

The Guide's Forecast - volume 16 issue number 51

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 19th – December 25th, 2014**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

DUE TO THE HOLIDAY NEXT WEEK AND THE UPCOMING STORM SYSTEM, TGF WRITERS AND STAFF WILL BE TAKING THE NEXT WEEK OFF. WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR PATRONAGE AND WISH YOU AND YOUR FAMILIES A HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON AND MANY FISHES IN THE NEW YEAR!

Best- Bob and Doug Rees, Michael Teague

Willamette Valley/Metro – River flows on the Willamette will slowly rise over the next several days. Winter steelhead are crossing daily. Try for sturgeon on the lower river.

McKenzie River levels, dropping over the past week, will rise with heavy weekend rainfall. Trout fishing here is slow.

The Santiams will rise this weekend, dropping starting Monday, December 22nd. With coho dark and summer steelhead far upstream, there's little of interest here.

Clackamas water levels are forecast to reach flood stage on Monday, December 22nd. When the water drops and clears, there will be winter steelhead available.

Winter steelhead have been caught over the past week on the Sandy River, though not a great number. It's early in the season but this weekend's winter storm should bring in a few more.

Northwest – It's been a bit of a bleak week for steelheaders and what few salmon anglers remain. A rough early return seems to be existing on most north coast systems and with a potential flood on the horizon, options look minimal for steelheaders ahead. It's going to be a quiet week for steelheaders to an already challenging start to the season.

Christmas crab will be hard to come by as foul weather and flood stage rivers should wash opportunities out to sea this week. Even under ideal conditions, success was sub-par.

There are still an occasional fresh chinook hitting the decks in the Tillamook district with Tillamook Bay and the Wilson River the best options for success. That was hindsight however as the upcoming high water event will wipe out options until after Christmas if it actually comes to fruition.

Southwest- When charter boats have been able to get out of Depoe Bay and Newport, bottom fishing has been good.

Heavy rains predicted for the coming weekend will create blowout conditions on many rivers and prevent fishing efforts. As the rivers recover, fishing in many places will improve.

Crabbing has been fair to good at Winchester Bay. Chinook fishing is wrapped up for the season. Only wild steelhead are available on the Umpqua mainstem.

Crabbing and rock fishing has been good at Coos Bay. The Coos River system has produced a few winter steelhead with prospects improving as the season wears on.

Anglers have been taking winter steelhead on the lower Rogue for a couple of weeks. The middle river has been providing fair but steady catches of summer steelhead. On the upper Rogue, steelheaders may expect to catch good-quality summers mixed with spawned out down-runners.

Chinook season is over on the Chetco as these fish have pushed far upstream to the spawning grounds. Anglers here are awaiting winter steelhead.

Eastern – Boats using downriggers to fish deep water are taking good-sized lake trout at Crescent Lake.

East side reports are hard to come by at this time of year. Readers are encouraged to contribute. Your report will be 'anonymized' unless you specify otherwise.

SW Washington- Creel checks on the Cowlitz revealed poor results for both bank and boat anglers. It should be good early season fishing on the Cowlitz but when more coho are being caught than steelhead, something seems wrong with that picture.

The Kalama remains an option for late chinook but a waning one. The high water event slated for Friday should wipe out this last chance option for the season with the exception of a possible window after Christmas.

The Klickitat is still putting out fresh coho although the quality of fish is deteriorating. It's been an impressive year here and can't last too much longer.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Soft tides last weekend allowed lower Columbia crabbers an opportunity to catch some quality crab. The problem is, with the commercial fleet inundating the lower river with gear, you'll have stiff competition. None-the-less, plenty of sport legal fish remain available and not many sport crabbers are after them. That's about all you have to look forward to for Columbia River fisheries.

The Guide's Forecast – Bigger tides this weekend won't be conducive to productive crabbing. Commercial gear is still ever-so-present but if you have quality bait and target the right time of the tide, even though your window will be brief, you can still take fair numbers of sport legal keepers. What a holiday treat!

