

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 20<sup>th</sup> – December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

**Willamette Valley/Metro** – Fish and wildlife statistics show a dramatic decrease in angler effort and success in the gorge fishery. Foraging stellar sea lions have changed the behavior of fish in the gorge but the shift to the Willamette has paid dividends for anglers working that water.

Anglers are catching a steelhead or two every other day at Meldrum Bar on the lower Willamette River. After the next big rain and the river gets a bump and warms, look for the catch to improve. Catch and release sturgeon fishing might be a better option as water conditions improve for this fishery. Boaters fishing the water above and below the St. Johns Bridge are getting fair numbers of fish daily as this winter fishery becomes more and more popular. A whole or half anchovy has been the best bait.

McKenzie River flows are a decent level for fishing but with the water temperature only in the high 30s, there are better options for anglers.

Very few Santiam-bound steelhead are moving up the Willamette while coastal rivers are just turning on. In addition, there is no hatchery winter steelhead fishery here and trout fishing is closed.

With good water conditions prevailing, the Clackamas River is putting out the occasional winter steelhead, although the bulk of the run is still over a month away. The river between Barton and Riverside Park would be the best stretch to work for any opportunity.

The Sandy River also has a few dispersed winter steelhead, but a good rain is needed to bring the river up and pull fresh fish in. The Oxbow to Dabney Park stretch will put out the most fish. Bobber and jig will get fish for bank fishers while pulling plugs will score for the boaters.

**Northwest** – Steelheaders are still struggling to find reason to pursue early run steelhead on the north coast. The signature system, the North Fork Nehalem has yet to produce any measureable catches at the hatchery although water conditions certainly haven't helped. None-the-less, a significant rain freshet is nowhere in sight but any rise in river levels will stimulate a bite.

Big and Gnat Creek, the Klaskanine, Necanicum, Kilchis and Three Rivers are all options but none are producing banner early returns of steelhead. We're entering peak season for this run of fish.

Larger systems such as the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers are best options in low water conditions and those systems are only producing a rare fish. Boaters are working the extreme lower reaches and the tidewater stretches of north coast streams and small concentrations of fish should be pocketed up where bobber and jig fishers could score results. These streams also remain open for chinook but action is dismal.

Despite good tides, effort for sturgeon on Tillamook Bay has been low. It's likely that sturgeon will continue to stage on the Columbia in hopes for another probable productive smelt run, likely to hit next month.

Ocean conditions are likely to remain too rough to recreate through the weekend. Bottomfishing can be excellent this time of year, weather permitting.

**Southwest**- Bottom fishing off the central Oregon coast was good over the past weekend when boats were able to get out. Near-limits of rockfish, lingcod and Dungeness were taken.

With commercial crabbers agreeing on a price of \$2.65 per pound, offshore efforts got underway on Monday this week and is expected to have an effect on recreational ocean and bay crab catches.

Keep an eye on offshore predictions to sneak out for action with bottom-dwellers. The forecast looks friendly on Friday, Dec. 29, but that forecast may change.

Winchester Bay has been producing a few decent crab but it has been slow to fair at best. Look for winter steelheading on the Umpqua to pick up in January.

Crabbing has remained fair but steady at Coos Bay and in tidewater on the lower Coquille.

Low water has winter steelheading off to a slow start on the lower Rogue although a few have been landed. Boats on the middle river are taking the occasional coho but anglers targeting steelhead have been mostly disappointed. Pressure is light in low flows and frigid temperatures on the upper Rogue although catches of summer steelhead and coho have made it worthwhile for a few well-insulated anglers.

Nearshore reefs produced good catches of lingcod and rockfish to boats fishing out of the Port of Brookings. Fishing for chinook is slow in the low, clear waters of the Chetco although winter steelhead have been entering the system despite river conditions. A slight increase in flows is predicted for the coming weekend and with it, an overall improvement in action.

The subtle rainfall at Port Orford early this week had little effect on river levels. A few chinook were taken over the past weekend so perhaps there's hope for a late-season fishing flurry.

Sub-zero temperatures overnight at Diamond Lake have formed ice thick enough to tempt a few out on the surface near the bank, but it will be a week or more until it's considered safe for ice fishing.

**Eastern** – While Deschutes flows are acceptable for fishing, expect bitter cold temperatures at times on the east side. Trout fishing has been slow to fair, steelheading remains slow with fish scattered.

