

The Guide's Forecast - volume 15 issue number 51

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 13th – December 19th, 2013**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro - On the Columbia, few reports from even fewer fishers give the impression your effort isn't worth the reward. Anglers will have several months to look forward to the first returns of spring chinook. If waters warm, a pilot run of smelt may make a winter showing.

On the Willamette, despite the frigid weather, some steelhead were taken from Meldrum Bar last week. Plunkers are casting their lines, fixing their rods into a rod holder and retreating to their warm vehicles in anticipation of a bite. Expect an improvement with the warming temperatures. Sturgeon fishers also had catch and release success in the Portland Harbor using smelt, squid, sand shrimp and anchovies will all entice hungry sturgeon.

McKenzie River water levels have been steadily dropping for over a week. Without a winter steelhead run, trout are the species to target for hearty fly fishers.

The North Santiam holds little of interest to anglers this time of year with few target species to pursue.

Bitter cold has kept anglers indoors and off the water on the Clackamas River. The water level remains very fishable but the extremely cold water temperature makes for tough fishing.

Like the Clackamas, the Sandy is a frozen ghost town for fishermen. Although there may a few steelhead in the system, getting them to bite is a challenge in the cold water. Wait for the coming rain to warm the river a few degrees and add a bit of color, then give it a try.

Northwest – Hazardous roads and plummeting temperatures have kept many anglers from trying their hand at coastal steelheading. Early indications from the North Fork Nehalem are less than impressive; only 46 steelhead were in the trap for a 2 week collection period, not giving anglers much hope for early season success. The upcoming weather front and associated warmer weather will give anglers a good idea how the rest of the season will unfold. Only a moderate bump in river levels is forecast so water temperatures will play the biggest role for weekend anglers.

The Highway 30 systems, the Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem, Kilchis, Wilson, Nestucca and Three Rivers are all options once precipitation changes the current low and clear water conditions. A rare late-season chinook may come from the Wilson or Trask Rivers.

Ocean crabbing and fishing was great on a calm ocean last week but those conditions may not return for quite some time. Commercial crabbers are likely to set pots on the 13th, effectively out-competing the recreational fleet.

The upcoming minus tide series may offer the last chance for coastal sturgeon on Tillamook or Nehalem Bays. Although action largely depends on a winter food source for lower Columbia sturgeon, some fish are certainly present.

Southwest- Offshore bottom fishing has been good out of Newport and Depoe Bay. One cabezon may continue to contribute to a seven-rockfish bag limit through December 31. Travel carefully as coast range roads may remain icy for a while.

Recreational ocean crabbing has been worthwhile but wintry when boats have been able to get out.

Commercial efforts, originally scheduled for Dec.1, will commence on Dec. 16 if crabbers agree on market prices.

Coos Bay crabbing has been worthwhile with salinity levels high. Tidewater in the lower Coquille is producing Dungeness as well. Winter steelheading has yet to be worthwhile here.

Winchester Bay crabbing has shown a marked improvement. While the Umpqua is currently low and clear, the next round of precipitation will bring with it a bounty of bright winter steelhead. Rain this week is forecast to push the mainstem at Elkton over 2,500 cfs and that will put fish in the river.

Trolling for chinook on Rogue Bay is done for the year. Anglers on the lower Rogue are reporting an improvement in catches of winter steelhead. Side-drifting bait or swinging flies has been most effective. Flies, spinners and plugs have been producing slow to fair catches on the middle river although most fish are wild and must be released. Few anglers are trying the upper Rogue but results have been good for summer steelhead in winter temperatures. Most lures are effective as is bait above Shady Cove boat ramp where it's legal.

Limits were the rule for crabbers out of the Port of Brookings following the opening for ocean crabbing on Dec. 1. Dungeness are stuffing pots dropped in 100-foot depths and nearly everyone is over legal size. Fishing for rockfish and lingcod has also been excellent. It has been optimistically stated that winter steelheading seems to be running about two weeks ahead of schedule on the Chetco. Catches of wild, hatchery and half-pounder steelhead would make that an accurate statement, however. Some of the adults have weighed 12 to 14 pounds and as many as a dozen half-pounders have been taken by a single group of anglers in a day.

A little rain in the forecast this week may improve low, clear conditions at the Elk and Sixes rivers. Fishing in the ocean off the river mouths is closed.

Eastern – It's cold on the lower Deschutes with water temperatures in the mid-40s. Those who have been able to keep their guides free from ice have reported slow to fair fishing for steelhead.

