

[The Guide's Forecast - volume 16 issue number 50](#)

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 12th – December 18th, 2014**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro – Water level of the Willamette at the Falls is likely to be rising over the coming weekend. Try for sturgeon in the muddy water.

Despite rainfall in the area, the McKenzie River, which has been steadily dropping since the first of the month, came up only a little in the last couple of days and is in good color.

While the North Santiam is forecast to be virtually unaffected by rain this week, the South Santiam will rise a little over the next day or two, then settle right back down.

Waters of the Clackamas are on the rise today but are forecast to start a drop, the trend of which is predicted to continue over the coming week. No winter steelhead catches have been reported.

Sandy River levels which have been a roller coaster since the first of December, are expected to continue in that manner. Cooler temperatures should equate to good water color, however. No winter steelhead catches have been reported.

Northwest – The early returning winter steelhead run is underway. The North Fork Nehalem hatchery is reporting good numbers of steelhead in their trap and success has been fair for the anglers working the hatchery reach of the North Fork. Although we use the North Fork as a gauge since fisherman put out an intense effort near the hatchery and the hatchery trap is often an indicator as to how many fish are around, other nearby streams will often mimic what we see at this facility. We'll have a detailed description in our full-length version.

Chinook are still around the Tillamook district but given the unsettled weather in the region, there hasn't been intense pressure pursuing them. It will mostly be steelhead from here on out although there should be another shot of chinook opportunity when Wilson and Trask River flows subside.

Big Creek, Gnat Creek, the Klaskanine and Necanicum Rivers in Clatsop County are strong steelhead options this week. The North Fork of the Nehalem, Wilson, Kilchis, Nestucca and Three Rivers will top Tillamook district streams for prospects.

A winter storm coupled with a high water event may knock out many north coast estuaries for crabbing but the lower Columbia still has some good options for keepers, amongst the commercial crab gear even.

Southwest- Rough ocean conditions have kept boats at bay recently and the forecast indicates there is little hope for improvement in the coming week.

Grey whales will be making their annual migration over the Christmas and New Year's holidays; get over to the coast to view these magnificent critters if you're able.

Tenmile Lake has continued to produce table-quality coho. The wild coho fishery will remain open here through December 31st.

Ocean crabbing opened on December 1st and despite high hopes for commercial crabbers, has been slow off the southern Oregon coast.

Coos Bay is expected to continue to produce limits or near-limits of Dungeness despite rainfall this week.

The Coquille River has started producing winter steelhead.

While the Rogue River is currently rising, it is supposed to fall over the coming weekend. Winter steelheading is expected to be fair on the lower river. The middle and upper Rogue should produce fair to good summer steelhead catches.

Chetco River anglers have been catching a mix of late-season Chinook and early winter steelhead. The freshet this week will facilitate the transition into winter steelhead season as Chinook jet upstream to spawn and additional winters enter the system.

Eastern – Steelheading is slow to fair on the lower Deschutes although the fish hooked are often large as there are B-run fish in the river. Trout fishing is slow.

Winter kokanee fishing has been slow at Green Peter although kokes can be seen jumping in many places.

SW Washington- Winter steelhead are showing in fair number on the Cowlitz with the Kalama still putting out an occasional chinook and a rare steelhead. The Lewis is also an option for steelhead although this run tends to peak later in the season.

The Klickitat is still putting out coho although action has predictably slowed. This fishery will continue to dwindle in the coming weeks; it's been a banner year here.

Columbia River Fishing Report – With nothing going on in the mainstem below Bonneville, crabbing is the only real option for those needing to recreate on the north coast. High winds however is scaring away more participants, even though weather forecasters have been wrong about 9 out of the last 10 times. What a pathetic career. Can you tell I'm peeved?

The soft tides happening right now are quite conducive to opportunity and although the lower river is littered with commercial gear, one captain reports abundant sport legals in the catch. You may have to work harder for your limit of sport legals but they are certainly present downstream of Hammond and on lower Desdemona Sands.