Flows at Crooked River are down to 70 cfs and fishing is fair to good.

**SW Washington-** With a noticeable gap in steelhead action on most district streams, the Cowlitz remains a bright spot, especially for boaters side-drifting small baits in the lower flows.

The North Fork of the Lewis still has some chinook available but most are turning dark. Anglers will look forward to more steelhead opportunity later in January and February but steelhead runs in recent history have been disappointing.

More trout plants in Spearfish and Rowland Lakes including several hundred 5 to 10-pounders. Thousands of catchable size rainbows are available too.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – The final nail in the coffin; commercial crab pots went into the lower Columbia on the 13th with the first picking happening on the 16th. It's official, there is nothing left to pursue on the lower Columbia.

**Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** reports, "Nobody has been fishing the water below Bonneville Dam. No reports."

**The Guide's Forecast** – **Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** predicts, "It's doubtful that anything is going to get anglers excited about catch and release sturgeon fishing below Bonneville dam in

the middle of a cold winter.....although the opportunity is there. However, the catch and keep winter fishery above the dam does draw a crowd and the fishing is known to sometimes be fantastic. Check the regulations on line before heading out."

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** reports, "Anglers are catching a steelhead or two every other day at Meldrum Bar on the Willamette River. After the next big rain and the river gets a bump and warms, look for the catch to improve. It also wouldn't hurt if the water warmed a bit as it is still on the cold side since last week's cold snap. Catch and release sturgeon fishing might be a better option as water conditions improve for this fishery. Boaters fishing the water above and below the St. Johns bridge are getting numbers of fish daily as this winter fishery becomes more and more popular. A whole or half anchovy has been the best bait, but all the other sturgeon friendly baits will work most of the time. Smelt are a solid bait that gets it done 99% of the time, either whole or cut into pieces. Herring will also score from time to time, either frozen/whole or in the roll mop version. But herring is also the least oily of the bait fishes and would be my last choice of readily available baits. Sand shrimp flat out gets sturgeon. In the winter months, it is a favorite for tipping baitfish with either a whole or part of a sand shrimp. A smelt-sand shrimp combo is deadly, as is a sand shrimp and night crawler combo. Let's remember that these fish are actively feeding and food is scarce this time of year. These fish "generally" aren't very picky, so don't put too much thought into presenting the gator's absolute favorite fresh bait du jour. Most of the time, all it takes is a naked, well placed bait, held tight to the bottom in a deep hole stacked with fish."

Rain starting Friday this week is likely to reverse the slow, steady drop of water level on the McKenzie. It is unlikely to cause the river to be out of shape for fishing, however, for those inclined to try it.

Winter steelhead passage over Willamette Falls clocked in at 156 as of the latest data on December 16th. With about 25% if those destined for the Santiam system, that's not very many fish for anglers to target.

Junction City Pond was stocked with 'trophy-sized' trout this week.

What? You still haven't bought a gift for that eccentric uncle or odd but endearing cousin? If they like the outdoors, here's your final reminder that 2014 fishing and hunting licenses may be purchased online. Don't worry about it, they'll appreciate it and there's no concern about whether or not it'll fit.

<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/news/2013/december/120213b.asp>

**The Guide's Forecast – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** predicts, "TGF is predicting an improvement in both the C&R sturgeon fishing and the steelhead fishing at Meldrum Bar. The predicted precipitation and the slight warming of the water is the key to better times."

The McKenzie River should remain in decent shape for winter trout anglers who place greater value on solitude than productivity. Caddis and Blue-Winged-Olives should be around as well as midges although nymphs will produce in the absence of hatches.

The North Santiam does have a small cadre of steelheaders who enjoy catch-and-release fishing for natives. There are also those who believe wild fish should be left alone. We'll leave this decision up to you.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** reports, "With good water conditions prevailing, the Clackamas River is putting out the occasional winter steelhead. Although the bulk of the run is still over a month away, a few local anglers are getting after it. Covering lots of water and hitting all the nooks and cranny's is key to finding what few biters are present. Hardware like spoons and spinners are great for these conditions because they attract fish from a greater

radius. A drifting bait or corky must get into the steelheads immediate dis-comfort zone to entice any reaction, but a flashing/whirling spinner will annoy a fish from a greater distance and often times elicit a charge and a strike. In clear water, it's not uncommon for a steelhead to rush a spoon or spinner from ten, or even twenty feet away. The drifts between Barton and Riverside Park would be the best stretch to work for any opportunity.

