

The Guide's Forecast - volume 16 issue number 5

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 31st – February 6th, 2014**

Willamette Valley/Metro – The Bonneville pool catch and keep sturgeon fishery is now closed. A summer season will likely be forthcoming.

The catch and release sturgeon fishery on the lower Willamette River remains the best bet in town if action is your goal. Double digit days can be expected if the fish are located and they are relatively easy to find. Looking for the concentration of boats in the Portland Harbor is a common practice, but having a decent depth finder and knowing how to use it makes the "locating" easy. Little pressure and even less action is happening at Meldrum Bar, though the season's first spring chinook could be taken here or at Sellwood any time now.

McKenzie River flows have stabilized with little change expected until the next weather front moves through. Winter fly fishing is fair.

North Santiam levels will be fishable through the coming weekend. While there still isn't a lot of winter steelhead in the system, numbers are improving with a few taken recently by boats drifting from North Santiam State Park to Stayton.

On the Clackamas River, ideal water conditions are inviting but the distribution of winter steelhead is still discouraging. Better times should be ahead as the Clackamas "winters" come later than those of other drainages. Late February through April is generally peak time.

The Sandy River saw some winter steelhead success over the weekend but there is still little to get excited about. Water conditions are again approaching low and clear with more challenging fishing to follow. Fresh fish will still enter the system, but one by one rather than a big push. Best opportunities are available from Lewis and Clark State Park up to Dodge Park.

Northwest – Back to low and clear water conditions, steelheaders on the north coast are left to deal with less-than-ideal scenarios in what is already past prime early season for returning adults. Following the last rain freshet, anglers were already coming across spawned out fish although bright ones still cut orange.

One of the better options, the North Fork Nehalem continues to report low pressure and low catch. Four steelhead were reported off of the handicap platform on Monday and it's likely steelhead will become more motivated to feed after they've dropped their eggs in the gravel. The problem is, they make for poor table fare.

Even larger streams such as the Wilson and Nestucca are unlikely to produce quantifiable catches of quality steelhead in the near future. Anglers typically have to wait until late February or March before the second wave of returns happen; a mix of wild and some broodstock fish to NW watersheds. To find consistent success anglers will have to downsize their offerings and approach pooled up fish in a stealthy manner. Single beads have become popular recently and low water is the perfect time to employ this technique.

Despite moderating weather, the ocean swell continues to keep anglers at bay. Aggressive lingcod will be available when seas allow but rockfish catches will likely remain subdued until ocean temperatures warm and fish begin to school in greater numbers.

The lower Columbia has slowed dramatically for Dungeness crab. It will be summer before catches improve again.

Southwest- Nearly everyone took rockfish limits over the past weekend when boats were able to get out on the ocean. Lingcod catches were also good. Rough offshore conditions are keeping boats at bay most days, however.

Crabbing has been slow at Coos Bay despite little fresh water influence from the last storm. Catches of rockfish have been good off the jetties.

Flows on the lower Rogue have dropped back to pre-freshet levels with catches of adult and half-pounder steelhead slowing as a consequence. While a handful of winters have been caught, fishing on the middle river has been poor to slow and is unlikely to show improvement with water levels predicted to continue dropping through the coming weekend. Upper Rogue steelheaders have continued to hook colorful or spawned out summer fish this week as the population of winters in this stretch remains low.

Following a crest at 4,500 cfs with the storm front earlier this month, the Chetco has been steadily dropping. Steelheaders trying it in the coming weekend will see a result of that trend in low, clear water, flowing at less than 1,000 cfs. These are challenging fishing conditions calling for light lines, long leaders and diminutive baits. Long range trends indicate relief will come in the last week of January when another front is forecast to roll through.

A few winters were taken over the past week at the Elk River but it is now at extremely low and clear conditions in the absence of precipitation.

Little change is reported at Diamond Lake where ice fishing is ongoing with little snow on the lake's surface. Fishing is slow to fair.