The Guide's Forecast – I think we all know by now that we can't trust the wind forecast, no matter who's putting it out but none-the-less, you can't overlook the warnings weather forecasters are still putting out there that might scare away interested crabbers. The tides are great for high success but you have to be prepared to be turned away if the winds actually do materialize in the coming days. Don't be dumb but there may be some great opportunity over the weekend. Use fresh bait if you can get it, even if it's not premium fish carcasses; in other words, chicken will work well. And sea lions are wrecking gear down there if it's not properly caged and out of reach for them.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Water level of the Willamette at the Falls has been rising and falling over the past couple of weeks. It will likely be coming up once again following rain this week. Winter steelhead are crossing the Falls at an increasing, albeit still modest pace, for a total as of December 11th of 154.

Despite rainfall in the area, the McKenzie River, which has been steadily dropping since the first of the month, came up only a little in the last couple of days and is in good color.

While the North Santiam is forecast to be virtually unaffected by rain the week, the South Santiam will rise a little over the next day or two, then settle right back down.

Extra-large rainbow trout were released this week into Walter Wirth Lake and Walling Pond in Salem. These fish weigh in at 7-15 pounds apiece. Brood trout were also released the past several weeks at Waverly Lake in Albany, Junction City Pond near Eugene, St. Louis Ponds near Woodburn, Huddleston Pond in Willamina and Sheridan Pond in Sheridan.

Readers are reminded that fishing licenses and tags make terrific stocking stuffers and may be purchased online. The gift-giver needs to have the hunter's or angler's full name and date of birth. If the person has had a license before, make sure you have their angler ID number from the top of their old license. If you are purchasing a license for someone who has never had a license, you will have to provide his or her social security number. See **Random Links**, below, for online sales.

The Guide's Forecast – Sturgeon fishing remains the best if not only option on the lower Willamette. Those fish love high, muddy water but aren't terribly particular if it's otherwise. Just be sure to take a variety of baits including smelt, herring, anchovy, sand shrimp and hot dogs (OK, kidding a little on that last one) and release everything you catch. Nine-footers have been hooked recently but those are seldom landed.

While the McKenzie River remains open through December 31st below Leaburg Dam, only flies and lures may be used and trout must be fin-clipped to keep. Expect angling to be slow.

Fishing is very slow on the Santiams with the coho season all but over and few late-season summer steelhead to target. There will be a catch and release fishery for wild steelhead on the North Santiam but it is months away. A brief glance at the 2015 fishing regs indicates miles of the North Santiam are closed to fishing next season. One angler was quick to point out that we get to pay an additional \$3 for the privilege of not fishing it.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Waters of the Clackamas are on the rise today but are forecast to start a drop, the trend of which is predicted to continue over the coming week.

Sandy River levels which have been a roller coast since the first of December are expected to continue in that manner. Cooler temperatures should equate to good water color, however.

The Guide's Forecast – Anglers are currently in the middle, stuck between runs on the Clackamas. Fishing for coho salmon is all but over while the winter steelhead run has just barely started. Give it a week or two and there would be a good enough number of winters to make a trip worthwhile. The ODFW reports a few coho lingering in Eagle Creek. They are likely dark and nasty critters. Steelheaders are trying but no catches have been reported. One fellow reminded us that one day before Christmas last year, he had five to the bank. So there's reason for hope.

Sandy River anglers are in a similar predicament with regard to being between seasons. The few lingering coho are unlikely to be of table quality and numbers of summer steelhead which may be targeted is dwindling. While there have been no confirmed landings of winter steelhead, everyone is reporting the "it's probably happened." And that's true, it is highly probable. With the change several years ago to broodstock plantings of hatchery fish, steelhead runs are later now. The upside is that the fishery is extended, about which it's tough to celebrate as we wait for the run to get underway. Perhaps the best news is that weather this week will have virtually no effect on the Sandy. The level, flow and color are expected to be great for weekend fishing.

