weekend. Bottomfishing and crabbing should be excellent. Commercial efforts for crab have been delayed until December 15th and possibly longer as testing of Dungeness showed meat content too low for market standards.

Crabbing has been slow in Yaquina Bay although some hard, legal Dungeness are being taken.

Bright chinook were taken out of the Siuslaw over the past weekend although it's getting late in the season for this river.

Trollers at Siltcoos Lake have been taking wild coho on plugs recently. This fishery is open through the end of the year although fish are starting to show some color.

Lower Rogue anglers are taking the occasional winter steelhead although half-pounder catches have been fair to good. Fishing on the middle river has been slow to fair for summer steelhead. Upper Rogue anglers continue to take steelhead thanks in part to ongoing recycling of fish from Coles River Hatchery. Most of these summers are pretty colorful at this time of year. Coho are also in the mix.

When the ocean has cooperated, limits of lingcod and rockfish have been taken out of the Port of Brookings. The Chetco is coming off another minor freshet with water predicted to be low and dropping into the coming week. Bobber and bait fished in deeper holes will take chinook. Prospects for winter steelhead will improve in January.

Rain is still needed to jump-start the chinook fishery on the Elk River. Precipitation in the southwest corner of the state over the past weekend was not enough to effect river levels.

Fishing remains slow at Diamond Lake.

Eastern – Crooked River is still flowing at 72 cfs and is producing trout. Anglers are using nymphs for the most part.

Mid-day fishing is likely to be most productive for steelhead in the chilly waters of the Grande Ronde River.

SW Washington- Winter steelhead now dominate the catch on the Cowlitz River; effort is on the increase. Winter chinook remain available on the North Fork of the Lewis but the quality will begin to decline in coming weeks.

The Washougal River is producing fair catches of winter steelhead with the early season peak likely by Christmas. Water levels will dictate success.

Trout anglers averaged about a fish per rod for 1+ pound rainbows. There should remain some residual fish following the aggressive Black Friday stocking at Kline Pond.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Crabbing remains the only option here and with the commercial fleet sidelined and an upcoming soft tide series, things look good for weekend crabbers. Although strong tides dominated the Thanksgiving holiday, those prepared for a quick pick of the pots did well over the weekend. Make no mistake however, it hasn't been easy. Effort remains high and you have to put your gear low in the river and down deep in waters that aren't overfished. Those still crabbing around Buoy's 20 and 22 are not pulling limits this year. That likely won't change either. It will certainly help to have fresh crab bait as well; not always easy to find this time of year.

Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reports, "The Columbia below Bonneville Dam has been a ghost town for fisherman. If you're willing to brave the wind, the rain and the cold (and quite possibly some snow) you could have some action catching and releasing sturgeon."

The Guide's Forecast – Tides couldn't be more favorable for the weekend and crabbing is likely to be good, well, except for one large factor, it looks as if the east wind could be a problem again, like it has for long periods of time this crabbing season. Cold weather often brings an east wind down the Columbia River, culminating in force around Hammond. Be prepared for this rugged weather over the weekend or just stay home to be safe. The ironic thing is that if the wind is blowing like that on the Columbia, it's likely flat calm everywhere else on the coast (in the ocean). That could make for some pretty good ocean crabbing this weekend out of more southerly ports. Go to the Forecast section of the North Coast fishing report for the outlook or click here for offshore forecasts:

<http://forecast.weather.gov/shmrn.php?mz=pzz250&syn=pzz200>

Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) predicts, "Freezing cold weather prevails through the weekend. The Columbia River gorge is going to be a miserable place to recreate. Anxious anglers are advised to do their Christmas shopping now, rather than later."