Eastern – Fly fishers on the lower Deschutes report fair results for native reddsides. Caddis, Midges and Blue-Winged-Olives will remain the patterns of interest through the season.

Most recently reported at 58 cfs, Crooked River flows are getting low even for regulars here. Trout fishing is fair on midge patterns.

SW Washington- District steelheaders are dealing with conditions consistent with NW Oregon; low, clear water conditions and a lull in returning adults after the early season steelhead. The Cowlitz will remain the best option but better returns are likely later in March when wild fish, along with some broodstock programs kick in for fair spring steelheading into early April.

Anglers are more likely to get on the water and try for an early spring chinook on the mainstem Columbia. Although the best fishing won't happen for several more weeks, January or February sport-caught chinook are not unheard of. Willamette fish are typically the first to return but that component of the run is forecast to be mediocre so early season catches will be more challenging.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Nothing new on the big river, despite 4 springers passing Bonneville, anglers are not exercising much effort in what would be a wild goose chase anyway. Better tides this weekend may offer opportunity for anchor anglers working the river's edge. Plunkers tend to dominate on these strong outgoing tides but it would definitely be a pipe dream to expect any results for an early spring chinook. It's too early to be wasting your time on the mainstem Columbia.

Crabbing will not be a worthwhile exercise on the lower Columbia. Strong tides coupled with below average odds make it a waste of time to pursue about anything on the mainstem Columbia.

Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reports, "Managers have decided to re-open

Bonneville Pool to sturgeon retention starting Feb 1st and to remain open through Feb 17th, with a harvest guideline of 1,100 fish available. On the last opener which concluded on Jan 19th, fewer than 250 keeper size fish were retained for the 19 days retention was allowed. It's unlikely that the 1100 keepers will get caught during this, but future seasons will be a possibility until the quota is met. Retention will be allowed from Bonneville Dam up to The Dalles Dam only and the keeper size range is from 38-54 inches, measured from the tip of the nose to the fork of the tail. And of course, barbless hooks only. As for favorite baits, all the standards will get fish, but frozen anchovies have been a favorite the last couple of seasons. As for the river below the dam, some spurts of smelt have made their way up to the Columbia River, with pilot runs making it into the Cowlitz. But as of yet, nobody has spotted any above the Cowlitz mouth. The bad news is, there are no seasons available as of this time to harvest smelt in the Columbia or its tributaries. The good news is, they are often an indicator of following spring Chinook and an healthy sturgeon fishery in the main-stem Columbia."

The Guide's Forecast – If you didn't get the hint in the last section, don't waste your time fishing or crabbing the Columbia this weekend. The weather may break but your effort will likely yield nothing measureable.

Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) predicts, "Expect more of the same on the Bonneville Pool with the coming opener. Either keeper size sturgeon are present in the population or they aren't. And the previous opener leads us to believe that the keeper age class is mostly absent. Action will be had, with mostly sub legal sturgeon and the rare keeper for a lucky few. No quoting here, but I'm guessing there will be another opener after this one."

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reports, "Catch and release sturgeon fishing remains a good option for anglers looking for opportunity close to the Portland area. On a good day, seasoned anglers can expect to catch 10 -40 sturgeon per boat, ranging in size from 20 or so inches up to 8 feet in length, with most on the 36-48 inch range. These fish pull hard and will give you a few good runs for your money and they are fun for anglers of all ages to catch. If you have a boat with a top and a propane heater, you are set for up for comfort even on the coldest of days. The wife and kids might even enjoy the action with these amenities. The harbor below the Broadway Bridge down to the head of Multnomah Channel is the favorite stretch, with the deepest holes working as catch basins for sturgeon fodder. Anchovies, herring, smelt and sand shrimp are the favorite baits of seasoned anglers. Meldrum bar isn't giving up much and there is little effort to gage anglers success. A few boats have been spotted on the weekends below I-205 working the Garbage Hole and along Yucca Island, hoping for an odd winter steelhead, or better yet an early spring Chinook slab. The latter being a serious possibility as the days progress. Two to three boats on any given day, have been working the Sellwood bridge hoping for a springer. No word as of yet as to any success."