North Coast Fishing Report – It's steelhead time on the north coast and with the bulk of the early run about to hit north coast rivers, the current rain freshet we're on is the one to get excited about. We'll go over most of those options in the forecast section so let's stay focused on what happened this week.

A slight bump in water levels prior to last weekend didn't blow the fishery up but more chinook and some steelhead were biting on the Wilson River. The North Fork Nehalem was obviously the best option for steelheaders but even with that, action wasn't all that great near the hatchery. Boaters who have better access to these late, mainstem spawners largely fished downstream of Mills Bridge. Effort is often focused even more so downstream of Sollie Smith Bridge. This is sled country and powerboats often cull out biters before they make it into driftboat country. Bank anglers really only have opportunity above Sollie Smith Bridge and to a much larger degree, Windy Bend where the river first meets Highway 6, coming out of the pastureland. There remains however, only a smattering of anglers fishing. Those that are however, are reporting huge numbers of salmon.....carcasses, lying to waste on the river banks. An indication that it was a good run and a good batch of fertilization is taking place right now.

Given it's still early, Necanicum and Kilchis River anglers couldn't have had high expectations for an early run winter steelhead this week; effort eluded to that speculation.

The Trask was still putting out an occasional winter chinook but there are an increasing number of dark fish in the limited catch over here. Coho are still present in some of these watershed but the bulk of that run, as good as it was, has also moved through. It does seem like the good 'ol days here.

Anglers are starting to see some activity at Three Rivers but should see more in the coming week. Fishermen are focusing most of their effort near the hatchery deadline although plenty are working the public stretches along the highway just upstream from Highway 101.

Not much activity in the estuaries either. Not just due to windy weather but high tides don't do much for success rates. That may change over the weekend however.

Ocean fishing and crabbing is NOT an option.

The Guide's Forecast – The big blow-out is underway, although it's not really all that big of a blow-out. A nice rise in river levels came mid-week, just in time for the smaller tributaries to start fishing on Friday and Saturday. The North Fork Nehalem, Necanicum, Three Rivers, Big Creek, Gnat Creek, the Kilchis, Wilson and Nestucca Rivers, likely in that order, should produce the first substantial catches of steelhead this weekend. The smaller the stream, the sooner it will begin producing, maybe as soon as Friday on many of the smaller systems. Don't be afraid to use bigger and brighter colors in higher flows but drop down in size as flows drop. It's these kinds of conditions where plunking or anchoring in a strategic location can produce results, but only in higher flows.

High winds are upon us as we write this week's forecast, a warning that downed trees will make smaller streams (and larger ones too) potential navigational hazards. It's fairly common that the Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem can claim boats and lives. Don't be a victim, drift with extreme caution.

If you're still looking for late season chinook, the Wilson, Kilchis, Trask and to a much lesser extent, the Nestucca will all be options. If you're still fishing in higher flows, look to the tailouts to produce some chinook, maybe a steelhead. Plugs can be especially effective for chinook in the tail-outs in higher flows. When flows drop, chinook will concentrate in the lower reaches of these systems and may fall victim to back-bounced eggs. This will likely be the last hurrah for bright chinook and it's likely that even bright hens may cut a bit pale this time of year.

Estuary crabbing? Well, you'll have to pay attention to the weather. Although the forecasters continue to blunder their predictions, it's still something you have to weigh. Here is what the forecasters are saying:

FRI

W WIND 5 TO 10 KT. GUSTS TO 15 KT IN THE AFTERNOON. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 12 FT AT 15 SECONDS. SHOWERS LIKELY AND A SLIGHT CHANCE OF TSTMS.

FRI NIGHT

SW WIND 5 TO 10 KT WITH GUSTS TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 3 FT. W SWELL 11 FT AT 15 SECONDS.