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reports, "A report finally came in of a winter steelhead taken from Meldrum Bar. Although not confirmed, supposedly a few had also been taken by the back-trollers at the mouth of the Clackamas River prior to the rise. High, dirty water plus debris will be around for a few more days, but by early next week the water turbidity should start looking green rather than brown. Tis the season, catch and release sturgeon fishing in the Portland Harbor should produce solid action for anglers willing to give it a try. The harbor is loaded with fat hungry sturgeon and they are fairly indiscriminate about bait offerings. You may have to try a spot or two till you find fish, but if you find a hole with fish, stay there till it dries up. Before the high water, anglers as well as spectator ship workers were watching droves of sturgeon jumping and rolling in the Swan Island bay. Some between 6 and 8 feet long. There has to be something that attracts the fish to the area and it could be a warm water discharge. Nonetheless, If you have a boat with a top and a good heater, C&R sturgeon is a great way to spend a day pulling on fish, especially if you want to stay local."

McKenzie water levels are dropping and will continue to do so over the coming weekend. Banks are icy here.

Flows on the North Santiam are moderating but still about 30% greater than they were prior to that last round of precipitation.

The Guide's Forecast – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) predicts, "By the end of the weekend, the Willamette River should start dropping back into fishable shape. If you can manage to stay warm, catch and release sturgeon fish will be a good option. Once the river starts to green up, steelhead will also be an option at Meldrum bar."

Fly anglers and gear fishers are enjoying fair to good results for summer steelhead below Dexter Dam on

the middle fork of the Willamette River. While these fish don't exhibit the seasonal sparkle of fresh winters, they're willing and put up respectable resistance.

Given the weather and road conciliations, neither the McKenzie nor Santiam river is worth the trip this coming weekend. Give it a week, then we'll see.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reports, "An adventurous bank angler reportedly caught two winter steelhead on the Clackamas River last week. Although it's still pretty early, more fish should show once the river drops back into shape by the weekend. The biggest hindrance now is the frigid weather. The river is quickly dropping back into shape but nobody wants to freeze their hiney off this early in the game.

"A few winter steelhead have finally showed up on the Sandy River. By this weekend, look for angler effort to increase and more fresh fish to show up in the catch. The stretch between Oxbow Park and Dabney Park will yield the best catch this early in the season. The usual baits and lures will get it done. Cured roe and sandshrimp are favorites, but coon shrimp and prawn tails will also turn a steelheads head. Few anglers use crawfish tails anymore but they will often times out-fish anything else. In the warm weather months, they are easy to catch, easy to put up and they are super durable baits. You can fish them raw, but they also work cooked or cured. A peeled crawfish tail on a size 1 hook with some pink, purple or blue yarn and a pearl pink corky is a deadly rig in medium to clear water."

The Guide's Forecast – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) predicts, "The river is already looking good, but the cold weather and water will keep anglers at bay and give what few steelhead are available a case of lockjaw. You really have to take it up a notch to get a steelhead excited enough to bite in sub 40 degree water. But it can be done. A size 5 silver plated spinner or a silver soon is a good cold water choice.

"The Sandy River is known for biting, cold wind coming off the glacier on Mt Hood and howling down the river valley. Its stings just thinking about it. Although water level is at an optimum, air and water temperature is working against anglers (and the fish). If you must, good luck and try to stay warm."

North Coast Fishing Report – It's been a rough week on the north coast; first battered by wind, rain and swollen rivers, now anglers trying to work the coastal waters are freezing to death in an attempt to catch late-run salmon or early-run steelhead. Depending on your age and years of wisdom, you're either out there in relatively uncrowded conditions catching very little, or you stoking your fire at home, reminiscing with your fellow fishing buddies about the days when you used to knock the ice out of your line guides. Does anyone really still do that?

Many of the coastal systems are fishable now but early indications aren't exciting many anglers. On a good year, the North Fork Nehalem is producing good catches by now, especially after an ideal rain freshet like we are just coming off of. Reports from that system indicate few fish being caught although effort remained light, likely due to the dangerous travel conditions and cold water that flat shut fish down. Like the North Fork, Three Rivers got a lot of attention on Tuesday but anglers weren't hauling mega-loads of steelhead up the banks despite great water conditions. Anglers on both rivers were concentrating their efforts near the hatcheries, which are a wise idea; there just wasn't many steelhead present to harvest. Cold water conditions certainly have a lot to do with steelheader success with the Wilson dropping 8 degrees in just 4 days. It's hard enough catching fish in those cold water conditions but when the drop is that dramatic, it's really hard.

