

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 16th – December 22nd, 2005**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Anglers in pursuit of sturgeon will find that conditions haven't improved much from recent weeks. Cold water temperatures have fish off the bite and wind isn't helping the effort as well. Although success remains the best in the gorge, effort is spreading out from Portland to Longview as well. Willamette sturgeon anglers are finding fair shaker action, despite the cold water conditions.

Counts at Willamette Falls have not been updated since the ladder was closed for repairs. With flows low and water temps below the 40-degree mark, there's little reason to believe the numbers of winter steelhead rushing upstream have increased dramatically.

Clackamas anglers report seeing a few winter steelhead in the system but catches are rare. It's still too early for the Sandy winter steelhead run. Both rivers would benefit from rainfall. Between the two, the Sandy holds more promise but hit the Clackamas if the East winds kick up again as forecasted. **Pro guide Jack Glass (503-666-5370)** writes, "Employ low water techniques such as bobber and jigs and target the deeper, slower water as holding fish will concentrate here."

Anglers will find eight-to-10 inch rainbows along with some recently-planted broodstock fish in Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake, both of which are located off Mission Street in Salem. Huddleston Pond in Willamina will receive rainbows in the 16-inch range next week.

Mid Columbia/Deschutes River - Deschutes action is winding down as weather conditions become unbearable. The John Day Pool continues to put out catches of steelhead, bound both for the upper Columbia tributaries and the John Day itself. The best fishing is in the John Day itself with larger fish available in the lower stretches. Fly anglers and bobber and jig fishermen are doing great in the upper stretches as low, clear water calls for a more stealthy approach. Multiple fish days are possible if anglers find a stretch of river that is holding fish.

North Coast - Persistent dry weather has north coast anglers anxious for rain. A good tide series last week has salmon and steelhead staging in tidewater awaiting the next opportunity to migrate upstream. Action in the lower Wilson is slow as low, clear water has turned fish timid.

Pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808) reports, "Nestucca and Three Rivers anglers are seeing light steelhead action as well." Anglers should consider waiting out the cold mornings, not just for their own safety but because fish seem to be more aggressive when air temperatures warm in the late morning.

Sturgeon anglers were out in good numbers in the west channel of Tillamook Bay over the weekend stated **pro guide Bob Rees (503-812-9036)**. Action was fair but a larger percentage of the catch was sub-legal. Only a few keepers were retained. Sand shrimp is the best bait to use as mud shrimp will be in short supply this year.

Although limits are not all that common, the large size of the crabs coming into north coast estuaries is impressive. Netarts and Tillamook Bays produced varied results over the weekend. Overall, the catch was worth the effort.

Clammers will have ample opportunity through the weekend although the best days to clam on are at the beginning of the minus tide series (December 13 – 15).

Mid-Coast - An early-season showing of winter steelhead at the Alsea hatchery bodes well for the run which has only just begun reports **pro guide Bill Kremers (541 754 6411)**. According to angler's reports, more coho are being hooked than steelhead.

Although the quotas for the wild coho fisheries at Siltcoos and Tahkenitch lakes are far from filled, ODF&W will still close the consumptive fishery here on December 15th.

Crabbing is fair at Newport, better out of Waldport. The ocean crabbing season for both commercial and recreational crabbers will open on December 31st, 2005, following the most recent round of crab quality testing.

South Coast - Crabbing is holding up at Winchester Bay but steelheading is falling off in the mainstem Umpqua River as the water clears and cools. Steelheading on the North Fork Umpqua has slowed. The South Fork opened December 1st.

The Coos and Coquille Rivers are producing a few winter steelies but action has tapered off with rivers running low and clear. South coast streams will take off with the next round of precipitation.

The Elk and Sixes Rivers are usually in full swing by this time however, low flows have many anglers changing plans. Little change in river levels is forecast, leaving anglers anxious for the next wet cycle to improve conditions.

Interest in coho and summers on the middle and upper Rogue is fading with fresh winter steelhead entering the lower river. Plunkers using Spin 'n' Glos are seeing the action slow recently, however.

Effective Jan. 1, rainbow trout over 16 inches are considered steelhead when caught in streams and must be entered on a tag if harvested.

Southwest Washington- Cowlitz River steelheading is underway with boat anglers taking the lion's share of the catch. Boat anglers tallied one steelhead for every other boat in last weeks count with the bulk of the catch coming from the Blue Creek area.

The coho fishery at Cowlitz Falls Reservoir has slowed with very little catch reported.