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Water flow has started to increase at Willamette Falls and on the lower river. Due to the length and size of this waterway, it's slower to change than small rivers whether rising or falling. Expect the Willamette River to crest in the area of Willamette Falls on Tuesday, maintaining the highest level and flow through Wednesday. It will slowly moderate in the days following.

Water levels at the McKenzie River have been dropping all week but this is about to change as heavy rainfall is in the forecast.

North Santiam levels are rising, a trend which will continue through Monday in the coming week.

Extra-large rainbow trout brook trout were released this week into Mt. Hood Pond, Canby Pond, Timber Linn Lake, and Waverly Lake. These fish weigh in at 7-15 pounds apiece.

The Guide's Forecast – The only Willamette Falls fish count worth noting at this time of year is that of winter steelhead which is unremarkable with the most recent YTD figure at 230. Not enough to do upstream anglers or tributaries much good. Fishing prospects are on the lower river where catch-and-

release sturgeon fishing in the St. Johns area and Milwaukie stretch has been good. Taking a variety of baits can't be stressed enough as these fishes' preferences can and often do change daily. This week, the hot baits have been anchovies or herring. Tomorrow, it could be smelt, squid or sand shrimp.

Trout fishing is seasonably slow on the McKenzie. If solitude is of greater importance than catching lots of fish, this just might be the destination for you. Blue -Winged-Olives are the primary winter hatch.

With the few remaining coho well past their prime at this time of year, the next fish of interest will be catch-and-release wild winter steelhead. Too few have passed the Falls to put sufficient numbers in the Santiam. It will be a couple of months until this occurs.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Water levels are on the rise on the Clackamas River where they are predicted to reach flood levels overnight on Monday, December 32nd.

The Sandy River will also see some water from this weekend's storm but the level is unlikely to reach flood proportions. Cold weather will mean good water color as water conditions improve.

The Guide's Forecast – The Clackamas is slated for a full on, no kidding blowout as it heads to flood stage over the next few days. Recovery is forecast to be nearly as swift as the rise so keep an eye on the level as this water will surely draw more winter steelhead into the system.

There have been a few - with emphasis on few - winter steelhead taken from the Sandy River. Following the freshet this week, there should be a few more but as an early adopter of the Broodstock steelhead program, even late December is considered early, Results will improve in January and February.

North Coast Fishing Report – It's almost all steelhead now as the last of the fall chinook enter Tillamook County streams for the winter spawn. The Wilson, Trask and Kilchis Rivers really remain the only North Coast options this late in the season. There are also still a few fresh fish coming through Tillamook Bay but success is hard to gauge given the light effort taking place. Avid angler Craig Campbell reported still getting bites at the Coast Guard Hole but had a hard time hooking those interested fish. He continues to use purple label herring. Those floating the Wilson River are finding an occasional fish in classic chinook water. Lower flows are concentrating chinook in more defined water as they wait for their last opportunity to spawn. This late in the season, bright bucks are the best target as even silver-sided females often cut pale this time of year.

Most anglers are ready to focus on steelhead. Despite my early excitement, success seems to be less than impressive. From the north, highway 30 systems as well as the Necanicum are producing fair at best results. **Pro guide Andy Betnar (503-794-4094)** floated the Necanicum River on Saturday, yielding a single fresh winter steelhead and 2 aging coho. Reports from other boaters in the area point to low success rates. He drifted under nearly ideal conditions. Andy also mentioned a major log-jam on the reach below Klotchie Creek where boaters have to portage their driftboats over land to get around the significant navigational hazard. You better bring some beef-cake with you if you plan on successfully floating this river. This is not an uncommon scenario for the Necanicum. The next couple of weeks will tell the real story on how our winter steelhead will perform this season.