McKenzie River levels rocketed from just over 3,200 cfs on Tuesday this week to an unexpected 7,500 cfs overnight. That's far too much water to fish well.

Winter steelhead have been crossing Willamette Falls in only single digits for the past 10 days, putting very few additional fish into the Santiam system.

Detroit Reservoir has been producing slow but steady results for trout to boat anglers at Detroit Lake. Bank fishers are not doing so well. The boat ramp is useable and will remain so as long as the water doesn't get too low.

Walling Pond, Junction City Pond, E.E. Wilson Pond and Alton Baker Canal were stocked with trout this week.

The Guide's Forecast – **Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** predicts, "Get after some

C&R sturgeon on the Willamette River, the fishing has been great. Expect the action to continue through the next few weeks, but if a strong showing of smelt shows in the lower Columbia, many of the Willamette's sturgeon will vacate the area for greener pastures. Some lucky angler is going to catch a spring Chinook any day now. maybe at Meldrum bar or maybe at Sellwood. Either way, all the excitement over the North West's favorite fish is about to begin."

The story is the same for the McKenzie as it is for the Santiams this week. There's going to be just too much water to fish for the next several days. Depending on precipitation in the coming week, that situation could change - for better or worse.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reports, "The Clackamas river has been giving up a few winter steelhead, but anglers are having to cover lots of water to find a biter. The peak of the Clack's season is in sight with mid-February through April seeing the biggest push of fish. The water level has come up to just a bit above optimum and is now on the drop, but the color is plenty fishable. This weekend should give up the best water conditions for boaters and hopefully a few winter steelhead will cooperate. Bank anglers should be hitting it now in the upper stretch from Feldheimer's up to Rivermill Dam. Bait under a bobber has become a favorite, with a jig in the baits place taking a close second. hardware anglers also do well on the Clackamas with spoons and spinners. The Little Cleo 2/5 ounce in brass or copper is a getter and better yet, the Pen Tac B.C. Steel 2/5 oz in 50/50, matte silver and genuine gold plate is my favorite. The size 4 or 5 silver plate Blue Fox spinner would be a good choice if you prefer your metal to spin rather than wobble. Favorite body colors are too many to mention but pink, blue red, purple and black would get first nods .

"The Sandy River will be in top shape Friday and Saturday. Let the games begin (again) and let's hope good numbers of fresh winter steelhead are here to be exploited. The run so far has been less than stellar with low water plaguing most of the season as of yet. If they are going to come in good numbers, it's likely we would already have seen some positive signs earlier in the month. Last season was below average and it's looking like we might be in a valley, rather than on the peak of the cycle. Oxbow Park is always a good option, with Dabney and Dodge Parks also having good access. Expect winter steelhead to trickle in through mid-April and then a few summers will start showing up in the mix."

The Guide's Forecast – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) predicts, "Expect good water conditions to hold on the Clackamas for many days to come. With the dams holding water back and little rain in the immediate future, the flows will be stable with a very gradual drop for at least a week to ten days. The peak of the Clack's winter steelhead run is within our reach, let's hope for a good showing.

"The next few days will tell if the Sandy River will have a winter steelhead run to talk about....or not. Good water condition should prevail through the weekend and into the early part of next week."

North Coast Fishing Report – The standard mid-season lull couldn't be more glaring than this year. Coupling a standard slowdown in action is the fact the returns this year are sub-par. Sure, there are steelhead around but finding a fresh fish will be a very rare treat. This is typically the time when anglers will see many more spawned out fish versus fresh ones. Most of the well-known systems on the north coast such as the Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem, Highway 30 systems, Kilchis and Three Rivers will yield a rare spawned out fish and even a more rare fresh one. A few fish were recycled in Big Creek and the North Fork Klaskanine recently. Larger systems that contain broodstock adults, such as the Wilson and Nestucca systems, may offer a rare early returning, high quality broodstock or wild adult. These systems also get early returning steelhead which will likely show themselves as spawned out adults headed back to sea. These fish readily take bait and even plugs under the current low-water conditions.