SAT

S WIND 10 TO 15 KT WITH GUSTS TO 20 KT. WIND WAVES 4 FT. W SWELL 11 FT AT 14 SECONDS.

SAT NIGHT

SE WIND 15 TO 20 KT. WIND WAVES 4 FT. W SWELL 9 FT AT 14 SECONDS...SUBSIDING TO 7 FT AT 13 SECONDS AFTER MIDNIGHT.

SUN

SE WIND 20 TO 25 KT. WIND WAVES 5 FT. W SWELL 6 FT.

SUN NIGHT

SE WIND 20 TO 25 KT. WIND WAVES 5 FT. W SWELL 9 FT.

MON

SE WIND 20 TO 25 KT. WIND WAVES 6 FT. W SWELL 14 FT.

TUE

SE WIND 15 TO 20 KT. WIND WAVES 4 FT. W SWELL 9 FT.

No place for open water recreation!

Central & South Coast Reports – High winds and heavy rains have pummeled the central Oregon coast this week. As a consequence, storm-watching has replaced offshore fishing out of the ports of Depoe Bay and Newport. Conditions for the weekend and into the coming week are for high winds and rough seas. Stay safe.

Grey whales will be making their annual migration over the Christmas and New Year's holidays get over to the coast to view these magnificent critters if you're able. Better yet, book a boat ride to get up close & personal!

Oregon Dungeness crab fishermen and seafood processor representatives participating in state-supervised crab price negotiations have agreed on an opening price of \$3.10 per pound for the 2014-2015 Dungeness crab season along the Oregon coast, which began at the start of December. Dungeness crab is the most valuable commercial fishery on the Oregon coast. Last season's harvest produced landings of 14.4 million pounds and an 'ex-vessel' value of \$50 million dollars.

Central coast rivers weren't hit as hard by this week's storm as those on the south coast. As the Siuslaw drops back into shape, look for fresh winter steelhead along the stretch near Whitaker Creek. The trap already has decent numbers of winters in it.

Trollers have been catching bright coho on spinners from the County Boat Ramp to Rocky Point and also in the upper arms of South Tenmile Lake. The wild coho season remains open here until December 31st with a bag limit of one wild coho adult per day and a total of 5 wild adult coho for the season in aggregate from all SW Zone waterbodies.

Writer Pete Heley (peteheley.com) is a thinking angler and often has insight regarding fishing that might not otherwise occur to many of us. This week, he wrote regarding the new spring Chinook regulations for 2015: "One change in the fishing regulations this year concerns spring Chinook fishermen. The season limit for non-fin clipped springers will be five salmon and the season now has fixed starting and ending dates of February 1st and July 31st respectively. The fall chinook season also has a fixed season opener of August 1st."

"The Umpqua River's fall Chinook start entering the lower river around the first of July, but the fall Chinook season now has a fixed starting date of August 1st. So what do you do if you catch an Umpqua River Chinook in July?"

"You simply tag the fish as a spring Chinook – since their season will run through July. It may not be the solution that the ODFW or enforcement people want, but it was the simplest fix I could come up with. I am not sure that the ODFW "fixed" a problem that didn't exist, but they may have wanted stricter control on the number of non-fin clipped spring Chinook salmon retained.

"I can definitely see a problem in the future regarding ocean fishing for Chinook salmon, which has begun on March 15th for a number of years. I am sure that ocean salmon anglers are not going to want to use up their season quota of five unclipped spring Chinooks on feeder Chinooks."

Crabbing at Coos Bay should resume as the weather settles down over the weekend, Due to the size and depth of the bay, it is seldom affected by even heavy precipitation. Rockfishing is expected to be good from the jetty.

Winter steelhead were caught from the Coquille earlier this week at LaVerne Park and near the town of Coquille. The run is just getting started here.

Other than a handful of Chinook lingering at the mouth of Indian Creek, there is nothing of interest to anglers in Rogue Bay at this time. Waters of the Rogue started rising on Wednesday this week and are forecast to increase in volume, cresting by mid-day Friday, December 12th, then begin falling December 13th. While the drop will be fairly rapid and fishing may resume as early as Saturday.

