

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 10<sup>th</sup> – January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro** – Willamette River anglers, what few there are, remain focused on catch and release opportunities for sturgeon in the Portland Harbor. Action is good using sand shrimp, smelt and anchovies if you have them. You won't find much competition out there.

Steelheaders continue to bide their time on Meldrum Bar with only an occasional fish being caught. The action is likely to wind down even more as the early season component is past its prime. Many anglers hope to claim the season's first spring chinook. Although an extremely rare catch in January, especially on a low return year like the one predicted for 2014, early February often sees fair action around Sellwood Bridge. The predicted rise in river levels over the weekend will likely put this goal out of reach until later this month.

Clackamas steelheaders remain diligent in their quest for early steel but realistically, it will be several more weeks before a stronger possibility exists. With little effort, anglers can still score results but you'll have to cover a lot of water to find a biter.

The Sandy has seen spurts of good fishing prior to the dry spell but it has been challenging lately. Depending on how much precipitation falls as snow will determine how much flow and color the river will get over the weekend. It's likely that the Sandy will remain the best metropolitan bet for the next several weeks. When colored waters return, anglers can up-size their baits and offerings to entice fish from greater distances. Fish bobbers and worms until the river swells.

**Northwest** – Reports remain consistent throughout the north coast with most anglers coming home empty handed when pursuing winter steelhead on Tillamook County streams. The first significant rain freshet in weeks is due to hit before the weekend however; it will be an anglers last chance for fresh early season fish before the wild and broodstock run makes a stronger appearance by mid-February.

Anglers plying the tidewater stretches of the Wilson and North Fork Nehalem systems report quiet waters as well, indicating that not many steelhead are even staging in these lower reaches before making the run upriver in the seasonally low north coast streams. There are however steelhead being taken in many of these systems nearly every day for anglers versed in low-water tactics.

The Trask has also been predictably quiet although there has been a rare wild fish taken near the hatchery. Only two wild bucks have been tallied by Tillamook ODF&W personnel for the Wilson River wild broodstock collection program, hopefully, February and March prove more fruitful.

A calm ocean on Sunday prompted anglers to head out in search of lingcod and sea bass. Action was good for those hitting the right reefs and whales could be seen on their annual migration south to Baja. Nearshore waters out of Tillamook Bay are laden with commercial crab gear as the fleet tries to improve soft early season catches. Crabbing in Tillamook Bay remains fair at best with fresh bait, which is hard to come by, producing the best results by far. The lower Columbia is also a fair bet for January crabbers although weekend tides and weather don't look promising.

**Southwest**- Calm seas offered some limited opportunity for bottomfishers last weekend but big tides likely kept fish from aggressively feeding or at least fishers from effectively catching. None-the-less, lingcod were top on the list as we enter spawning season with fish fairly aggressive. Swells are likely to remain too high for safe boating for the foreseeable future.

Recreational and commercial ocean crabbing remains challenging on the south coast.

Like much of Oregon, area rivers remain low and clear, challenging winter steelhead anglers for the last several weeks. The year's first significant river rise is forecast through the weekend which should stimulate action for plunkers working lower river gravel bars on the rise and side-drifters once swollen rivers recede. The Coquille and Chetco are likely the best prospects as steelhead entering these systems typically start to peak in January anyway. Coquille Basin steelheaders are allowed an additional fin-clipped fish per day, making a three-fish bag limit pretty attractive to area anglers.

The Umpqua is also slated to receive a much needed rain freshet which should jump start the wild run, mostly destined for the mainstem and North Umpqua with a few hatchery fish available in the South Fork.

The Rogue will also be a strong option following the predicted rain freshet. The lower reaches should produce for plunkers during the week when flows are expected to rise and driftfishers when flows stabilize. It appears unlikely that a strong run will show but it will remain a top destination for the next 3 weeks.

Hearty plants of catchable size and larger trout have been recently planted in Fort Borst Lake in Centralia, South Lewis County Park Pond in Toledo, Lake Sacajawea in Longview and Battle Ground Lake.

**Eastern** – Although the John Day River is reportedly still ice-laden, the Grand Ronde, Imnaha, Wallowa and Umatilla are options for late season steelhead. The Grand Ronde is your best option with the Umatilla reported as slow.

Wallowa Lake can offer some decent winter fishing opportunities when conditions are safe.

