

The Guide's Forecast - volume 16 issue number 1

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 3<sup>rd</sup> – January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Don't forget to purchase your new 2014 licenses and tags!**

**Willamette Valley/Metro** – Anglers anxious for a consumptive opportunity for sturgeon will be racing towards favored fishing spots above Bonneville Dam today. Action is likely to be good and effort intense, causing quick utilization of the winter quota in the coming weeks. The winter segment of this season lasts through January 19<sup>th</sup> with a daily bag limit of 1 keeper sturgeon between 38 and 54 inches to the fork of the tail, 2 keeper sturgeon per year.

McKenzie water levels have continued moderating in mostly dry weather with the flow dropping to 2,500 cfs at Vida. Catch-and-release winter trout fishing is slow to fair.

The Santiams get about 25% of the steelhead that cross Willamette Falls. With recent counts right around 200 and only single digits crossing daily, there aren't enough fish in the North Santiam to target yet. It may be worthwhile to do so in February depending on water conditions and how run numbers stack up.

The Clackamas River has dropped down into great shape but anglers are not expending a lot of effort this early in the season. Some early season steelhead remain available below Barton to the mouth but most are awaiting the larger return later in February. Most anglers fishing this area opt for Meldrum Bar, just downstream of the mouth of the Clackamas, where mainstem Willamette steelhead are more plentiful this time of year.

After a period of high water on the Sandy, freezing levels have dropped and so have water levels. The lower flows are slowing what few steelhead exist in the river system, making the lower reaches downstream of Oxbow the most likely area to intercept early returning fish. Bobbers and bright colored jigs often work best under these conditions but small baits will produce results as well.

**Northwest** – Action for north coast steelhead remains subdued even though we're officially in peak season for the early run. Low and clear water conditions haven't helped anglers harvest fish but savvy anglers working small baits and bobbers and jigs or pink worms have done fairly well this week. River systems that receive the heaviest plants such as the North Fork Nehalem hold the greatest promise in higher flows, with consistent action off of the handicap platform each morning.

Big Creek and the Klaskanine, Necanicum, Wilson and Three Rivers remain the best prospects but with no significant rises in the river forecast in the coming week, action isn't likely to improve all that much. Any change however will likely improve the bite somewhat and a slight rise is forecast for the weekend.

The Trask is likely to start seeing larger numbers of native steelhead but some anglers looking for late season chinook scored well last week. Chinook season closes on the north coast starting January 1<sup>st</sup>.

Clam diggers struggled on the great tides this week, largely due to a big surf that kept clams from feeding near the surface. Crabbers working the lower Columbia on high tide were still taking fair numbers of keepers last week. The lower Columbia will remain the best prospect for crabbers into the New Year.

The offshore forecast may hold promise for bottomfishers over the weekend. Lingcod remains the best bet but sea bass may come on the bite in the coming weeks.

**Southwest**- Boats launching out of Newport and Depoe Bay over the past weekend reported catches of

rockfish, lingcod and crab had slowed.

Cabezon may no longer be retained as part of a rockfish limit as of January 1, 2014. The limit remains seven rockfish in the New Year and the lingcod limit of two per day, 22 inches or longer, same as 2013.

Winchester Bay has been slow for crabbing. When many rivers are running too low to fish well, the mainstem Umpqua can be a blessing for steelheaders. Fishing has been decent from Sawyers rapids and recently on the river above.

Lack of rain has maintained salinity levels in Coos Bay, resulting in fair to good results for crabbers. A minus tidal series will occur after dark if adventurous diggers want to take advantage of the excellent clamming available here.

Crabbers in the lower Coquille have been taking fair to good catches of Dungeness.

Low, clear, cold water is the story on the Rogue River where these conditions have stalled results for early winters in the lower river and kept them from running upriver to the Grants Pass stretch. While summer steelhead are being taken on the upper Rogue, they're not in any condition to be considered keepers. Some fish taken recently had already spawned.

When boats have been able to slip out to the ocean just outside Brookings, jigging for rockfish has been good. Water levels are low and running cold in the Chetco and while a few winters are taking bait in the lower portions, it is challenging to get them to bite.

