

[The Guide's Forecast - volume 17 issue number 3](#)

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 16<sup>th</sup> – January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015**

### **Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro** – Winter steelhead passage has picked up slightly at Willamette Falls. Options for fishing the lower Willamette include bank fishing for winter steelhead and catch-and-release fishing for sturgeon.

The McKenzie River will blow out with storms this week and is historically slow to recover.

The Santiam system is also due to rise rapidly over the coming weekend as storms pass over western Oregon.

Winter steelheading has been slow to fair on the Clackamas and Sandy although it is still early in the season. Look for numbers and results to improve into February and even March.

**Northwest** – It's been a productive early season for steelheaders but good action is about to wane as this component seeks out spawning grounds to mate. It won't be long and these fish will be exiting in masse and become easy targets. The Highway 30 streams as well as the Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem, Kilchis and Nestucca systems all get early plants of these steelhead.

It will still be several weeks before broodstock steelhead enter in masse but savvy anglers are scoring early season results for these high-quality products. The Wilson and Nestucca are your best options but there will be better days ahead as we forge into spring. None-the-less, action should be good for those that play the rain freshet to their advantage.

Offshore options have not been good ones lately but there was a fair amount of public input on the nearshore rockfish fishery at the Salem level. And how about those barbless hooks on the Willamette still.....mindboggling.....

**Southwest**- When boats were able to get out of Depoe Bay and Newport earlier this week, limits of ling cod were the rule.

Starting this Thursday, Jan. 15, the bag limit of seven rockfish will remain the same but only three may be blue rockfish.

Despite concern heard from some offshore fishers that all red rockfish will be off limits, vermilion rockfish may still be retained in 2015.

Razor clamming is closed from the Oregon/California border north to Heceta Head (north of Florence) due to elevated levels of a naturally-occurring biotoxin.

Crabbing has been slow in Winchester Bay, Steelheading has been slow to fair in the mainstem, North and South Umpqua rivers.

Rain this week will do nothing to improve the already-slow crabbing at Coos Bay. Winter steelhead have been entering the Coos River system with best fishing in the tributaries.

The Coquille River system has been providing decent numbers of winter steelhead. Prospects remain good as the river recovers from storms due over the coming weekend.

Steelheading has been best on the lower Rogue although fish are distributed through the middle river and to the upper stretches. Winter steelheading is expected to have benefitted from freshets in the week to come with better numbers of fish moving upstream as a result.

Boats launching out of the Port of Brookings have experienced excellent results for ling cod and good catches of rockfish. Chetco steelheading has been fair this week. The river will be unfishable over the coming weekend but is expected to be good in a week or so.

Diamond Lake is expected to produce well as soon as it freezes over, allowing for anglers to do some ice fishing.

**Eastern** – Trout fishing has been decent for fly anglers on the lower Deschutes. A few summer steelhead are also being taken.

Lake Billy Chinook is producing kokanee.

**SW Washington**- Not much action for steelhead on the Cowlitz but some steelhead and an occasional coho still coming into this system. Most are waiting for better opportunity come spring.

The Washougal, Kalama and Lewis largely have early returning fish in them, making them poor table fare when you do come across one or more.

Good razor clam options up on the Long Beach Peninsula this weekend and early next week. Go to <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/shellfish/razorclams/current.html> to access the consumptive opportunities if that's what floats your boat.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – Still no reports with so few options.

**The Guide's Forecast** – nope.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – While data readings at Willamette Falls indicate the level dropping and the water clearing, this is due to change. Keep in mind that, due to the mass of water in the Willamette, change will take place more slowly than in tributaries and other valley rivers, as will recovery. About 500 winter steelhead have been counted at the Falls with daily numbers are showing some improvement. Steelheading has been slow but steady at Meldrum Bar and the Blacktop (located just downriver from the mouth of the Clackamas). The ramp at Milwaukie is open for boats to launch although the dock is not yet in place. There are 14 parking places for rigs with boat trailers.

The gradual drop in water level that has been occurring on the McKenzie River will reverse with rain in the next several days.