It will be difficult to tell if there are willing fish in the north coast systems until the water temperatures at least stabilize. When water temps do go on the rise, the bite should pick up. The larger systems were just coming into prime color on Thursday with the weekend looking good for those willing to brave the cold.

We'll spend more time on what we have to look forward to in the next section but like inland salmon/steelhead fishing, those willing to brave frigid temperatures, may want to look west for bottomfishing and ocean crabbing opportunities. The ocean is just now starting to lie down and look promising. I'm not sure if the bottomfish will react much differently in the chilling air temperatures.

With the inclement weather, not many folks have been recreating on the north coast estuaries. It seems that cool east winds seem even colder on an open estuary.

With not much to report on given the recent weather conditions (Tuesday was really the last day to fish without getting hypothermia), let's look forward to what lies ahead.

The Guide's Forecast – With the continued weather forecast, don't look for success rates to jump anytime soon. Cool temperatures will keep salmon and steelhead less than motivated this week. The Arctic air blast is predicted to remain in Oregon for a while longer which will keep the fish from intensively migrating let alone from aggressively biting.

Smaller systems such as the Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem, and Three Rivers will still offer the best chance at steelhead prior to the weekend. If you do choose to fish these North Coast rivers, there will be a rare fish caught in the morning but fish can become more active as water and air temperatures rise by late morning. By the weekend, you will want to use smaller baits but stick with the bright colors as steelhead seem to respond to those in colder water temperatures.

By the weekend, the Wilson and Trask rivers will also be options but again, because of the cold air and water temperatures success rates will remain low. There should still be some salmon around for those willing to work for them but cold water temperatures will keep them from aggressively biting. The Wilson downstream from Mills Bridge will offer up the best opportunities for both salmon and steelhead. The Trask River will fish best below Loren's Drift. Like our suggestion to bank anglers, the better fishing will likely take place when air and water temperatures warm up in the late morning and early afternoon. Don't overlook the use of plugs when pursuing both salmon and steelhead this time of year. The Tadpole plug line seems to produce results for both salmon and steelhead this time of year.

Tillamook Bay anglers may still be plying the waters for chinook and a winter sturgeon. Neither species will likely give up easily under these conditions but if you bring a propane heater you may be able to tolerate your outing. Fish the incoming tide on the east side of the bay or salmon and outgoing tide on the west side of the bay for sturgeon. Don't go into it with high expectations.

Crabbing in the estuaries may pick up by the weekend. North coast estuaries may be a stronger option than the Lower Columbia River where east winds are likely to hamper success and safety. The ocean they also be a viable option has the forecast indicates calm seas ahead:

FRI

E WIND 10 TO 15 KT WITH GUSTS TO 20 KT. WIND WAVES 3 FT.
NW SWELL 2 FT AT 7 SECONDS. RAIN.

FRI NIGHT

NE WIND 15 TO 20 KT...EASING TO 10 TO 15 KT AFTER
MIDNIGHT. WIND WAVES 3 FT. NW SWELL 2 FT AT 7 SECONDS.

SAT

NE WIND 10 TO 15 KT...BECOMING E 5 TO 10 KT IN THE AFTERNOON. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 2 FT AT 13 SECONDS.

SAT NIGHT

NE WIND 5 TO 10 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 3 FT AT 12 SECONDS.

SUN

E WIND 5 KT. WIND WAVES 1 FT. W SWELL 3 FT.

MON

E WIND 5 KT. WIND WAVES 1 FT. W SWELL 6 FT.

Bottomfishing in the nearshore could be pretty good too. The farther offshore you get however, the more you open yourself up to rough seas upon your return to port. If the east wind blows as forecast, it should knock the swell down to next to nothing in the nearshore. No need to launch early, go late when temperatures warm.