The year wrapped up as one of the driest ever in southwest Oregon. The Elk River levels remain low and optimism about the chinook run this season is plummeting to similar levels. Many local anglers are speculating if rain, when it comes, will be too little, too late. There's still hope for a winter steelhead season here.

About five inches of ice covers Diamond Lake with few venturing out to cut holes and fish. Trout catches are slow as the fish are acclimating to winter conditions.

**SW Washington-** The Cowlitz remains the top option for steelhead in the district but anglers should also find sporadic success on the Kalama and Washougal Rivers. The North Fork Lewis has a few fish also and should improve for wild fish in a few weeks.

Several regulation changes occur on January 1<sup>st</sup> so check regulations for the body of water that you fish.

Trout plants were strong on several lakes in mid-December and action should remain stable into the New Year.

**Eastern** – Lower Deschutes anglers are taking a few reddsides and far fewer steelhead. Overall, results have been slow. Caddis are the primary pattern of interest for fly fishers targeting trout.

Winter trout fishing has been worthwhile on the Metolius for those who can crack the code. Double nymph rigs have been effective.

Ice fishing is underway at Lake of the Woods where seven to nine inches of hard ice covering the surface is making it safer to walk on but watch out for thin spots at the edge. Trout and yellow perch are being caught.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – No reports of smelt yet but what would that matter? Effort remains light for all other species although some sport crabbers remain focused on getting keeper crab down in the estuary. There has been some decent catches lately, even though the tide swing is significant and commercial effort is surely present. It's a good sign however that there remains a few keepers for those willing to work for them. It may be the bright spot on the coast as the commercial fleet is rather disappointed in their early season results as you can read about here:

<http://www.columbian.com/news/2013/dec/31/oregon-crab-season-reporting-slow-start/>

The good news here is that it seems that the northern portion of Oregon is producing some of the better catches.

We're still a couple of months away from peak season spring chinook fishing but if you haven't seen what the forecast is for the spring run, you can find it here:

[http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/forecasts/columbia\\_river/2013\\_returns\\_2014\\_expectation.pdf](http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/forecasts/columbia_river/2013_returns_2014_expectation.pdf)

**The Guide's Forecast** – With sturgeon on the slump in the mainstem Columbia, crabbing is really your only option downstream of Bonneville. The weakening tide series by the middle of next week should be beneficial but until then, tides remain strong, which will limit the ideal time to work your gear. You could catch a bit of the last trickle of outgoing tide through low slack in the early morning over the weekend but you might be better off waiting until mid-week or next weekend.

Anglers fishing above Bonneville Dam should continue to expect good catches through the winter closure on January 19<sup>th</sup>. The opener was predictably productive and although it should taper somewhat, action should still be good for anglers using sand shrimp, smelt or roll-mop herring. Hopefully, the quota will last until the proposed closure date.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – With continued dropping flows, both steelhead and sturgeon fishing will only get better over time. Starting with steelhead fishing, an occasional winter run continues to be taken by Meldrum Bar plunkers. As these flows drop and pressure intensifies, anglers will have to get craftier in their approach to harvesting steelhead. Scent or bait plays an integral part of success under these conditions and when it's really the best game in town, effort will likely be running fairly high, especially now that spring chinook are an option, albeit an oddity.

Sturgeon anglers, regulated to catch and release fishing for who knows how long, will continue to find ample opportunity for quality sized and shaker sturgeon in the Portland Harbor. These fish tend to congregate in good numbers in these deeper holes this time of year and are susceptible to biting using sand shrimp, herring or smelt for bait. It's best to hunt them down with a reliable fish finder, often able to make the case of the best fishing on the most dense concentrations of fish. Just upstream and downstream of the St. John's Bridge would be a reliable section to target these fish.

Anglers hope that the Clackamette Park Boat Ramp, which was recently closed for repairs due to panels damaged in high flow, is repaired and reopened before spring Chinook season.

McKenzie River flows are stable and expected to remain that way over the coming week. Hatches of caddis have been sparse.

Dropping for several days now, the North Santiam is getting skinny; the latest reading at Mehama as just 3,600 cfs. In water conditions such as these, there are hazardous stretches that can cause serious problems for boaters.