The Santiam system has been gradually dropping over the past week. There have been too few winter steelhead over Willamette Falls to have created a fishery here as yet.

For those who keep track of such events, the Portland Sportsman Show will take place February 4,5,6,7 & 8. The Central Oregon Sportsman Show in Redmond is March 5,6,7 & 8 while the Idaho Sportsman Show in Boise will run March 5,6,7 & 8.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Catch-and-release fishing for sturgeon has been good and will remain so even when waters of the lower Willamette are stained from muddy upriver flows. According to **Robert Campbell at Fisherman's Marine in Oregon City (503-557-5600)**, Anchovies are still the top bait although we've seen some interest in squid and sand shrimp over the past week." As always, following a storm, keep an eye upriver and be prepared to cut an anchor rope of a deadhead or log contacts it as this could lead to pulling the boat underwater without time to pull the anchor conventionally. For those targeting steelhead from the bank, a #2 Spin 'N' Glo in pink pearl or Tequila Sunrise can be effective, even when the water is a little off-color. The addition of a dime-sized bait of good-quality roe can turn the trick. Just keep in mind that in higher flows, winter steelhead will be passing within feet of the bank as they're bound for the Clack. Spring Chinook will also fall for such an offering and the odds of a hookup are improving every week.

Winter trout fishing has been slow and blowout conditions won't improve prospects. Keep in mind that this is a system slower to recover from high water conditions than most other valley rivers.

As with other valley rivers, the Santiam system is due to receive a wallop from storms this weekend. Levels and flows will increase through Sunday and Monday, taking most of the week to come to recover. While there will be additional wild winter steelhead in the North Santiam as a result of this freshet, the numbers will remain too low to target with any degree of optimism.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – Some steelheaders were heard to complain that water levels on the Clackamas had fallen to levels too low this week for decent fishing. Those complaints will be silenced over the next couple of days as storms bearing heavy rainfall are due to hit the valley.

Water is low and clear on the Sandy at this writing the morning of Thursday, January 15th. The coming rainfall is expected to help with water level and flow although, as always with the Sandy, the color is subject to roiling when freezing temperatures rise above the 4,000 foot level. Steelheading has been slow to fair but with the broodstock program in place here for many years, better numbers are yet to come. Action will improve into February.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Steelheaders can write the Clackamas off their list this weekend as the water level is forecast to approach flood stage overnight on Sunday, January 18th. A rapid recovery is predicted, however, with plunking a possibility as early as Tuesday or Wednesday in the coming week and the trend for low water to once again challenge winter anglers the week following. The coming freshet is sure to bring fresh steelhead into the system although the peak of the run is yet to arrive. When the river allows, try the drift from Barton to Carver to find good holding water. Incidentally, bobber and jigs have accounted for a high percentage of winter steelhead landed this season. Try tipping a jig head with a four-inch pink plastic worm. "Steelhead are being caught but I would say it's only fair," said **Robert Campbell at Fisherman's Marine in Oregon City (503-557-5600)** who went on to add, "There have been some fish taken that were Eagle Creek stock and even Eagle Creek was fishing OK until it went low and clear."

"Sandy River has been the bright spot, " according to **Robert**. "Catches have been running about half and half [hatchery to wild, Ed.] but it has been fishing better than the Clackamas. There have been times, though, the wind has been horrific." The impact of passing storms is expected to have on Sandy River will entail rising levels through Sunday, then a gradual moderation in depth and flow. As always, water clarity depends on the freezing level to the greatest degree. Fish are being caught from Lewis and Clark upriver to Cedar Creek though the better part of the season is yet to come. Be aware that a large

percentage of the winters available now are wild and if caught, should be released as quickly and gently as possible. Jigs have been effective recently with the nightmare a popular pattern.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – following last week's rain freshet, steelheaders were reporting excellent catches along many coastal systems. Late last week, smaller rivers such as the Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem were producing limits for savvy anglers. **Pro Guide Andy Betnar (503-791-4094)** reported limits for him and his customers floating the upper reach of the river (Necanicum). The fish were cookie cutter 5 - 7 pound fish, in which most were still in good condition as spawning season nears. Andy did mention however that they did release a few fish due to skin color. The group was drifting small clusters of eggs.