Steelhead are being taken by fly anglers on the frigid Grande Ronde River on nymphs and streamers; fish mid-day for best results.

SW Washington- The Cowlitz remains a top bet for winter steelhead with still a few coho in the mix. The North Fork of the Lewis is still an option for fresh chinook but will soon be overtaken by winter steelhead although anglers shouldn't expect great fishing. The mainstem Lewis is slow.

The Kalama is also a poor choice but Washougal boaters are catching some winter steelhead and a rare summer fish. Anglers should see peak fishing in the next 2 weeks.

The Klickitat is slowing with only a fair return of coho this season.

More trout plants for Battle Ground and Lacamas Lakes as well as Kline Pond last week. Fishing will only improve with air temperatures.

Soapbox Update: Here's a *preliminary look* at what we have to look forward to in 2014:

Reprinted from the Northwest Fishletter publication:

NW Fishletter #325, December 12, 2013

[5] 2014 Spring, Fall Runs Predicted To Be Very Good

Columbia Basin harvest managers say next year's upriver spring chinook run could be one of the best in decades, if their preseason estimate comes true. Their 227,000-fish return is based on the high jack returns in 2013, and nearly twice the number that returned this year.

But managers' predictions have a checkered history, and have been complicated by super-high jack counts in some recent years.

They were nearly on the money in 2013--141,400 were predicted and 123,100 actually returned. But in 2012, the upriver spring run came in only 65 percent of the preseason estimate. In 2012, they were again very close--111 percent--but the three years prior to that they overestimated returns by between 57 percent and 67 percent.

The technical advisory committee to the *U.S. v. Oregon* process had more good news--it expects more than 40,000 wild springers to return to the Snake in 2014, about twice the number that returned in 2013. Hatchery and wild totals for Snake springers are expected to hit 125,000.

Upper Columbia spring chinook returns are expected in the 24,000-fish range with 3,700 wild ones. Last year, 18,000 returned, with about 3,600 wild.

Summer chinook returns to the upper Columbia are also expected to be close to last year's return. About 67,500 adults are expected, 67,600 returned last year.

On Dec. 12, Washington and Oregon harvest managers announced more good news. They expect another fall chinook run in the Columbia that could be similar to this year's huge returns. Tule stocks may come in below average, but are improving, they said. Bright stocks are expected to come in above average.

The total fall chinook run for 2013 was predicted to return nearly 678,000 fish this year, but actual returns totaled 1.2 million fish. The managers said all stocks exceeded expectations, except the Bonneville Bright stock, which met its prediction. [-B. R.](#)

Columbia River Fishing Report – Crabbing is still the only thing going on the lower river but with cold weather and an occasional east wind, folks have understandably, stayed at home. It's likely still the best bet for limits however but it's not as easy as it used to be. The weekend soft tides produced nicely for those that took advantage of the soft tides with the best action taking place on the lower Desdemona Tongue Sands. It won't be much longer until you see the commercial fleet sweeping up the rest of the opportunity on the lower Columbia; they're likely to set their pots on Friday the 13th (bad omen?).

Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reports, "Still nobody fishing the Columbia, no reports."

The Guide's Forecast – If the commercial fleet goes in as planned, beginning December 13th, it will be a lot harder to catch limits of Dungeness crab on the lower Columbia than it has been all season. And it hasn't been as easy as it once was. Couple this with a strong tide series by the weekend and it may be a futile effort. If you do go over the weekend, be prepared to stay on top of

your pots because you won't have much time to pick them before or after the tide change. Saturday could provide for some pretty good razor clam digging too if you bring your shovel for the late afternoon minus tide.

Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) predicts, "Nobody will continue fishing the Columbia."

But, here's a recent press release for those interested in what's taking place upstream of Bonneville Dam:

States adopt sturgeon season above Bonneville

Dec. 20, 2012

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

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

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

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

The size limit is 38-54 inches fork length from the mouth of the Columbia upstream to The Dalles Dam and 43-54 inches fork length from The Dalles Dam upstream to the Oregon/Washington border. Anglers are reminded that under Oregon fishing rules, the annual bag limit in 2013 will be one white sturgeon per year in all waters under state jurisdiction, down from the five fish annual bag limit in previous years. The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission adopted the reduced bag limit at its Dec. 7 meeting in response to the continued decline of legal-size white sturgeon in the Columbia and Willamette rivers.