**SW Washington-** Steelhead action in the district has slowed dramatically and some anglers, particularly those fishing the Washougal, describe the action as poor. Washington, like Oregon, typically witnesses a lull in activity until late season broodstock or wild fish show in the area streams later into February. With the low early season showing, it's likely that the late return will be down somewhat as well.

Catch and release sturgeon fishing can be good in the Longview area this time of year, especially if returning smelt make a showing which commonly happens this time of year. No signs of smelt just yet in the lower Columbia.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – Reports remain non-existent for anglers downstream of Bonneville Dam. Even catch and release sturgeon fishing is not impressive.

Upstream of Bonneville Dam, catches were also much poorer than most had thought. I got called out (in a polite manner) by reader Dennis K, stating that perhaps he had just missed all the good action on the opener (January 1<sup>st</sup>) for the Bonneville Pool. Dennis wrote:

"I spent the day at Cascade Locks area sturgeon fishing the opener. Two friends joined me and they too are accomplished fishermen. I have previously served on the Columbia River Recreational Fishery Adv Council. We are in our early 60's and fished from above the launch to the Washington side at rivers mouth area and then downstream to cover the entire area just above the lock at Bonneville Dam and then moving a few times around the Bridge of the Gods before eventually leaving. We used all of the baits you wrote of in members guide forecast and brought shad we had frozen from last year as well. Shakers were rare to be found anywhere. There were 14 boats launched out of Cascade Locks and numerous others were nearby from Washington launching. We did not see or speak to anyone that had a keeper. Upon leaving, we were checked by ODFW field staff who hadn't seen anything either.

The last paragraph of the guides forecast speaks of all kinds of success yet I didn't see any. Did somebody write that closing beforehand assuming the quota would be threatened or did we just flat out miss everything?

Except for the wind upstream and outside of Cascade Locks it was a beautiful day. We weren't drinking and as usual a lot of BSing but no catching. Maybe the catch was out of Hood River."

Thanks for going easy on me Dennis. Yes, creel checks confirmed that the catch in the Bonneville Pool was surprisingly slow. I think that took everyone for a surprise. Was the water temperatures too cold? That often happens on the mainstem this time of year. But the sheer lack of pressure for so long beforehand typically causes a frantic bite following the extended closure. Here are the ODF&W creel checks from last week:

**Bonneville Pool:**

Weekly checking showed five legal white sturgeon kept, plus one oversize and 38 sublegal sturgeon released for 130 bank anglers; 20 legal white sturgeon kept, plus two legal, two oversize and 766 sublegal sturgeon released for 81 boats (251 anglers).

**The Dalles Pool:**

Weekly checking showed one legal, two oversize and eight sublegal sturgeon released for 48 bank anglers; and two legal white sturgeon kept, plus one oversize and 88 sublegal sturgeon released for 11 boats (34 anglers).

**John Day Pool:**

Weekly checking showed two sublegal sturgeon released for 36 bank anglers; and two oversize and eight sublegal sturgeon released for 21 boats (48 anglers).

Less than impressive, I know. If the opener was that slow, it will likely stay that way until water temperatures warm. Who knows when that will be. Any other surprises in the future?

Crabbers were still doing fair in the estuary prior to the rain. Not that the rain will squash effort but continued commercial gear and nastier weather won't help matters much either.

**Chris Vertopoulos adds,** Reports from the Columbia River above Bonneville Dam, on the catch and keep sturgeon fishery indicate "decent" but far from gangbusters.... for sub-legals. Getting a keeper is the tough part. Creel checks by the ODFW are saying about one out of 25 sturgeon caught between both boat and bank anglers is a legal keeper. The cold water temperature doesn't help the fishing, but the lack of keeper size sturgeon is apparent. This fishery closes on Jan 19<sup>th</sup>.

**The Guide's Forecast** – It doesn't look great for Columbia River recreationalists this week. Stronger tides will hamper crabbing efforts, not to mention a rough weather forecast. And yes, the commercial gear is still in the river although success for the commercial fleet has certainly tapered as well.

Sturgeon effort will remain the highest in the Bonneville Pool but I can't say that success will jump any. Typically, the opener is the most productive but if anglers wish to take home a sturgeon at all this season, they had better hope for better results in the future. That likely won't come until the water conditions change, specifically the temperature. We may make it through the January 19 closure date without consuming the entire quota. That will just leave more for the summer season.

Chris believes is not expecting much of an improvement in getting keeper sturgeon in the Bonneville pool. As of yet, creel sampling indicates a high percentage of under size fish with few keepers to give up.