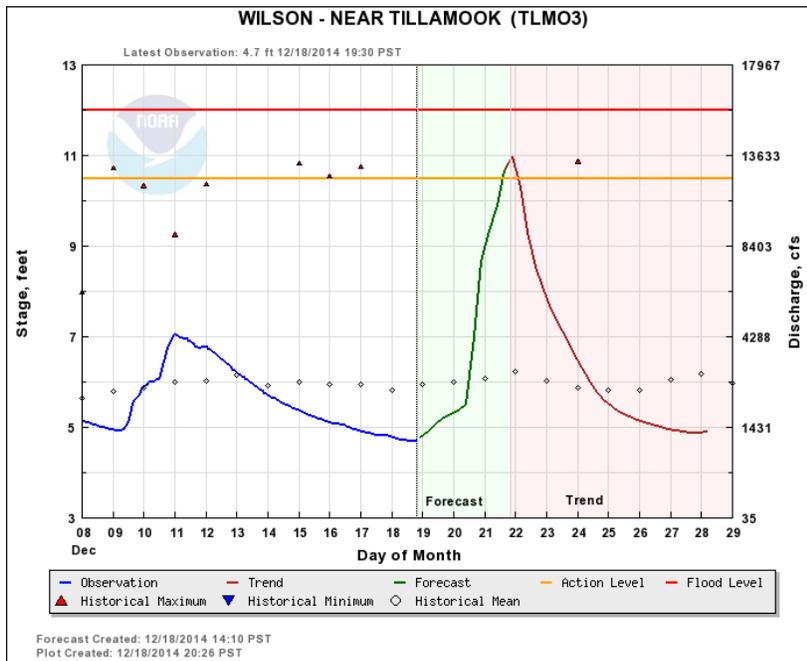
The North Fork Nehalem is yielding similarly lack-luster reports. Although fair numbers of fish have been trapped, they're not biting very aggressively for bank anglers in the hatchery stretch. Hatchery workers reported 160 steelhead in the trap at mid-week but low angler success in the hatchery section of this system. They have been recycling a few steelhead down to Aldervale. Other systems such as the Wilson and Kilchis as well as the Nestucca have yielded sporadic results. As we've mentioned before, these early returning, out of basin stocks seem to continue to underperform. That's largely why I wait until

broodstock season beginning around mid-February. There have been steelhead taken in the Trask watershed. Although there have been hatchery strays here, this watershed is managed for wild production. We also mentioned the correlation between a successful coho return and that of our steelhead returns starting this time of year. That too seems to be an early disappointment but it is in fact, still early. We should know a lot more when the upcoming flood event subsides. Three Rivers remains a viable target in south Tillamook County but bank anglers working the river here have also witnessed minimal success.

The Alsea River has also yielded unimpressive results this season. Former guide Bill Kremers noted very little competition when he floated earlier this week and consequently only caught a couple of coho. Steelhead are oddly absent in this watershed right now.

Offshore conditions are keeping boaters inshore; estuaries to be more exact. Crabbing was fair on last weekend's weak tide series but like the commercial fleet, crabbers have not been impressed with their results. With the commercial fleet being the indicator, catches and weather conditions have been challenging this season.

The Guide's Forecast – Options don't look rosy for weekend anglers. Predicted near-flood conditions may very likely turn into flooding conditions, putting most streams out of reach over the weekend. The Wilson isn't forecasted to return to fishable levels until after Christmas. That's a long ways out. That puts the Trask, Wilson and Nestucca out of business for a while. As for smaller streams, the North Fork Nehalem, Three Rivers, the Necanicum River as well as the 3 Highway 30 systems could all be options by Saturday, more likely Sunday, depending on how much precipitation we actually get. If anglers get to fish by Sunday, plunkers could score results but boaters or bankies working these systems should target the slow water edges, especially if visibility is low, for staging steelhead. They could very well be at your feet when flows are high. As these rivers drop by early next week, better action should be had by all and it will be the peak of the winter return for the early season component of our winter steelhead run. Given early season results however, I wouldn't expect gang-buster action but it should be the best shot at winter run steelhead for the early run component to date however. Here is the Wilson River hydrograph for the foreseeable future:



Crabbing and offshore fishing is not an good option. High tides and rough seas will keep sane people in port. I'm not even going to post the offshore weather report.....

Central & South Coast Reports – Charter boats were able to get out of central Oregon ports over the past weekend which provided on-board clients the opportunity to catch limits of rockfish and good numbers of lingcod. Boats out of southern Oregon ports didn't catch the break which allowed launches further north.