Trout fishing is slow to fair at Foster Reservoir, one of the many Oregon lakes open year-around. The 2014 general bag limit of five per day, eight inches or better applies but trout must have an adipose fin clip.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Steelheaders may see a slight improvement in catches on Meldrum Bar as we come off a pretty good tide series that may draw more fish upstream. Also, we can't deny the fact that we're coming into the more traditional time-frame for adult winter steelhead returns. The dropping flows and clearing water won't hurt an anglers chances either, especially on these larger bodies of water. Downsize your spin-n-glos in the clearing water but do tip your offering with sand shrimp or coon shrimp for your best chance at success.

With the continued prediction of mild weather in the forecast, the sturgeon fishing should remain pretty consistent for the next several days. Smelt, shrimp and herring or anchovies should continue to take fish for anglers fishing on concentrations of sturgeon in the deeper holes around St. Johns. This isn't everyone's cup of tea so you may find yourself on your own in many popular destinations.

There are too few winter steelhead in the North Santiam to create anything of interest to anglers, particularly as coastal rivers are getting fish.

Catch-and-release trout fishing is slow to fair but may appeal to those who want to get out to throw a fly in the wintertime at a location where there is little pressure.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – By now, most anglers have come to the realization that there aren't a lot of early season fish available on these metro rivers right now. What few steelhead available in the Clackamas this early in the season are destined for Eagle Creek and that run has been depressed for quite some time. None-the-less, anglers are out and about in the nicer weather and reporting a few fish between Eagle Creek and Carver and certainly available downstream of that as well. In the dropping flows and warmer temperatures, plugs become a bit more of an option with fish headed for deeper runs and broken surfaced waters in these conditions. There is a mix of wild and hatchery fish available.

On the Sandy, last year's run was surprisingly good and maybe we'll get lucky again this year. The Sandy has been peaking a bit earlier than the Clackamas in recent years so anglers are pretty anxious to get the season underway. Low flows will slow upstream migration but that will make Oxbow and Dabney Park pretty good options this week. Bobbers and jigs or pink worms can be effective in these clearing flows but the Sandy, being a bigger system, don't leave any water unmolested. Small baits in the tail-outs of these holes can produce in the early morning as well.

**The Guide's Forecast** – If you had to choose a river to pursue steelhead in, the Sandy would be the best early season option of the two. Fresh fish may be riding in the extreme tide series we're just coming off of, which will be good for lower river anglers. Plunkers working the I-84 area are not in the best position in the dropping flows but fish should still be available to those that scent or tip their offerings with bait. Oxbow Park downstream to the mouth will offer up the best opportunities.

Clackamas anglers should also stick to the lower portions of the river; downstream of Eagle Creek with the freshest fish coming from Carver downstream. Plugs and spoons or spinners may be effective, especially in the tail-outs at first light. Backtrolled sand shrimp often produces some of the best results for backtrollers and side-drifters should start to see their action pick up in the coming weeks, especially between Barton and Carver.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – Angling pressure and success continue to be low for most north coast

systems. With the continued dry weather and clear water conditions, what few fish are in the system are pretty wary of anglers in pursuit. That's making the first light bite an anglers best option and not quite worth the drive if you're coming from the valley (or even from distances greater than 10 miles for that matter). The Fab Five remain the best bet; North Fork Nehalem, Necanicum, Wilson, Trask and Three Rivers with hatchery fish available in all but the Trask the least likely to have fishable numbers of hatchery fish. Wild steelhead have started to show and should make a better showing following the next significant rain series.

Hatchery workers at the North Fork Nehalem and Big Creek have little to report. An occasional fish is being taken at either one of these hatcheries but returning adult numbers continue to be unimpressive. The Big Creek hatchery has only reported about 53 adults as of December 27<sup>th</sup>.

Anglers working these systems are focuses on the extreme lower reaches of these rivers. I crossed the lower North Fork Nehalem on Thursday, and for the first time, seeing some definition to the reach downstream of the Aldervale Boat Ramp where riffles and snags were showing; certainly an odd site for early January. Although temperatures are warming slightly, the low flows continue to have fish slow to migrate but most would agree, there has to be fish present in order for them to migrate. It's been a dismal early season that we all hope doesn't translate into a dismal spring season for steelhead. Sadly, there isn't more to report, at least until we get some rain.