One bright note, with the rain making its way into the region, the water temperature will likely increase a few degrees triggering a better bite. This fishery continues through Jan 19th.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – Catch and release sturgeon fishing in the Willamette River is going strong, with solid action for most boats in the Portland Harbor. Fishing is always best in the deeper holes easily accessed by the Cathedral Park and Swan Island boat ramps, but good fishing can also be had in the Milwaukie and Oregon City stretches. Most baits will score numbers of fish, but as of lately the mighty anchovy has been the top dog. This is a boaters fishery, not just because of lack of access to bank anglers, but also because the fish like to congregate in the deep holes most easily fished from a boat nearer to the middle of the river. There are however a few bank spots in the harbor, off the beaten path that are worth exploring. I have seen on multiple occasions, anglers fishing from piers and docks below the Freemont Bridge and the water is plenty deep enough to qualify as a good feeding trough. Releasing a fish might pose a problem if you want your gear back though. Overall, this fishery hasn't been getting the recognition that it deserves since keeping a sturgeon isn't a possibility. Steelhead fishing at Meldrum Bar has been pretty slow. Not only has the catch rate been sparse, but effort has waned to "light". This fishery is traditionally best in December and drops off by mid-January. Catching an early spring Chinook from the bar is a growing possibility with each day that passes. Expect the first of the season to be taken this month, from either Meldrum Bar or by one of a few die-hard trollers who fish at the Sellwood Bridge.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Even though the Willamette River will color up and rise with the prevailing rains, the catch and release sturgeon fishery will continue uninterrupted. Murky water rarely hinders hungry sturgeon from feeding and has sometimes been known to even trigger an improvement. Dust off the rain jacket and get after it. To an extent, a rising Willamette River can also fish well at Meldrum Bar and the Blacktop in particular for shore hugging winter steelhead, but for most purposes this fishery will be slow at best given the late timing. Throughout the coming weeks keep your ears and eyes peeled for the first spring Chinook of 2014.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – Steelheaders are piqued as the Clackamas river is finally on the rise and scheduled to crest this weekend at just over 16 feet. Fishing has been sporadic at best with the low, clear water but that's about to change. Peak time for Clack steelhead comes later in the winter than most other systems. If accurate stats were available on wild fish caught and released, combined with hatchery harvest records, they would indicate February, March and April as prime time for the Clack. Though the latter half of January shouldn't be ignored as a sleeper. Once the river drops after the weekend, look for fresh steelhead to be taken throughout the entire system below Rivermill Dam. All traditional methods do apply, be it bait, hardware or flies. The Clack is a big river and boaters and bank fishermen alike all have good opportunity.

Five drifts are available to drift boats and sleds are allowed on the entire river up to McIver Park. Bank anglers have the most access in the upper river at McIver, but walk in spots dot the river all the way down to its junction with the Willamette.

Plagued with low, clear water the Sandy River has been slow to produce.

Now, with a good rise finally happening, fishing should pick up substantially when the river drops back into shape. Boater will especially appreciate the greater flows as rocks are starting to shine with aluminum in some of the tail-outs. Steelhead have been present, but the going has been tough and only the best low water experts have been scoring the occasional fish. When the river drops back in, all the standard techniques will pick up fish. The side drifters will be happy, the hardware fishers will score, the fly guys will be swinging the tail-outs again and even the pluggers will be back trolling brightly colored maglips and wiggle warts with rattles in them. Good water for everyone is on its way. Until then, the plunkers have the best crack at a fish, fishing the seams that run close to the bank with spin n glows in a top a sandshrimp.

**The Guide's Forecast** – By the time this gets to your in-box, the Clackamas River will be flowing high and still rising through the weekend. It should peak late Saturday or early Sunday around the 16 foot mark, rendering fishing futile until sometime mid next week.

The going will be tough on the Sandy river as well. Decent fishing conditions are quickly on the way out and Sandy River anglers won't see the light at the end of the tunnel will sometime next week. Time to catch up on tying leaders and plan on getting back on the water just before next weekend.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – With little new to report due to stagnant river conditions, anglers continued to struggle to find success for north coast steelhead. As we've talked about for some time, plying the tidewater sections of these coastal systems is the logical move to make under the conditions we've seen on the north coast for some time now. One report came in from a guide scouting the lower Wilson to come up largely empty over the dry spell. Even with the conditions we've had the last several weeks, more fish should have been taken by the few anglers in pursuit.