A mighty storm's a-brewin' so coastal rivers will be high to blown out completely over the coming weekend. All this water will bring fresh winter steelhead so prep tackle and hone your skills for the coming week. If you haven't lain in some pink plastic worms to adorn your jig heads, this would be a good time to do so. They're effective enough to be considered cheating by some.

The annual Tenmile Creek steelhead Derby will be a season-long contest rather than just a weekend event. Cash prizes to \$250 will be awarded for "Best of the Creek" entries. For details call 541-759-3312.

The Siuslaw is predicted to rise in the next few days along with other coastal rivers, cresting over the 'action level' at nearly 16 feet mid-day Sunday, December 21st. As it drops and clears, however, winter steelheading should be worthwhile. The trap at Whitaker was set up Wednesday this week.

Crabbing is fair to good for boats at Winchester Bay as it takes a real gully-washer to put down Dungeness in a waterbody this large. Fishing on the Umpqua mainstem will continue to improve along with water conditions in the coming week although this is a catch-and-release fishery for wild winter steelhead. Fishing will be worthwhile in January and peak in February on the South Umpqua where there's a decent chance of landing a hatchery keeper.

Jetty fishing has continued to produce good catches of black rockfish for anglers at Coos Bay. Crabbing has remained good for those doing so from boats but freshets have hampered efforts for dock crabbers. Winter steelhead have been caught recently on the Coos River system so fishing should be worthwhile as water levels improve in the coming week. While it is likely to be crowded, the West Fork Millicoma is a best bet.

Winter steelhead have also been taken on the Coquille River where the South Fork Coquille is expected to produce fish in the coming week.

It has been too rough out of Gold Beach to make ocean launches over the past week. Water level and flow of the Rogue River are forecast to be on the rise through the weekend. While this commonly stalls fishing, once the water starts to drop, this could turn into good news for winter steelheaders. On the lower Rogue, where boat and bank fishers have been taking winters for the past couple of weeks, fishing is expected to be even better once the freshet subsides. Plug-pullers and plunkers will have the edge at that time. Summer steelhead catches have been fair but steady on the middle river although there will be no opportunity to try it as waters rise in the coming weekend. Again, as conditions improve, so will catches. It is hoped that a few winters will be in the mix at that time as historically, an early winter run on the Rogue has been an indicator of an above average run. On the upper river, fishing above Shady Cove Boat Ramp is still the best bet as all manner of bait and lures are allowed. Below that point, where only lures and flies may be used, plug pullers will likely hold an edge.

Chetco levels will be rising along with the other southwest rivers and is predicted to crest around 17,000 cfs. It will drop rapidly, allowing plunkers a shot at fish a couple of days later. Chinook are far upstream where they're spawning so the target will be fresh winter steelhead.

Boats have been fishing the Sixes River recently but there have been no catch reports forthcoming. The late run of Chinook here and on the Elk River will be entering with every freshet although there are fish scattered throughout the systems.

Continued snowfall in the Diamond Lake area has been causing further access problems. While the lake has not yet started freezing over, ice fishing will be the next big adventure here.

If your favorite river is blown out, consider one of the many year 'round trout lakes to stretch you string until the water drops and clears. Garrison Lake at Port Orford has been productive recently with anglers taking trout up to five pounds on lightweight phosphorescent jigs. Now through February are some of the best times to fish Garrison Lake.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Crooked River has remained productive for fly fishers who are satisfied with good numbers of smallish trout.

Those who enjoy the sport of winter trolling call it fishing weather. That would be sunny and mid-20s. So it was over the past weekend for hardy anglers who plied the depths of Crescent Lake. Their reward was lake trout to 25 pounds or better dredged from 150 to 200 foot depths.

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Random Links

Sign up now for January ice fishing workshop:

<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/news/2014/december/121214.asp>

Dec. 14th Sturgeon Sleigh Ride:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hzo03P2kWf8#t=11>

U.S. Navy Creates Robot Tuna:

<http://www.newsweek.com/us-navy-creates-robot-tuna-291662>

GOOD LUCK!