"The Sandy River also has a few dispersed winter steelhead, but a good rain is needed to bring the river up and pull fresh fish in. The Oxbow to Dabney Park stretch will put out the most fish. Bobber and jig will get a fish for bank fishers while pulling plugs is a great option for the boaters in the low, clear water conditions. The K-11X Kwikfish or the 3.5 Maglip are both favorite plugs for Sandy River metal-heads. Try metallic red, blue or pirate colors."

**The Guide's Forecast – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** predicts, "A slight bump in water level and hopefully temperature sure improve the bite on the Clackamas River, but considering the late run timing of Clack steelhead, this river will see better days in late Jan, Feb, March and even April.

"A little will help on the Sandy River. That means a little rise from both the melting glacier and a little rain(which is in the forecast). And a little bump in the water temperature. Steelhead will still enter the river regardless of low clear water, but when the river swells with rainwater, they will pour in."

**North Coast Fishing Report** – With consistent low and clear water conditions on all North coast streams, anglers have little to be excited about. Anglers are desperately awaiting a significant rain freshet which is nowhere in the near future. A slight rise in river levels is forecast before the weekend, but unlikely to significantly improve steelhead catches.

Reports from around the district remain less than impressive. The easiest system to gauge the number of fish present is the North Fork Nehalem. Hatchery workers report that only 19 fish were in the trap for the week. This is the system that gets the most significant plants on the North coast yet it remains slow for steelhead as we enter peak season.

Although precipitation is surely what drives interest for anglers on the North coast, a good tide series happened last weekend which could have produced decent catches in the lower reaches of most of these systems. Not many anglers are versed in fishing the Tidewater stretches and even those that are did not produce impressive catches.

The Wilson River has the potential for producing a few early-season steelhead but effort was low and so were catches. The warming trend however certainly favored anglers as fish are much more apt to bite when temperatures near the mid 40° range.

Even with the abundant options on the north coast from Highway 30 streams to Three Rivers, reports are consistently slow and anglers are walking away largely disappointed. There has been some recycled steelhead on the Three Rivers system however.

There wasn't much effort in pursuit of sturgeon on Tillamook Bay last week. Despite good tides, anglers are not beaming with excitement as this fishery has been producing mediocre at best results the last few years. It's likely the bulk of the population remains in the lower Columbia in anticipation of another good smelt return this winter.

With the commercial crabbing fleet going in the ocean last week, anglers are less motivated to look at the ocean for a fishing and crabbing combination trip. Weather was far from ideal and is expected to remain challenging for the days ahead.

**The Guides Forecast** - Only a slight rise in river levels forecast for this week, anglers shouldn't expect fishing to improve all that much for North coast steelhead. Low, Clear water will continue to challenge anglers and force them to use small and subtle offerings this weekend.

The smaller systems that harbor early returning steelhead won't offer up much again this week. There should be some slow accumulations of hatchery fish near their liberation points and that's where anglers are likely to focus.

The Wilson and the Nestucca Rivers will continue to be the best options for big water steelheaders and may offer up the best opportunity for fish that aren't so skittish in low, clear water. Anglers would still be wise to pursue fish using small offerings or bobber and jig fishing in the deeper water where fish are more likely to concentrate under these conditions. On the Wilson, boaters willing to fish downstream of Sollie Smith Bridge will likely find the best results.

If you are going to pursue steelhead on the smaller systems, Big Creek, North Fork Nehalem and Three Rivers will all likely be fair targets for anglers fishing near those respective hatcheries. Did I mention the use of small baits and offerings? Small spinners and spoons can also be effective when air temperatures warm.

Although the tides will not provide a strong option for sturgeon in Tillamook Bay, crabbing opportunities may present itself in time for holiday appetizer plate. Netarts Bay may also be an option as well.

The predicted high swell and West wind will make the ocean a poor option through the weekend. Bottom fishers this time of year can expect to have extended periods of time of inaccessibility.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – Rough offshore conditions have kept recreational and charter boats off the ocean for the most part this week. Forecasts continue to show a window of opportunity on Friday, December 20th out of Newport and Depoe Bay but with cold temps and the possibility of snow in the AM, just getting there may be the biggest challenge.