Central & South Coast Reports – Winter steelhead season is upon us. This is the time of year when anglers expect frosty mornings and a day on the river dealing with ice in the guides. An exploratory trip mid-week revealed a number of hopefuls on several coastal rivers although no catches were observed. Be careful out there; the weather over the coming week will be just ridiculous.

When boats are able to get out, offshore bottom fishing is excellent at this time of year and with ocean crabbing once again an option as of December 1st, it's possible to return to port with a bounty of northwest seafood. Usually, the problem is getting out; this weekend it will be getting there safely.

For What it's worth, offshore forecasts are pretty fantastic for this time of year. Swells are predicted to remain at two feet or less at intervals of 12 seconds or longer. As tempting as that may seem, if we're graced with snow, it will stay in place (along with ice) as air temperatures will remain below freezing all weekend long which is the forecast as of the morning of December 5th. The coast range will undoubtedly get the worst of it. Be extremely cautious if you try it. The best advice might be don't. On a trip over the western hills on Wednesday this week in sunny weather, every shady spot was a slippery mystery.

A few coho have been taken at Siltcoos and Tahkenitch by hearty trollers using plugs or spinners this week. The fishery never really got hot and is starting to slow as the majority of fish make their way upstream to spawn. Wild coho may be kept at these locations through December 31st.

Crabbing has been slow in Yaquina Bay and only a little better just outside in the ocean. Alsea Bay crabbers have had slightly better results.

Big Elk, a tributary of the Yaquina River, has put out a few winter steelhead but as with most coastal streams, it's early in the season for best results.

It's still early for the winter steelhead fishery to be productive on the Siuslaw although a few have been taken. Look for catches to improve in the coming weeks.

While coho is closed and Chinook fishing is all but wrapped up for the year, winter steelhead are starting to show in fish traps and on anglers' lines on the Siletz River. Water levels are dropping as a result of the last freshet so conditions are decent but prospects will improve later in December and into the New Year.

Waters of the Umpqua have potential to hold a few early winter steelhead although the majority will be wild fish. Bundle up and try the below Elkton to Sawyers Rapids. North Umpqua fly fishers report slow to fair results for summer steelhead with mornings near Swiftwater most productive. While the South Umpqua opened on December 1st, winter steelhead won't be available in fishable number until January next year with catches improving in February. Once winters arrive, the South Umpqua holds the best chance for anglers to score hatchery keepers.

Crabbing has finally started to improve on Coos Bay as those crabbing from docks have joined boaters in taking some legal Dungeness. A few winter steelhead have been caught in the Coos as well as the Coquille river with prospects improving later in the season.

While a few half-pounders are being taken along the Agness stretch of the lower Rogue, most anglers are awaiting the arrival of fresh, bright winters. Steelheaders are reporting fair fishing for summers which are hitting a variety of spinners, lures and drifted bait. Best results have come in the Grants Pass stretch. A few coho are still being caught although most of these fish are showing plenty of color. Anglers are taking a mix of summer steelhead and coho on the upper Rogue with fishing reported as fair to good. Fish are hitting spinners or plugs and bait from the boat ramp at Shady Cove to the deadline at Cole Rivers Hatchery where it's legal to use.

Chinook are being taken from the Chetco River, mostly by those using bobber and bait. Low, clear water has slowed catches although a couple of winter steelhead have reportedly been landed here. Relief from bit freezing temperatures and low water may come around December 12th according to long range forecasts.

Elk and Sixes Rivers remain low and clear in the absence of precipitation. In addition, cold weather here has frost on the ground as temperatures dip well below freezing overnight. There have been no reports of fish being taken this week.

The latest speculation is that the aggressive feeding spree normally exhibited by Diamond Lake trout prior to ice-over isn't going to happen this year. For those who want to try before winter's chill causes hardening of the water here, the north boat ramp will remain plowed until ice starts to form on the lake's surface.