North Fork Nehalem anglers also had a productive week below the hatchery. Bank anglers and those that floated the challenging stretch below the hatchery were rewarded with good fishing. Most recently however, flows have dropped and smaller systems have cleared, making for challenging conditions for district anglers. The hatchery did start recycling steelhead to Coffenbury and Vernonia Lakes and likely back downstream where NFN anglers have another crack at them. The NFN is quite clear now.

Larger systems, such as the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers also produced good catches as flows dropped. When temperatures moderated and the east wind subsided, conditions were pleasant and so was the catching. Although it wasn't one of those slam dunk weeks on the bigger systems, a strong effort produced measurable results for many. There are some nice sized fish present too.

The Wilson likely produced the better catches with the Nestucca and Trask viable options as well. In the dropping flows, the mainstem Nehalem also came online with fair catches reported there for the few that know how to effectively fish it. Hardware, particularly spoons, can produce fairly good results for these more aggressive wild fish. It's typically late January before this system starts to produce more consistent results. With the run looking so good this year, I think we're in for good action if water conditions cooperate, which is a tall ask for an extended period of time over the course of the season.

Beads continue to be all the rage, especially in dropping flows. Most Steelheaders know to dampen down their presentations in clearing waters. Anglers have been using variations of pinks and oranges to entice strikes. It's equally important to peg your bead about 3" above your hook for reasons I haven't quite understood just yet. Also important; use as light of lead as you can so your offering skips downstream at about the same pace as the river flows.

The ocean hasn't been an option lately. Big swells, big wind waves. It looks like bottomfish will have another safe week ahead as well. There are new regulations for bag limits for specific species of rockfish. You can find details here: [http://www.dfw.state.or.us/MRP/finfish/groundfish\\_sport/index.asp](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/MRP/finfish/groundfish_sport/index.asp).

Crabbing has been challenging too and the upcoming tide series won't change that this weekend. Good thing it's not Super Bowl Weekend.

A strong minus tide series may make Tillamook Bay sturgeon fishing an option but nobody does it now that it's all catch and release. Clamming would be a good option in the surf if the surf would just lie down. Bay clamming may be a better option.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Action this week will be dependent on the forecasted rain due by the weekend. If the prediction comes true, we could see a nice bump in water levels, which would give all north coast systems another small surge of steelhead. The early season component will largely be over however so anglers wishing to focus on broodstock streams will look to the Wilson and Nestucca systems to produce the best results. Early run fish will make a break for smaller tributaries in the lower reaches of these

watersheds and hold in the rivers for just another few weeks. Here's our river by river breakdown of options this week.

Highway 30 streams (Klaskanine, Big Creek, Gnat Creek)- The fresh component of steelhead is largely over on these systems. There may be a rare fresh one coming in but you should count on more spent fish than fresh ones at this point. Down-streamers will start coming in hoards in another week or two.

Necanicum River- Like the Highway 30 systems, this fishery is largely over. Most steelhead will be focused on spawning so you'll see the bite taper a bit. It won't be long however until anglers can expect double digit days for spawned out fish. Bait becomes a great option as the salmon spawn slows. There are still a few coho around however.

North Fork Nehalem – Action has definitely slowed this week and it won't get any better for fresh fish. The run is largely over here but you still stand a chance, albeit rare, to get a fresh steelhead here. This system did have a great run this year but anglers should look elsewhere for a higher grade of fish this weekend. It may however, be the better option if we get the rainfall that is currently predicted.

Mainstem Nehalem – Fish are starting to run on this river even though we're weeks away from a peak. It's another indication that we're in for a good run this year. Depending on the rainfall, this river could go back out again but keep it in your back pocket when all the other systems are running low and clear.

Kilchis River- Largely over for early run steelhead, this system will become a great wild fish fishery when water levels allow. This river has very few hatchery fish available during the run that is already past peak.