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

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reports, "Despite the frigid weather, some steelhead have been taken from Meldrum bar on the lower Willamette. Plunkers are casting their lines, fixing their rods into a rod holder, adding the ever important bell and retreating to their warm vehicles in anticipation of a bite. A few anglers huddle close to the fire barrel if they are feeling social, but the cold is virtually unbearable for most. The spin n glow is the lure of choice 99% of the time. Rocket red, orange, pink and combinations of which are the favored

colors. A Gamakatsu 3/0 barbless hook is most commonly used, tied to 20 lb. leader. Sometimes a coon shrimp or prawn tail is added to make things even more enticing. Resist casting your offering towards the heavy flow of the middle of the river, the steelhead travel within three or four yards of shore. Expect an improvement with the warming temperatures. Sturgeon fishers also had catch and release success in the Portland Harbor. The Toyota Hole and the Gas Tank Hole are favorite haunts but you will find fish where you find them, often stacked on top of one another. Use your fish finder and look for fish before you drop anchor. If you are in a bite, keep baits in the water and stay with it till it dries up. When it dries up, look close by for a new hole loaded with fish and drop your anchor there. Smelt, squid, sand shrimp and anchovies will all entice hungry sturgeon."

The steady drop we're seeing in the flows on the McKenzie is expected to change very little as a result of rain showers this week.

Anglers who choose seclusion on the North Santiam will find water levels low and visibility good. These conditions will change little through the coming weekend.

Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake have been gifted with legal and larger trout from the ODFW. Merry Fishmas.

The Guide's Forecast – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) predicts, "With the warmer temperatures, more anglers will join in and we can expect the bite to pick up at Meldrum Bar . Christmas time is traditionally an optimum time to get into a Meldrum Bar/Blacktop steelhead. The warming conditions can only help the sturgeon bite too. A two or three degree bump is a big deal to a fish that swims in cold water for much of its life.

There's not much to lure anglers to the McKenzie at this time of year. Slow to fair catch-and-release trout fishing isn't much of a draw compared to fresh winter steelhead elsewhere.

While there is a winter steelhead run on the North Santiam, they are all wild fish. Some enjoy catch-and-release action with native steelhead. ODFW methodology for distinguishing summers from winters (they go by date), with only 137 steelhead having crossed the Falls since the 1st of November, there are darned few of them in the Santiams.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reports, "Bitter cold has kept anglers indoors and off the waters of the Clackamas River. The water level remains very fishable but the extremely cold water temperature makes for tough fishing. This week's warm up and scheduled rain will only improve the situation so stay on point. Plunkers at Riverside Park have reported seeing a couple of fish.

"Like the Clackamas, the Sandy is a frozen ghost town for fishermen and is just now starting to thaw out. Although there may be a few steelhead in the system, getting them to bite was a challenge in the cold water. Wait for the coming rain to warm the river a few degrees and add a bit of color, then give it a try. Fresh winter steelhead will be available in the river below Dodge Park. From Dodge Park upstream, you are most likely to run into old summers."

The Guide's Forecast – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) predicts, "Some fresh winter steelhead should show up in the catch this coming week on the Clackamas River. Expect the best action from Riverside Park up to the mouth of Eagle Creek. Eagle Creek needs some water and will produce a few steelhead when it gets a rise.

"The Sandy needs some water to bring fresh fish in. It's looking like we are not going to get enough to spike the river other than some snow melt. With the warmer water temperatures, there should still be an improvement in the fishing."

North Coast Fishing Report – It's been a quiet week on the north coast. Low water, frigid temperatures and treacherous travel conditions have all combined to keep anglers where they belong this week; near home. There really isn't much good to report as few have ventured out in search of winter steelhead and late season chinook. With air temperatures so cold, you'll hear stories of frozen line guides and anchor ropes and keeping your sand shrimp alive. Well, it's all true and we haven't even touched on the displeasure of trying to keep warm. To top it all off, there doesn't seem to be many fish around, at least of the biting variety.