The low, clear water conditions also call for single beads and bobber and jig fishing but hopefully those poor river characteristics change by the weekend. Overall, this week's steelhead catch went as predicted; few steelhead, mostly coloring up or spent and even fewer fresh ones for stealthy anglers.

A week or rough seas kept ocean anglers at bay. Despite good tides, crabbers fared poorly over the weekend. Crabbing reports throughout the NW district were unimpressive. There just isn't much to do on the north coast right now.

The Guide's Forecast – Anglers do have a rain freshet to look forward to this weekend but again, given the likely lull in action, anglers shouldn't head into the weekend with high expectations. The Wilson and Nestucca will remain the best bets and hopefully, anglers can jump-start the late returning broodstock fish, which will show up in better numbers from late February through March. About 200 hatchery steelhead were recycled to the lower Nestucca River from Cedar Creek Hatchery recently. All the other north coast systems will likely be dominated by spent hatchery fish trying to return to the sea. One of the best prospects, the fishing platform at the North Fork Nehalem hatchery, is yielding consistent results at first light for those able to fish there. Fresh run fish are clearly tapering, not just at this site, but on the north coast in general. The weekend rain freshet should yield a few early returning wild fish but for the most part, hatchery opportunities on these systems is done for the season.

Although far from a gully-washer, the Wilson is projected to rise nearly a foot as of this writing. Often off, it should still be a significant river rise, which should trigger some movement of a rare fresh fish, maybe a small spurt of broodstock fish and even some early returning wild fish to the north coast systems. If the river rise goes slowly and remains under a foot, action can be quite good on the river rise. If it exceeds a foot, especially if it happens swiftly, fish will go off of the bite and fishing will be challenging until the river stabilizes. Regardless, given the long period of low-water, there will be willing biters around, whether they are fresh from the sea or looking to return to it. Some of those spent fish, especially bright hens, may look a bit snaky but they can oftentimes still cut quite orange. I just took one out of the smoker a few days ago and it was consumed in no time.

Anglers will still have to utilize stealthy tactics however, with the single bead technique catching on quite quickly. Many side-drifters or bobber doggers rig the single bead a lot like you do driftfishing, just under a bobber to keep from snagging more often in the lower velocities. Bobber and jigs or worms rigged with a jig head can be quite productive under these conditions as well. By the weekend, rivers may be clearing quite significantly by then so if you can go sooner rather than later, you're likely to have better action. Certainly side-drifting small clusters of eggs or shrimp tails will produce in the higher flows, it's just that the high flows won't last long, particularly into the weekend. Did I mention that you're likely to come across several spawned-out fish?

Looking west, saltwater anglers may find themselves a small window of opportunity by the weekend. Offshore forecasts look favorable beginning Saturday but we all know how quickly that can change. Rockfish remain somewhat elusive; it's all about matching the hatch with these fish this time of year but lingcod should be readily available for anglers dangling lead jigs or bait in their lairs.

Ocean crabbing may offer you best chance at quality keepers but like every estuary on the north coast, don't go into it with high expectations; even the commercial season was less than stellar. We may be on a down-turn for Dungeness here but the north coast fared better than other areas of the Oregon coast.

Razor clam diggers could score good results on the upcoming minus tide series starting on Thursday. By Saturday, the peak of the outgoing, the surf it expected to lay down and diggers using lanterns may find good digging conditions over the weekend. You still have to be cautious of the waves however. Dry sand digging could be as productive as any however so start in the upper reaches of the beach when the tide is close to low.

Central & South Coast Reports – The ocean has been big this week, accompanied by authoritative, gust coastal winds. This typical winter situation has prevented charter and recreational craft from launching an assault on tasty bottom dwellers. The coming weekend looks a little friendlier, though, so hopes are high for good catches of ling cod and that rockfish will be in a biting mood.