Wilson River – Likely the best option for fresh fish this weekend. It looks like we'll see an equally good run on the Wilson as we head farther into February. With a slow rise in the forecast, anglers could see a good spurt of action on the beginning of the slow rise. If it goes up as predicted, it's not expected to go too high and may be in fishable shape by early next week. This is a great river system to perfect bead fishing; you should look at this technique as it's producing well for those that have mastered it already.

Trask River – Most anglers know that this river system is managed for wild fish but you'll find an occasional hatchery fish in the system for your consumptive use. If the river gets to its predicted maximum, consider doing the upper reach from Stone's Camp to the Peninsula drift. It's a great (and productive float) in higher flows.

Three Rivers/Nestucca system – Broodstock fish are beginning to show in better numbers on the mainstem. These fish are planted throughout the system but the reach from 6<sup>th</sup> Bridge to Three Rivers will produce the best results. Early season, Three Rivers destined steelhead are largely spawning about now. Those will turn into aggressive down-runners in just a few weeks.

This weekend is not a good option for offshore fishing or crabbing. Extreme tides will limit production for offshore and nearshore species.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – When boats were able to get out of Depoe Bay and Newport earlier this week, limits of ling cod were the rule with a handful of rockfish to sweeten the catch.

From a January 9<sup>th</sup> bulletin, "Starting this Thursday, Jan. 15, the bag limit of seven rockfish will remain the same. However, of those seven rockfish, only three may be blue rockfish. ODFW's original recommendation to the Commission was that only one blue rockfish would be retained. But according to Patrick Mirick, ODFW's assistant groundfish project leader, public input at the meeting (most of which was by charter boat operators and letters written to the Commission), convinced the commission to

increase the blue rockfish take from one to three.”

In addition, starting today, Jan. 15, the retention of copper rockfish, quillback rockfish and China rockfish will be prohibited along with the already-forbidden canary and yelloweye rockfish. The fine for any of these is guaranteed to ruin any angler's day. *However*, thanks to a recovery of ocean stocks, the retention of canary rockfish will be allowed in March of this year for the first time since 2004 according to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission. A date when this will occur has not yet been divulged.

Despite concern heard from some offshore fishers that all red rockfish will be off limits, vermilion rockfish may still be retained in 2015.

Anglers should make note that the difference between blue and black rockfish is slight. The new regulations should be more than enough motivation for offshore anglers to learn the distinctions to be certain they can identify different species. One such resource is listed in the **Random Links**, below.

With estuaries recovered from the last round of storms, crabbing inside bays and in the ocean just outside has been improving. Ol' Mom Nature won't let that situation endure for long though, as another round of fronts will bear down on the coast over the next several days. With storms approaching, launches from Oregon ports for offshore fishing will not be an option until late in the coming week.

Razor clams remain closed from the Oregon/California border north to Heceta Head (north of Florence) due to elevated levels of domoic acid. The closure includes razor clams on all beaches, rocks, jetties, and at the entrance to bays in this section of the Oregon Coast. Opportunities to collect razor clams are still available along Oregon beaches north of Heceta Head. Mussels are open along the entire Oregon coast.

Crabbing has been slow in Winchester Bay and the freshet due in the next few days will do nothing to improve the outlook. While the bulk of winter steelhead hooked on the mainstem Umpqua are inevitably wild, a few hatchery fish were hooked here over the past week. Winter steelhead numbers are building on the North Umpqua as well but this is also primarily a catch-and-release fishery as the North receives wild fish almost exclusively. While the run won't peak until February and March, hatchery steelhead are already available on the South Umpqua where the smart money bets on a keeper for dinner.

Coos Bay crabbing has been slow as has rock fishing from the jetty. It won't get better with the next round of storms due over the coming weekend. Winter steelhead have been entering the Coos system over the past few weeks with the West Fork Millicoma River is running low and clear but the East Fork Millicoma and South Fork Coos rivers holding the most promise. This will change starting today as rain pushes the rivers out of shape.

Winter steelheading has been fair to good on the Coquille system over the past week. The Powers Fork of the Coquille River receives good numbers of hatchery smolts, some of which will be returning as adults in the coming weeks. It's a good bet as the rivers recover.