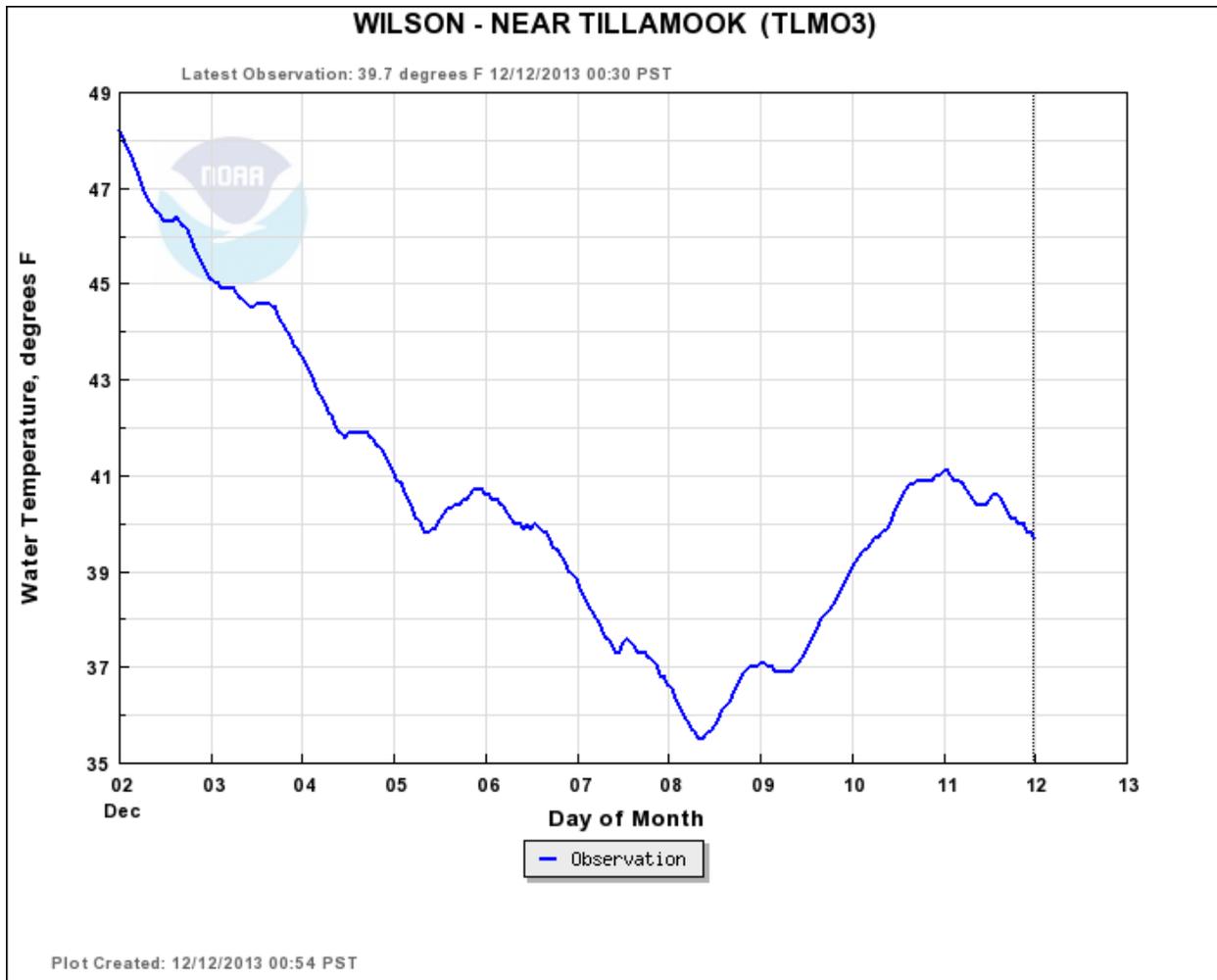
One of the better gauges for the north coast is the North Fork of the Nehalem where hatchery workers can count the number of fish in the trap and give an accurate report of how fishing success is going at the deadline. Well, it's been less than impressive with workers tallying about 46 steelhead for the last 2 weeks. Cold water temperatures surely keeps fish from biting but it also dramatically slows down their migration into the river systems. This time of year, the ocean temperatures can actually be warmer than the river temperatures and that's likely about now. It can all change in a heartbeat however so we'll spend some time looking at the prospects for the weekend in the forecast section.

The bottom line: Few anglers are in pursuit but a few steelhead are still being taken, mostly by boaters working the Wilson River and claiming virgin water using small baits or beads or bobbers and jigs. Chinook are certainly a rare catch right now, as it has been for much of the late season. Larger systems such as the Wilson remain the best bet as low, clear water has steelhead pretty skittish on the smaller streams. You can still take steelhead in the broken surfaced pockets when air temperatures warm. Temperatures did climb nearly 6 degrees in 3 days recently, which certainly doesn't hurt your chances.