With catch and release the only option for sturgeon, effort is non-existent; hopefully the fish aren't. It's likely that many of our local population is staging on the lower Columbia in anticipation of another banner smelt run up the river. We should start to see signs of smelt in the coming weeks if they are going to make a showing anything like they did last year.

Most boats remained tied to the docks this week, forgoing any offshore opportunity for bottomfish. Lingcod continue to be the primary target when conditions permit. Hopefully, we'll see a window of opportunity in the coming days.

Crabbing has been fair at best but with the commercial fleet struggling, sport boats can't expect much. Tillamook remain the best bet but the lower Columbia will remain king for a while longer.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Although a rain freshet is scheduled to hit tonight (Thursday), it doesn't look too threatening for high amounts of precipitation. With the extended period of low flow, any amount of precipitation will help however. Still, with the forecast only calling for a 0.3 rise in the Wilson, one can't expect much on such a moderate rise. This may however be one of those river rises that is productive versus waiting for the fall of the river systems to get after them. It's always a question however as to how close to the prediction will the forecast land?

Nothing will change as far as the top prospects for the north coast. You can view previous issues of this forecast section for more details but in order of likely production, here's the top to bottom options:

North Fork Nehalem- Fish at the hatchery at first light. The Soapstone Road on the west side of the river is closed to trespassing due to vandalism of equipment.

Wilson River- Fish downstream of Sollie Smith for fresh fish. Fish down here are also likely to be less spooky, at least until the jet sleds run over the top of them. More broodstock fish should begin to show in the latter part of this month. Bobbers and jigs or worms may prove most productive.

Necanicum River- Too low to pursue willing fish in the upper reaches; you'd likely get to sight cast to them if you were stealthy. Anglers should head to the tidewater reaches however where bobber and worm or jigs should produce some results, especially coming off of the high tide series.

Trask River- Also fishing low or at the Dam Hole might prove most effective. Again, go small and subdued but expect anything you catch on this system to be wild.

Three Rivers- Also a bit of a shot in the dark under the current conditions, fish should be most available towards the hatchery. Although it doesn't seem possible, there may be some spawned out fish this week but more likely after the next heavy rain (if it ever comes). Small baits.....where have you heard that before?

That's about all we can offer up for steelheaders this week. We desperately need rain but even when we get it, it's not going to salvage a poor return this year. Hopefully come February, we have more to crow about.

We're on the back side of the minus tide series for sturgeon so it's transition week for estuary anglers (and catch and release by the way). Let's look at the forecast for a possible ocean option:

**FRI**

NW WIND 5 TO 10 KT...RISING TO 10 TO 15 KT IN THE AFTERNOON. WIND WAVES 4 FT. W SWELL 10 FT AT 14 SECONDS.

**FRI NIGHT**

N WIND 10 TO 15 KT...BECOMING NE 5 KT AFTER MIDNIGHT. WIND WAVES 4 FT...SUBSIDING TO 2 FT AFTER MIDNIGHT. W SWELL 9 FT AT 13 SECONDS.

**SAT**

NE WIND 10 TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 3 FT. W SWELL 6 FT AT 12 SECONDS.

**SAT NIGHT**

NE WIND 10 TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 3 FT. W SWELL 6 FT AT 12 SECONDS.

**SUN**

E WIND 10 TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 3 FT. W SWELL 4 FT.

**SUN NIGHT**

SE WIND 5 TO 10 KT WITH GUSTS TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 4 FT.

**MON**

SE WIND 10 TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 3 FT. W SWELL 5 FT.

**TUE**

W WIND 5 TO 10 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 6 FT.

Now let's just assume that the forecast remains accurate. If so, lingcod will be on tap for offshore anglers. Sea bass should also be an option although they seem a bit less willing during this time of year. If you do head to the ocean and bring your crab pots, don't expect easy limits but the crab are of good quality. You will want to stick close to shore however as when it's predicted to be the calmest, the east winds will knock the swell down close to shore but the further you go offshore, the rougher it will become.

The one constant this time of year; the weather is ALWAYS unpredictable. Stay safe!