North Fork Nehalem personnel, often the most reliable resource for how the north coast is going to fare, reported the river at the hatchery on the rise with a modest rise for Wednesday anglers. Although a report wasn't readily available, more rain was on the way so if there was good fishing on Wednesday morning and afternoon, it wasn't going to last too long.

Some anglers, versed in low water techniques, have had a good run during these drought times. Those folks are naturally pretty tight-lipped about where they are finding their success but we won't deny that there are fish in nearly every coastal system, just getting them to bite under these conditions takes a different level of persistence. What's also true, is that fish under these conditions will concentrate in good numbers in just a few areas. And these areas aren't necessarily consistent every year. It also takes several years of perfecting low water techniques along with the steelhead's migrating habits before consistency will happen.

With little to report, we'll go into more detail in the forecast section as the current rain system will be a game changer for all of Oregon.

Some saltwater enthusiasts took advantage of calm seas over the weekend. Bottomfish were the primary target but some were motivated enough to drop crab pots too out of Garibaldi. Lingcod continue to be the most willing to sacrifice themselves for the greater good but a few bottomfish were taken as well. Overall, the sea bass have been more challenging to catch the last several weeks. They'll respond better in the spring.

Ocean crabbers can't quit raving about the high quality crab coming off of big blue. There just aren't many of them. Don't expect limits with the ocean strung with commercial gear but you can compete if you have good bait.

Crabbing in Tillamook Bay has been fair with those working fresh bait doing the best, by far. Crab Harbor remains the staple but you can find great catches away from the crowds too. Again, fresh bait is key.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Well, things are finally looking shiny for steelheaders this weekend. With a significant rain system finally upon us, even though we're past peak season, the fishing for steelhead should really open up following the drop in river levels (that's assuming that they actually do go up as forecast).

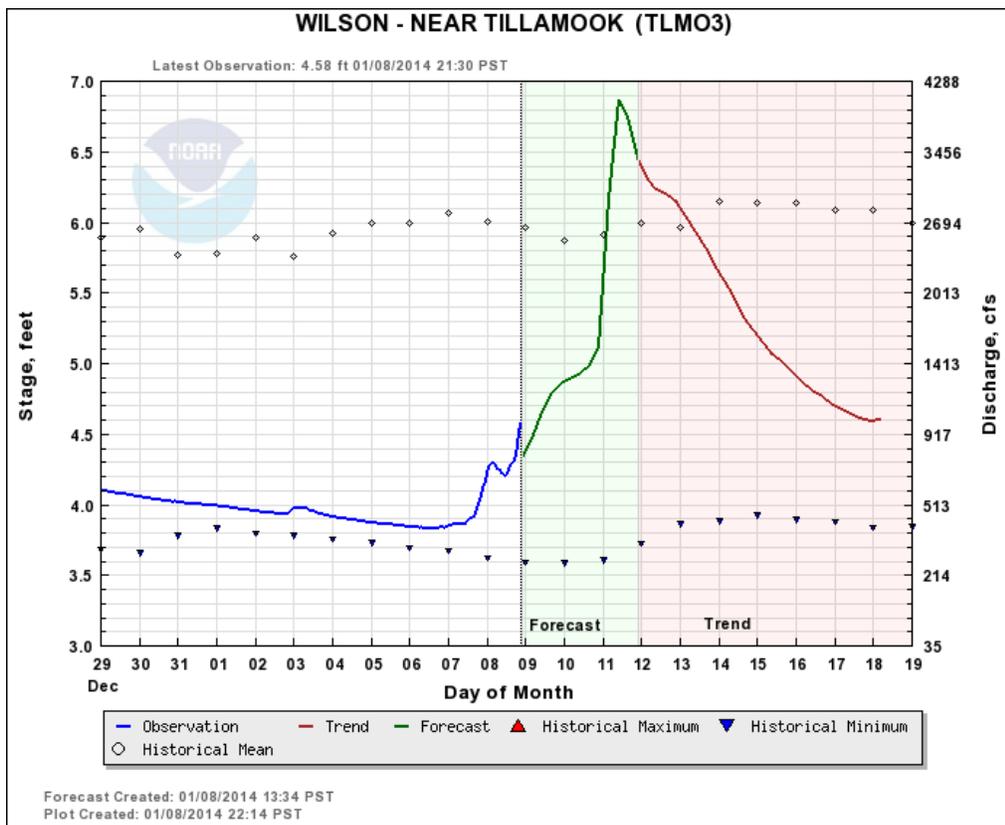
Although we've been writing about the lack of fish in tidewater, that won't necessarily translate into bad fishing following this rain freshet. I think most anglers would agree however that we're not going to see a banner year for winter steelhead; at least not for the early component. Of course this will be the rain that tells all- it's a make it or break it rain freshet for north coast steelheaders.