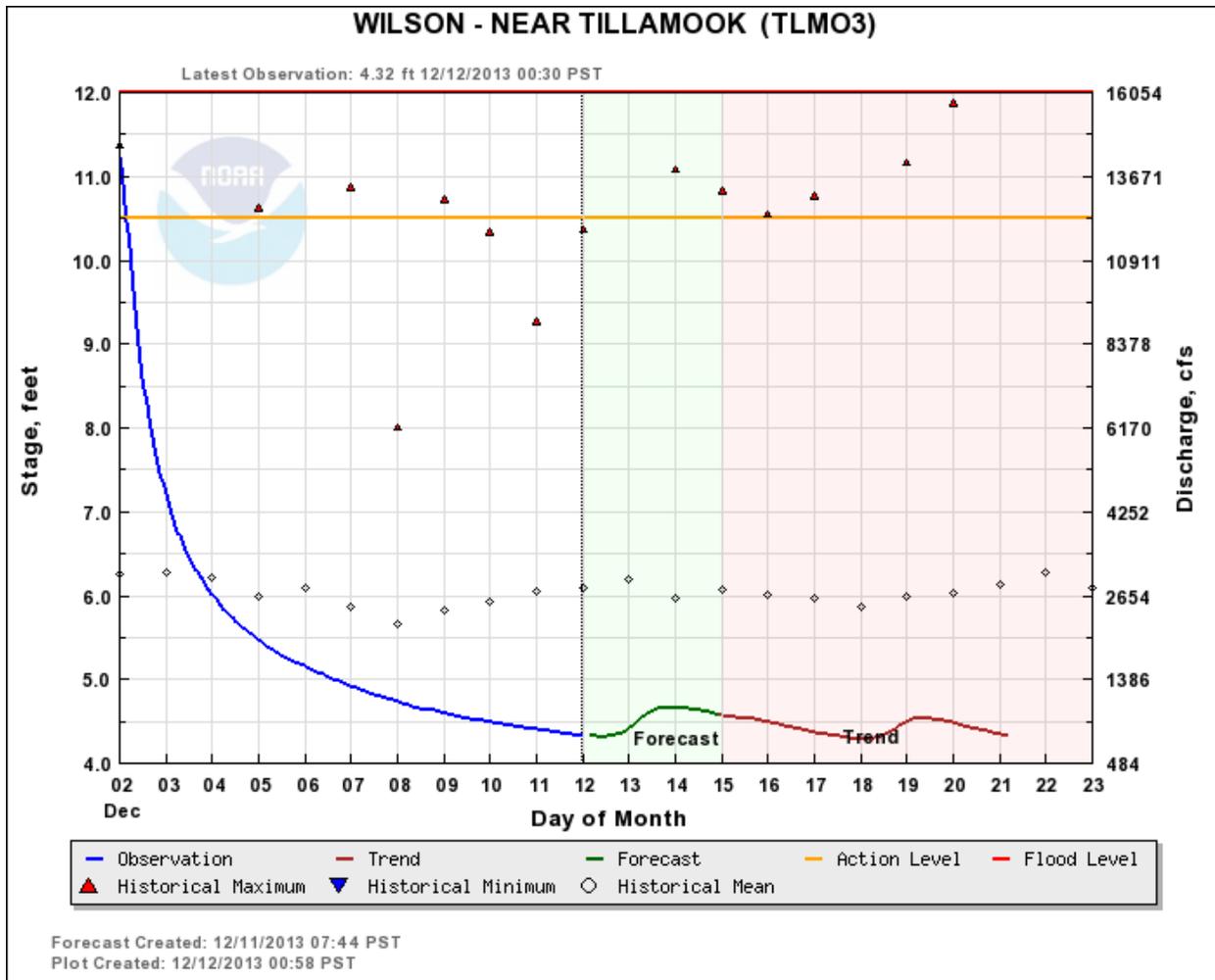
Some folks still have bottomfish on the mind. It's pretty hard to ignore big blue when the seas are calm and the commercial fleet has yet to set a crab pot. Recent reports out of Garibaldi indicate good lingcod fishing but sea bass still seem a bit reluctant to sacrifice themselves. Limits are not the rule at Three Arch Rocks, at least for bass. Lingcod seem plentiful and some are of sizable quality. Crabbing seems to be best north of the estuary entrance but contrary to my earlier predictions, keepers seem to be more common in shallower water (<35 feet) than deeper. Of course fresh bait still will out-crab frozen but go with what you got.