**Central & South Coast Reports** – Reports early this week indicated that catches of rockfish and lingcod had slowed out of central Oregon ports. Action picked up mid-week so there's reason for optimism for the coming weekend.

As of January 1, cabezon may no longer be retained as part of a daily rockfish bag limit. They're off limits until July 1, 2014.

***The ODFW issued this correction on December 31, 2013:***

There is an error in the 2014 Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations book in the waypoint for the Stonewall Bank yelloweye rockfish conservation area (YRCA) on page 105. The latitude for waypoints 3, 4, and 5 are incorrect. The map on page 105 is correct. The waypoints for the Stonewall bank YRCA are the same as in previous years, see below:

ID	Latitude	Longitude
1	44° 37.46'	124° 24.92'
2	44° 37.46'	124° 23.63'
3	44° 28.71'	124° 21.80'
4	44° 28.71'	124° 24.10'
5	44° 31.42'	124° 25.47'

Crabbing has been slow in Yaquina Bay with traps and rings coming up with mostly undersized Dungeness. Even those who have ventured across the bar to crab the ocean report dismal results lately.

Rock and jetty fishing will improve in January and February as lingcod move into shallow water to spawn. This is when shore-bound anglers have an opportunity to take the largest fish of the year although it's best to release females of the species. Be extremely cautious fishing these areas in the winter time.

A few winter steelhead are being landed on the Alsea by anglers employing stealth tactics and long leaders. Tiny corkies or diminutive baits on small hooks are called for in low, clear water. Only a couple of winters have returned to the hatchery. Rain will rejuvenate this fishery. Drift boaters should use extra caution in low water conditions. A boat went down at the bottom of Ernie Walters over the past weekend.

While offshore bottom fishing can be good and often very good at this time of year, ocean conditions at this time of year often make it challenging to pick a day to launch.

Low, cold water has stalled winter steelheading on the Siuslaw according to reports this week.

Crabbing has improved in Winchester Bay with boats doing pretty well. Dock crabbers are taking far fewer Dungeness but are getting a few keepers. The Umpqua has continued to produce winter steelhead this week despite fairly heavy pressure although the chances of landing a hatchery keeper are remote this early in the season. Catches have slowed a little as the Umpqua flows are also suffering from extended dry weather. North Umpqua fishing is slow this late in the season. There are a few winters in the South Umpqua but too few for productive fishing. Catches here will improve in months to come.

Coos Bay has been productive for both dock and boat crabbers. A few winter steelhead are being taken in the Coos and Coquille Rivers but as with most places in the southwest, fishing is slow due to low water conditions.

Steelheading is predictably slow on the lower Rogue in crummy water conditions. Without sufficient flows, steelhead have yet to move in to the middle river which has stalled fishing efforts on this stretch.

Even the upper Rogue is slow, with only aging summer steelhead to target and anglers must often endure bone-chilling weather to do so.

There are a surprising number of winter steelhead in the Chetco system but getting them to respond in skinny water conditions has been tough. The smallest clusters of roe on size 4 hooks has been effective at tempting them at times. Temporary regulations have been in effect here but beginning January 1, 2014, permanent regulations as listed in the 2014 Sport Fishing Regulations will apply.

Water levels remain low on the Elk River. It may be too late for precipitation to rescue the Chinook fishery this season, but a freshet will bring in winter steelhead. Those traveling to fish the area are advised to get tags in advance as there's currently no local license agent.

Trout fishing has been slow for ice fishers at Diamond Lake.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – Lake trout have been cooperative with trollers using downriggers at Crescent Lake. Temperatures have been below freezing but landing a few large fish will warm you right up.

Trollers have been taking some brown trout, bull trout and even a few kokanee at Lake Billy Chinook.

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**Random Links**

2014 Oregon Fishing Regulations:

[http://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/docs/2014/SW\\_v11-18-13.pdf](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/docs/2014/SW_v11-18-13.pdf)

2014 Columbia River Basin Endorsement -

[http://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/CRP/columbia\\_river\\_basin\\_endorsement.asp](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/CRP/columbia_river_basin_endorsement.asp)

Orcas chase speeding boat: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s49lfSf\\_VMU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s49lfSf_VMU)

**GOOD LUCK!**