Here's our river by river breakdown on what to expect:

Highway 30 streams – Big Creek will likely be the best bet for bank anglers looking for fresh fish. Gnat Creek and the Klaskanine River are also options of course but the action will definitely be best in the higher flows that we'll see on Sunday and Monday. Of course if you spend most of your time near the smolt liberation points themselves, you should stand a fair chance at success. Hint: fish near the hatcheries!

North Fork Nehalem- As this system receives the most plants, it's likely to get the best action following the rain freshet. It likely fished fair on Wednesday, might fish Thursday, will likely be out until Sunday or Monday and should fish excellent Monday and Tuesday and start to taper by Wednesday. If the rise is moderate, anglers could see some really good fishing on Friday or Saturday but it's expected to shoot right up and the fish will respond to migration with vigor, largely ignoring your offerings. Big baits in swollen rivers, dropping down to smaller offerings when the water clears.

Wilson River- The river is forecast to crest on Saturday night and rise pretty hard before that. This will put the Wilson out of reach until early next week; maybe Tuesday. Don't expect gang-buster fishing here but all water below Vanderzanden's Boat Ramp should fish well into the middle of next week. We may even see a few early broodstock fish show up. Plugs will become more effective as flows drop, which may not actually be until late next week.



Necanicum River- This is really my favorite north coast stream and it should produce good fishing, maybe as early as Sunday. The Necanicum can be a hard river to navigate with all the blow down that is likely so proceed with caution. You'll have to be mindful of the limited number of boat launches available here as you have to have a pass from Johnson's Construction to access the one half ways through the drift. This is a river system that you leave NO drift unmolested as fish will be well distributed, especially in higher flows.

Trask River- There should be a better showing of wild fish following this rain freshet. You won't have much competition and you may want to check out Buzz Ramsey's favorite fishing hole, the Dam Hole when the flows are still high. Fish concentrate in fair numbers in the slower water here, waiting to navigate the chute itself when flows permit.

Three Rivers- What few fish remain in the mainstem Nestucca and below, should make their way into Three Rivers on this rain freshet. Like most systems, it won't be overloaded with fish but the catching should improve dramatically following the drop in flows, say by Sunday. Fish will be on the move in the higher flows so you won't have to travel from hole to hole as fresh fish should be making their way upstream throughout the course of the day, as long as there is color and flow to the water. The Nestucca itself may see a few fish this early in the season but we're still several weeks away from the wild and broodstock fish from making a strong showing. By the time the lower river downstream of Three Rivers clears, the fish will be well into Three Rivers itself, making the lower reaches a poor option.

The ocean and estuaries will be poor choices for a while. High winds, rough seas and wind will make for a uncomfortable experience. Don't bother. A razor clam dig will also be a poor option until the swell lies down. Here is the offshore forecast through the weekend, combined seas to 29 feet? How fun would that be?:

**FRI**

S WIND 10 TO 15 KT WITH GUSTS TO 25 KT. WIND WAVES 4 FT.  
W SWELL 14 FT AT 15 SECONDS. RAIN.

**FRI NIGHT**

SW WIND 25 TO 30 KT...BECOMING S 35 TO 40 KT AFTER  
MIDNIGHT. GUSTS TO 50 KT. COMBINED SEAS 17 FT. RAIN.

**SAT**

SW WIND 30 TO 40 KT WITH GUSTS TO 50 KT... BECOMING  
30 TO 35 KT WITH GUSTS TO 40 KT IN THE AFTERNOON. COMBINED SEAS  
21 FT. RAIN.

**SAT NIGHT**

W WIND 25 TO 30 KT WITH GUSTS TO 40 KT... BECOMING  
SW 20 TO 25 KT WITH GUSTS TO 30 KT AFTER MIDNIGHT. COMBINED  
SEAS 29 FT. SHOWERS.

**SUN**

SW WIND 15 TO 20 KT. WIND WAVES 5 FT. W SWELL 22 FT.