Nobody has really been sturgeon fishing but that could change with the upcoming minus tide series. We'll detail that fishery as well in the next section.

The Guide's Forecast – Although early indications are not cause for optimism, the upcoming warming trend will certainly have a more favorable outlook for steelheaders by the weekend. More than anything, we're in desperate need for warmer air and water temperatures and we're headed in the right direction as indicated by this water temperature graph on the Wilson River (also clickable link from our home page):



The steady drop in temperatures earlier in the month and subsequent rise recently definitely effects steelhead behavior. If the upcoming trend keeps it in the low 40's we'll be in for a much more productive week, especially on the larger systems. Although water temperature increases will certainly help, it would be nice if water levels were looking to change as well. From this graph, there is no significant rise in levels expected in the near future but even the moderate bump will help success rates:



Although moderate, the rise will be particularly helpful on the larger systems such as the Wilson and Nestucca. Smaller systems will still benefit but the persistent low water conditions will keep fish fairly wary in the clear water. Here's our river by river breakdown on the systems we fish most:

Gnat Creek, Big Creek and Klaskanine River – These rivers already have fish present but like most north coast systems, they are in limited supply. These systems get between 40K and 60K steelhead smolt plants per system so when conditions are right, the action should be too. Cold weather and low water will make the lower reaches, maybe even the tidewater sections, the most productive. It's likely these lower reaches don't get much attention so you'll be pioneering some stretches, particularly the tidewater reaches. Only a few dozen steelhead have been reported at the Big Creek trap however.

Necanicum River – This is my favorite on the north coast but remains too low for productive fishing. If/when we get the next big freshet, it will be game on for hatchery fish on this system. Until then, the tidewater reach should hold fish as well as the lower reaches where fish feel more secure in the deeper holes. Don't look for much improvement unless we get greater rainfall but the tidewater reach, around the Bell Buoy fish store, could hold promise for bobber and bait or jig fishers.

North Fork Nehalem – Like the Necanicum, this system needs a good rain. Until then, anglers at the hatchery will be lucky to hook into one, likely in the early morning. More fish may show in the warming weather however. Innovative boaters can work the lower reach by Aldervale backtrolling a diver and shrimp on the strong outgoing tides this week. Plugs may be effective as well but without rain, action will

be subdued despite coming into peak season. This river gets over double what most other systems get (90,000 smolts) so you can see where you may have your best chance at results.

Kilchis River – This system should have some fish in it but like other systems that get about 40,000 smolts, do the math, this may result in a return of about 400 adults assuming a 1% survival rate. Most of these plants are early returning fish so the action should be peaking in the month of December. Some years, the late season chinook run is good here, this just isn't one of those years.

Wilson River – Also a system that gets a 40,000 fish early steelhead run plant (100,000 later returning wild-broodstock steelhead) is typically one of the better bets for pre-Christmas chrome. It clearly produces better results later however and anglers may still find a bright chinook in this system, often destined for the Little North Fork of the Wilson near Mills Bridge. Being a larger system, fish don't spook as easily as they do on the smaller systems of the north coast. For this reason, in low clear water that we're likely to continue to see on the north coast, you'll want to target the deeper, slower water where bobber and jigs tend to perform best. Small baits in broken surfaced runs will also take fish, especially if you're the first boat through. Anglers that target chinook will only find them in a few places this time of year but likely bunched up. Back-bounce small baits of eggs or run smaller plugs to target them. Consider releasing the hens as oftentimes, even bright hens this time of year cut pale.

Nestucca River – Although most of the effort takes place in Three Rivers, these steelhead have to pass through the mainstem Nestucca to get to Three Rivers so it's best to target steelhead downstream of this tributary. The mouth is the most likely place to intercept if you're a bank angler. Fish will be moving pretty quickly through the lower reaches to get to Three Rivers and like the Wilson, the better action will take place later when the adult returns from a 70,000 smolt plant take place. There may still be a late chinook but it's not worth targeting them on this system at this time of year.

Three Rivers – Most of the early plants head to Three Rivers, making it the perfect destination for bank anglers. There is fair access for bank anglers although a lot of private land exists as well. Most anglers brave the crowds at the hatchery. This river will remain low this weekend unless we get surprised by more precipitation than is in the forecast. Warmer water temperatures however should improve the bite.