The ODFW shares this harrowing incident from over the past weekend:

Great White Shark Encounter Ends Well

"Chris Hyde shared a great fishing story with ODFW of his encounter with "the Landlord" during a kayak fishing trip over the weekend.

"I was fishing off of Simpson's Reef near Charleston when I had my run in with a 13-foot great white.

"The last couple of days have been excellent bottom fishing. I launched my kayak out of Sunset Bay State Park and pedaled my Hobie Revo13 the one and a half miles out to the reef. I was on the fish as soon as I got out there. I couldn't keep the lingcod off! Every drop down I had an angry male on the end of my line in a matter of seconds. It was like this all morning.

"I took a break from catching a couple hours into my trip. I was eating a sandwich when I heard water moving behind me. I didn't think anything of it; I saw porpoises early that morning and I thought it was one of them or an inquisitive seal coming close for a better look. When I finally turned around to see what was behind me I saw a massive dorsal jutting out of the water about 10 feet behind my kayak. It took a second to register what I was seeing. Then I realized a huge great white was right on my tail and it was very interested in me.

"The great visibility made it possible to get a full view of this amazing creature. I wasn't sure what to do, I knew better than to make any sudden movements. I looked around to see if my fishing buddy was close by, but he was a couple hundred yards away fishing near some rocks. The closest power boat was about 100 yards away so I slowly started toward them.

"The shark followed me almost the entire distance to the power boat. When I got within earshot I yelled out to them to let them know what was going on. One of the guys on the boat said it was as long as my kayak. It disappeared just as I got near the boat and I never saw it again.

"I was pretty shaken by the encounter and I hung around the boat for a few minutes and talked with them while I collected my nerves. I decided to continue fishing. It was pretty spooked for the rest of the trip and constantly looked over my shoulder. The conditions were epic this weekend and I was having some of the best fishing I've had all year. The shark made it that much better! I regret not getting any pictures of the shark but I was busy eating a sandwich and surviving. Perhaps next time I'll snap a picture or two.

"There are many factors that probably contributed to the chance encounter. The fins on my drive system are bright red and probably look appealing from below. I had fish bleeding out on deck and the blood was draining through the scuppers. I was also throwing the heads from my bait overboard. I was no doubt chumming. It was not my intention! Reflecting on the situation, I really wasn't in danger. It's the shark you don't see that gets you!"

"Chris recently started a Facebook group for his area called Coos Kayak Fishing."

TGF notes: to catch a little kayak rockfishing action (without any Great White distraction), see **Random Links**, below.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Steelhead are well-distributed on the lower Deschutes between Trout Creek and Maupin so one is as likely to hook up in one spot as another. Catches have been decent despite water temperatures in the mid-40-degree range. Air temperatures have been quite bearable, reaching 50 degrees during the day but dropping well below the freezing mark overnight. With the cold weather front moving over us now, be prepared for anything and everything and travel with caution.

Fly anglers raving frigid weather are catching steelhead on the Grande Ronde. Water temperatures are in the mid-30s and clear. Try downstream of the Powatka Bridge with nymphs or streamers during the warmest part of the day.

Crescent Lake has been rewarding trollers with decent-sized lake trout over the past week. It should continue to produce over the winter months whenever it's accessible.

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Michael Teague: TGFMichael@gmail.com

Chris Vertopoulos: chrsv@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com

Random Links

Rockfishing from a kayak, November, 2013

<http://vimeo.com/80679303>

ODFW sued over McKenzie hatchery fish

<http://www.westernlaw.org/article/fishing-groups-aim-ensure-mckenzie-river-hatchery-does-not-hinder-recovery-imperiled-wild-sp>

Frozen waterfalls from the Oregonian

http://www.oregonlive.com/travel/index.ssf/2013/12/sahalee_falls_more_frozen_call.html#incart_river

Rogue Chinook recover in absence of dams

http://seattletimes.com/html/localnews/2022293731_rogueriverxml.html

GOOD LUCK!