Travelers to the central Oregon coast might enjoy viewing the winter migration of gray whales which will be taking place now through mid-January. About 18,000 of these leviathans will pass during this time, surfacing every three to six minutes at which time the spouts will be readily visible in the cold winter air.

Crabbing picked up a little recently at Siletz Bay but commercial efforts just getting underway offshore may have an impact in catches. Hatchery winters are being caught on the Siletz River with results fair to good recently.

Yaquina Bay has been showing some improvement for bay crabbers launching out of Newport and for those crabbing off local docks.

A few winter steelhead should enter the Alsea with the next weather system which is forecast to arrive over the coming weekend.

Steelheading has been slow on the Siuslaw but should improve after the front moves through in the next few days although it is early for this system to produce well. January should be productive. There have been reports of cougar activity on the Siuslaw Road side of the river so be alert if fishing the area.

Winchester Bay has been producing fair catches of decent-sized Dungeness to boaters although dock crabbing has been slow. Steelhead has been fair on the mainstem Umpqua but it's mostly a catch-and-release show for wild fish at this time of year. Side-drifting has been the most effective technique here. With the next freshet, expect to see water levels rising on Saturday and Sunday, December 21st and

22nd a foot with increase in flows to 3,500 cfs at Elkton according to NOAA forecasts. This will bring additional steelhead into the system but the better fishing is still a ways out. For hatchery fish, target the South Umpqua well into the New Year with best fishing in late February through March.

Crabbing has been fair to good in Coos Bay. Winter steelheading has been slow to fair in the Coos River with best results coming to those fishing at the top of tidewater. Steelheaders are allowed a three-hatchery-fish daily bag limit through April on the Coos as well as the Coquille river.

A few winters are being taken between Myrtle Point and the town of Coquille on the Coquille River with results here expected to improve in January providing water conditions improve as well.

Fishing has been slow on the lower Rogue where, as with all south coast rivers, water is low and clear. Rainfall this weekend is expected to make only the slightest improvement according to NOAA predictions. Once there's sufficient water in the river, this fishery will be underway for the next couple of months. Steelheaders fishing cold water on the middle river are taking a few fish by drifting bait or tossing spinners although the Maglip 3.5 Blue Pirate has been a hot plug for early winters this season. The few anglers who are braving cold weather on the upper Rogue have continued to experience fair to good catches of winter-season summer steelhead and colorful coho. Results will improve river-wide with warmer weather and some rainfall.

A few winter steelhead are being taken from the skinny waters If the Chetco but conditions such as these are a detriment to anglers. Dime-sized clusters of roe have been effective in tempting a few winters over the past week. While rain is forecast for the weekend and it should be cause for improvement, the impact on level and flows will be nominal.

Chinook fishing at the Elk and Sixes rivers remains stalled due to low, clear water. While rain is forecast, it remains to be seen if it will be sufficient to get this late-season fishery rejuvenated. It doesn't take much to effect these small ocean tributaries.

Ice on Diamond Lake is reported to be four or five inches thick out to 50 yards from shore. A few early adopters are ice fishing but results have been poor. Trout require a period of acclimation to being trapped under ice.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – While trout fishing is only fair on the lower Deschutes, larger fish are often taken in the winter time. Try streamers to attract them. It's a long shot as slow as it's been but there are steelhead in the system as well which will occasionally take such an offering.

Hood River is flowing cold and clear but has been producing steelhead to fly fishers using nymphs on long, light leaders.

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#### **Random Links**

More Fisheries off limits due to Marine Reserves for 2014 - Cape Perpetua and Cascade Head:

[http://www.dfw.state.or.us/MRP/docs/marinereserves/Cape Perpetua handout.pdf](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/MRP/docs/marinereserves/Cape_Perpetua_handout.pdf)

In-depth info on Bull Trout at LBC:

[http://www.trophytroutguide.com/articles/Ratliff-Bull Trout at LBC 05-15-12.pdf](http://www.trophytroutguide.com/articles/Ratliff-Bull%20Trout%20at%20LBC%2005-15-12.pdf)

Jay Nicholas' Saltwater fly Tying Tutorial:

<http://oregonflyfishingblog.com/2013/12/15/saltwater-fly-tying-introduction/>

**GOOD LUCK!**