Armed with that steelhead info, you'll still be challenged on what system to fish. Your decision should be based on your access. Boaters will fish the larger systems as a significant rain freshet is not forecast and bank anglers should have their best access and success on the smaller streams.

Other North Coast options? If you can brave the cold weather, and windy at times, the tides are right for sturgeon fishing over the weekend. A strong minus tide will concentrate schools of sturgeon in some of the channels of Tillamook Bay. A slight warming trend will make it a bit more tolerable. Use sand shrimp in the west or middle channels and bring your propane heaters!

Offshore, Saturday may prove to be an option but it's likely you'll have competition from the commercial crabbers if you bring your pots. They're slated to start soaking pots on the 13th with their first picking coming on the 16th. Saturday may be your only option but the weather is changing all the time so this forecast likely won't be accurate by Saturday. Take it for what it's worth:

FRI

SW WIND 5 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 8 FT AT 14 SECONDS. CHANCE OF SHOWERS.

FRI NIGHT

S WIND TO 5 KT...BACKING TO SE AFTER MIDNIGHT. WIND WAVES 1 FT. W SWELL 8 FT AT 13 SECONDS. PATCHY FOG.

SAT

S WIND 5 TO 10 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 8 FT AT 12 SECONDS...SUBSIDING TO 6 FT AT 11 SECONDS IN THE AFTERNOON. CHANCE OF RAIN.

SAT NIGHT

S WIND 10 TO 15 KT...RISING TO 15 TO 20 KT AFTER MIDNIGHT. GUSTS TO 25 KT. WIND WAVES 4 FT. W SWELL 6 FT AT 10 SECONDS. CHANCE OF RAIN.

SUN

SW WIND 5 TO 10 KT. WIND WAVES 3 FT. W SWELL 11 FT.

MON

N WIND 5 TO 10 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 11 FT.

Finally, crabbing in the coastal estuaries won't be all that much fun either this weekend. Although the time of year is right, the weather and tides won't favor a great crabbing experience. The extreme tide series will likely claim a few pots or rings so keep a watchful eye on your gear. STAY SAFE!

Central & South Coast Reports – While limits of rockfish and lingcod were taken out of central Oregon ports over the past weekend, the rockfish bite slowed over the past few days. Ocean crabbing is great and we have them all to ourselves until commercial operations get underway starting December 16th (although pots get dropped on the 13th).

It's still too early to expect much in the way of winter steelhead on the Alsea although there was one in the hatchery trap on Tuesday this week. Following the next round of rainfall it should be worthwhile with better results coming in a few weeks.

A few winter steelhead were taken on the South Coos River prior to the cold snap. Results are expected to improve with rain.

Coquille steelheaders took a couple of early winters before the weather turned cold and while more will follow, expect results to improve significantly in January.

If rainfall today (December 12) and tomorrow amount to anything significant, there's a chance for winter steelhead near Elkton on the Umpqua mainstem. Summers remain available on the North Umpqua with results reported as slow to fair. South Umpqua winter steelheading will get underway after the first of the year.

Catches slowed on the lower Rogue this week which has steelheaders hoping that rain showers will bring a few fresh winters into the system. A few steelhead are being caught on an assortment of bait and lures on the middle Rogue but water temperatures are too low for fish to bite well. Half-pounders are amongst the mix of wild and hatchery winter steelhead being caught on the Chetco. Adult steelhead have been averaging 10 pounds. Water levels are supposed to increase slightly this weekend with additional help from Mother Nature due late in the coming week. Steelheaders on the upper river have continued to take some steelhead with best result higher in the system as the outflow from Lost Creek Reservoir is several degrees warmer than the water down by the old Gold Ray Dam site.

Elk and Sixes rivers remain too low and clear to fish well. It remains to be seen if rain this week will be sufficient to move late-run Chinook into the system. It has been a very dry season in southwest Oregon this season.

Ice has covered Diamond Lake with sub-zero overnight temperatures. Boat ramps closed as snow covered them. The ice is expected to be thick enough for ice fishing shortly after the holidays.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Winter reddsides may be caught on the lower Deschutes with Blue-Winged Olives, Midge and Caddis patterns. Prepare for frigid weather and start at mid-day. Steelheading is slow.

Cold weather and cold water have combined to make for a slow Mackinaw bite at Crescent Lake.

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GOOD LUCK!