Whether accurate or not, local wisdom holds that a late run of winter steelhead means nothing but an early run is an indicator of great season ahead. While winter steelhead were drawn into the entire length of the Rogue River by precipitation in late December, the lower river has been most productive by far with both bank and boat anglers scoring. Side drifters and plug pullers have been picking up the better numbers, however. Even when water levels dropped to low, steelheading remained decent around Agness. See **Random Links**, below, for a live cam where anglers can check water conditions on the lower Rogue. The middle river was producing fair numbers below the mouth of the Applegate River earlier this week with plugs drawing the most strikes. Precipitation starting today should improve water temps on the upper river and, as conditions improve, so will the steelhead bite. Cole Rivers hatchery is already seeing above-average numbers of winter steelhead for this time of year. It's unfortunate that off-

color water from Lost Creek Reservoir had just started to clear this week and now another round of rain storms will muddy up the water once again.

One guide boat on the Chetco took clients across the bar after successfully drifting the lower river. This put them in a rather exclusive group having caught winter steelhead, ling cod and rockfish all in the same day. With ling cod moving into shallow water to spawn, they are becoming more aggressive, readily biting a mix of jigs, leadfish, herring, shrimp flies and kelp greenling. The hot bite has been near Chetco Point over the past few days for lings running 10 to 18 pounds and rockfish to eight pounds although Bird Island to Mack Arch has also been productive. The bottom fish bite got hot in the first week of January and shows no sign of slowing

Only light rain has been falling in southwest Oregon, keeping the Elk and Sixes below optimum levels. That should change in the next few days. Steelheading has been fair to good when there has been decent water in these systems.

Diamond Lake started to freeze in the first week of January but Oregon rain fell on the surface, turning it to mush. When the surface freezes hard enough to create a safe fishing surface, ice fishers can use Power Bait or worms to try for an eight-fish limit, one of the more generous in Oregon.

Other opportunities to catch trout, a pastime made more appealing when southwest rivers are out of shape, may be had at Garrison Lake, Lake Selmac, Expo Pond, Willow Lake or Lost Creek Reservoir.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – Trout fishing has been fair to good on the lower Deschutes this week. Look for Blue-Winged-Olives to hatch anytime rain starts to fall. Fly fishers have had steelhead grab their offerings with one angler landing (and releasing) a large native on Tuesday this week.

Limits of kokanee have been taken this week at Lake Billy Chinook by trollers using flashers and hoochies. The kokes, averaging 10 inches, are quite shallow at this time of year.

Cold weather trolling enthusiasts at Crescent Lake have been rewarded with several mackinaws up to 20 pounds for a day's effort this week.

A few have tried off-season trolling for kokanee at Green Peter with nothing to show for their efforts. The water level is low (923 feet) so launches are only possible with small boats.

### **Reader Emails: The Inbox**

Reader **Sapo** sent us this report on Wednesday this week, "I went to the Deschutes in 10-degree weather a week and a half ago, and the trout fishing is slow to fair, the steelhead fishing is about the same. We managed to hook up with a monster steelhead and a couple trout. Nymphs have been unproductive except for whitefish, swinging wooly buggers is what has been working lately."

We don't have an Email addy for you, Sapo, so please allow us to thank you here. Your east side (or any other) report is sincerely appreciated!

### **Write to the TGF staff:**

Bob Rees: [brees@pacifier.com](mailto:brees@pacifier.com)

Michael Teague: [TGFMichael@gmail.com](mailto:TGFMichael@gmail.com)

Doug Rees: [doug@TheGuidesForecast.com](mailto:doug@TheGuidesForecast.com)

**Random Links**

Lower Rogue River Cam: [http://web.thedailycourier.com/web\\_cam/](http://web.thedailycourier.com/web_cam/)

Big steelhead on the South Umpqua:

<http://www.mailtribune.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20110429/LIFE/104290305/-1/OREGONOUTDOORS>

Detailed Rockfish Identification Booklet in PDF:

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

**GOOD LUCK!**