Steelheaders pulled a few winters out of the lower Rogue earlier this week but it wasn't hot 'n' heavy. Plug pullers and plunkers hooked up every so often. It is hoped this week's freshet will bring in greater numbers and improve prospects in the coming week, at which time flows are supposed to remain somewhat stable. Steelhead are being caught on the middle river although these are summers, not winters. Fishing is reported as fair but steady for fish up to 30 inches. Chasing steelhead on the upper Rogue would be an option except for the rising water, which is predicted to continue through Friday at the very least. Catches earlier this week were quite good and a freshet will often trigger a good bite. Once again, the stretch above Shady Cove Boat Ramp to the deadline at Cole Rivers Hatchery holds the most promise as either bait or lures may be used.

Commercial crabbers out of the Port of Brookings were surprised and disappointed at the opener. Many pots had only a single crab. They have talked of moving efforts further north to improve prospects.

Sports crabbers, on the other hand, were satisfied with only taking a six or a dozen keepers in a day's effort. Regardless, ocean crabbing in this area is rated only fair at best. Bottom fishing is excellent, however making a combination trip a sound choice for recreational boats. Lingcod catches have been good while rockfish have been mostly blacks occasionally mixed with more colorful varieties. Jigs, shrimp flies and leadfish are most always effective for any of these fish. Late Chinook have entered recently, providing action for anglers who are back-bouncing cured eggs in the lower Chetco. These late, fresh salmon are chrome bright. Coos River steelheaders are anxiously awaiting the arrival of winters. It should be any day now, particularly with rain that has caused the river to swell this week. While the Chetco has been producing a decent mix of late fall Chinook along with early winter steelhead, action will transition over the next 10 days or so as the remainder of the salmon hit upstream spawning beds and winter steelhead numbers increase dramatically. At this writing mid-day Thursday, water levels were predictably rocketing with the river forecast to crest at ~13,000 cfs late today, then drop through the coming weekend. It should be plunkable by Saturday, December 13th. All this water will equate to more winters as well.

Anglers fishing the Elk River on Tuesday this week reported seeing Chinook on the move but not being able to get any of them to bite. The water was green and 52 degrees at that time. Since then, about an inch of rain has fallen but high wind has kept boats off the water. This time of year, winter steelhead will be joining late fall Chinook on the Elk as well as the Sixes river.

Fishing is fair at Diamond Lake although there is very little pressure. Snowfall closed part of the road around the lake this week so it would be wise to call 1-800-733-7593, ext. 236 or 238 for the latest conditions.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Steelheading on the Deschutes is scratch fishing at this time of year but if you can hook into one, chances are it'll be big. There are some B-run fish in the river now. While there are fish upstream from the mouth, the better percentages are in the stretch from Warm Springs to Maupin. Trout fishing will be slow through January but you might get lucky and hit a Blue-Winged-Olive hatch. Otherwise, it's possible to fish all day without seeing a rise.

Beautifully colored trout are being taken at Crooked River by fly anglers with the usual offering. Keep it to yourself, though; this little place has plenty of people fishing it already.

Winter kokanee fishing has been slow at Green Peter although kokes can be seen jumping in many places. Be aware that with the water level low, the boat ramp is very long and a little muddy at the bottom.

Warmwater fishing is seldom discussed in the winter time although fishing has been fair to good at Brownlee Reservoir. A report this week indicates that fish moved deeper with a storm from passing this week.

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Random Links

Online 2015 License & Tag Sales: <https://or.outdoorcentral.us/or/license>

ODA Shellfish Closure Map:

<http://geo.maps.arcgis.com/apps/SimpleViewer/index.html?appid=821de5a7b9004fa2b64aca73a7f604ef>

Clever Gift Idea: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m9fwBkMQcV4>

GOOD LUCK!