**MON**

SW WIND 10 TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 14 FT.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – Forecasts for offshore conditions over the weekend to come will have boaters seeking recreation inland or tuning up tackle. Wind and wave action will be fun to watch but you won't want to be in it.

Alsea River levels started rising on Tuesday, January 7th, are increasing and will continue to do so through the coming weekend. Prior to the freshet, winter steelhead were being caught up to Five Rivers so once the water starts to drop and clear, fishing should be quite good.

It has been a crazy, unpredictable crabbing season in Winchester Bay. Catch rates have picked up continuously over the past month or so but are still spotty. Steelheaders on the Umpqua mainstem continued to take winters even while other south coast rivers had too little water to be productive. This situation is typical as the Umpqua is so large it isn't prone to getting skinny in dry weather periods. Fishing at this time of year on the Umpqua mainstem and to a lesser degree, the North Umpqua, is for wild steelhead which must be released here but many just enjoy the sport of it. The stretch above Sawyers Rapids has been very good this week for backtrollers using plugs. Pressures has been heavy but with precipitation bring other coastal rivers back into shape, steelheaders will seek hatchery fish rather than C&R natives here. A very few hatchery steelhead have found their way into the South Umpqua but it will be many weeks until numbers build to the point that perusing them will be worthwhile.

As of Wednesday this week, four winter steelhead had entered the Cole Rivers hatchery facility on the Rogue which means there are fish in varying number throughout the river now. Flows on the lower Rogue are increasing slightly but will start improving over the next few days after which steelheading is expected to be quite rewarding. Fishing is slow to poor on the middle Rogue which has yet to see any benefit from rainfall this week. According to NOAA predictions, water will start to rise late this weekend which should encourage fresh winters into this stretch. Summer steelhead are still being caught in modest number on the upper Rogue but they're getting ratty. Bait is legal river-wide now and is often more effective than lures when water temperatures are low as is the case currently.

Boats launching out of Brookings Harbor prior to the latest round of winter storms found rockfish and ling cod on the bit just outside the jaws. As lings move into shallow water, they are more vulnerable to anglers' offerings, particularly soft plastics on jig heads. This time of year, it's not unusual to find large specimens in 40 or feet of water. Winter steelhead was fair to good on the Chetco prior to the current (and much welcomed) precipitation despite low water levels. Now that rain is finally falling and healing the skinny river conditions, the winter steelheading season will be delivering on its promise to anglers. Expect to see water levels rising over the coming weekend, cresting on Sunday, January 12th, the dropping through the coming week. When the water is high, plunking will be effective. Flows are expected to moderate rapidly so drifting conventional baits and lures will be in short order.

Following one of the driest seasons on record and river levels as low as have been seen in 30 years, rainfall in southwest Oregon is pumping water into the Elk and Sixes rivers. While there may be a very few Chinook remaining to be caught, winter steelhead will be the target for anglers now.

There has been little change in conditions at Diamond Lake where four or five inches of ice covers the surface out about 50 yards. Trout catches remain slow to fair with a few hole-diggers taking limits. Walk carefully and try to ignore the noise that unstable ice makes underfoot (if you can). Try Power Bait in 15 to 20 feet of water.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – Anglers will find the weather seasonally appropriate on the Deschutes; that is to say freezing cold. Water temperatures are in the mid-40s on the lower river, a number which is likely to drop over the coming week. Trout are being caught on Caddis, Blue-Winged-Olive and midge patterns. There are steelhead available but catches have been few and far between.

In contrast to rising water levels on the west side of Oregon, flows at the Crooked River have dropped to the lowest yet at less than 60 cfs. A level such as that is likely to challenge any fly angler.

Hard-core kokanee trollers dragging hoochies at the 60 to 80 foot levels of Lake Billy Chinook have been dredging up fish 10 to 13 inches in excellent condition. A few limits have been reported. Bull trout are also available to anglers.

Deep water trollers landed some large Brown Trout at Crescent Lake over the past weekend. Those targeting mackinaw took some dandies as well.

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### **Random Links**

A little rough offshore:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=FtIHM2Xfuqq](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=FtIHM2Xfuqq)

Ceremony for Renaming Your Boat:

<http://boatsafe.com/nauticalknowhow/rename.htm>

Detailed Rockfish Identification Booklet in PDF:

<http://www.afsc.noaa.gov/race/media/publications/archives/pubs2000/techmemo117.pdf>

**GOOD LUCK!**