Rain this week resulted in an improvement in river flows in southwest Oregon with effects greater on some systems than others. Consequently, there are a few more winter steelhead to chase but this was not the major system most steelheaders have hoping for. That wish may be fulfilled, however, as meteorologists and NOAA river forecasts seem to agree that the next system, due in as the weekend of February 8th approaches, will make a significant difference in river levels and flows.

Siletz steelheading has been slow but a few winters are being taken in the middle and lower sections. Impact from precipitation was much greater here than further south with the depth at the town of Siletz increasing three feet and flows increasing from 570 to over 2,100 cfs.. Plug-pullers are having the greater success here.

Fishing for winters has been slow at the Alsea River despite the recent freshet which has raised the hopes of many steelheaders.

Water levels topped six feet on the Siuslaw at Mapleton on January 30th, and indication that the upper river is most likely to be productive. The water is dropping gradually and will continue doing so through the weekend.

Winchester Bay has been poor for crabbing with very few legal-size Dungeness available. The mainstem Umpqua has been producing native winter steelhead for catch and release action this week. Flows on the South Umpqua increased from about 400 cfs to nearly 2,400 cfs as the water level rose nearly three feet with rainfall on Wednesday this week. That freshet brought fresh hatchery winters upstream and steelheaders have been nailing them this week. As the river drops and clears over the next few days, results may slow a bit but it should remain worthwhile as long as the water doesn't get too low. Steelheading on the North Umpqua has been slow to spotty. Use caution boating the North - three boats have gone down this month alone and two of those were guide boats. This is as good a spot as any to remind everyone: PFDs float; you don't.

Coos bay rock fishers are picking up ling cod and rock fish from the south jetty. Bay crabbing has been slow. Winter steelhead catches picked up following rainfall this week with decent results expected through the weekend.

The moderate freshet which resulted from rainfall earlier this week resulted in a slight improvement in Coquille winter steelhead catches this week with fishing expected to slow over the next few days as the water level drops.

Rainfall this week caused a slight improvement in flows and catches on the lower Rogue with a few adult and half-pounder steelhead being caught. The water level will continue to drop and is predicted to be near historic low levels by Sunday. Various baits, lures and flies are hooking a few winter steelhead which started to show in the middle Rogue even prior to the uptick in flows as a result of rain showers. Pressure is light as fishing is slow on the upper Rogue. There are still a few geriatric and spawned out summers with only a few winter steelhead up into this stretch of the river. Fly fishers have been doing as well as anyone playing with summers which are taking nymphs.

Following the disappointing amount of precipitation this week, the Chetco near Brookings measured 1,400 cfs. Compare this to the historic seasonal flow of 2,000 cfs near the end of January. And now it's moderating, destined to be around 1,000 cfs by this coming Saturday. Actually, fishing prior to the rain this week was fair but steady with winters falling for drifted roe on light leaders and it won't get worse due to the lack of a gully-washer.

Diamond Lake is fully covered now with ice which measures a foot thick in many places. Trout have been biting but anglers report that hooking those biters has been challenging. While there's still very little snow in the forecast, more is forecast to fall over the coming weekend.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Grande Ronde steelheaders are enduring cold weather to a few fish on jigs.

Crooked River, which commonly registers at low flows, dropped to a remarkable 46.5 cfs on Thursday, January 30th. We have heard there is some construction which may have diversion. We'll report more as we're able to get details.

Trollers using downriggers at Lake Billy Chinook are taking limits of kokanee averaging a foot long although of varying degrees of silver. It might be worth mentioning that the limit here is five fish.

Kokanee are hitting trolled hoochies at Green Pater and while catches are far short of the limit of 25 here, they are reported as bright.

TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Michael Teague: TGFMichael@gmail.com

Chris Vertopoulos: chrisv@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com

Random Links

Ice Fishing Tips

http://www.diamondlake.net/rainbow_trout_ice_fishing_tips.html

Contrast - Bahamas Bonefish

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2TSGo3u5oWU>

GOOD LUCK!