Eastern - Cold, clear weather has Eastern Oregon fisheries on hold. Although steelhead are still being taken, catch rates have dropped from previous weeks. A change in the weather pattern will drastically improve catch and effort but that may still be many days away.

Soapbox Update - Holiday Cheer

For Immediate Release Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2004

ODFW stocks Oregon Food Bank with salmon fillets

CLACKAMAS - A special holiday dinner with Oregon salmon as the centerpiece will be a reality for many people needing assistance from the Oregon Food Bank thanks to donations by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

ODFW has donated the equivalent of 146,000 servings of salmon to the Oregon Food Bank this fall. The salmon is delivered as frozen fillets ready for cooking.

The Oregon Food Bank will distribute the fillets to every county in Oregon through a statewide

network of 20 regional food banks and hundreds of hunger-relief agencies. The relief agencies will give the fillets to people in need.

Since 2001, ODFW has donated 301,000 pounds of salmon to the Oregon Food Bank, which equates to about 1.2 million 4-ounce servings of fish. The donated chinook salmon, coho salmon and steelhead are hatchery-reared fish that have returned to Oregon's hatcheries from the ocean to complete their life cycle. In the past several years, ODFW has had many more fish return than necessary to produce the next generation of hatchery fish.

The fish donated are processed in accordance with federal food handling guidelines by American/Canadian Fisheries, Inc., a company based in Bellingham, Washington.

American/Canadian provides all the staff and equipment at no charge to ODFW and the food bank in exchange for the opportunity to market by-products of the filleting process in international markets.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Effort in the Columbia River gorge continues to decline due to mediocre fishing results and poor weather conditions. The persistent east wind has many anglers wondering what would draw them to such a place. Catch rates indicate there really isn't much of a reason to target sturgeon here although the only boat checked here over the weekend had one keeper and 12 shakers. Bank angling effort has also dropped but bank fishers tallied 4 legals for 66 rods. The Portland to Longview stretch is about on par when comparing to previous years data. A single keeper was taken during the 34 boat creel survey. 98 shakers accompanied the catch. Smelt and shrimp remain the best bait.

Steelhead anglers working the John Day area found favorable results this week as well. Although catch rates have dropped off from the previous week, anglers still averaged close to 1 fish for every boat and 1 steelhead per 3 bank rods. Most of the effort is taking place in the mainstem John Day itself. Low, clear water conditions have fly anglers at their best. Ample opportunities exist for the savvy angler and those not willing to work as hard, bobber and jigs are producing nicely as well. Anglers working the lower stretches find themselves more likely to intercept a larger "B" run steelhead that may be bound for an Idaho river. Although not the size of the "B" run fish, steelhead are more plentiful in the upper stretches of the John Day for those working the deeper pockets on a stealthy approach.

Although commercial pots won't fish until 2 days prior to the 12/31 opener, recreational crabbers are not putting in much effort these days. The crabbing is likely holding up but a wicked east wind is keeping many crabbers at bay. Folks working the water downstream of Hammond should score results- particularly if you crab away from your competition. It's best to check weather conditions before making a trip down there.

Clamming was good on this last tide series. Limits were common from the south jetty at the mouth of the Columbia River to the mouth of the Necanicum River near Seaside. Clammers need to be aware that female crab are spawning on the beach this time of year and their breathing holes look a LOT like clam holes. Be careful not to injure these crustaceans as they are the future of our fishery!

The Guide's Forecast – It's best not to have high expectations if you are sturgeon fishing on the Columbia River. Catch rates continue to drop for keepers although your best chance remains in the Columbia River Gorge. Smelt will be the stand-by bait but anglers wishing to up their chances should use shrimp coupled with smelt. Some oversized fish and sub-legals remain available so action is likely. Good shaker action is also present for anglers in the Portland to Longview stretch. It wasn't too many years ago when this time of year, we were just a few weeks away from great catches in this part of the river. Sturgeon used to stage here in

anticipation of a smelt run but this years forecast isn't looking promising. Sturgeon do not seem to be staging here so keepers will be hard to come by in this section.

Steelheaders in the John Day stretch will again enjoy some good opportunity although catch rates are likely to drop. Cold weather will keep biters from becoming aggressive until air and water temperatures draw closer to each other. Hardware is an option but many anglers choose to target steelhead with bobbers and jigs or flyfishing for them.

Crabbers will have a more favorable tide this week on the lower Columbia. Crab should also be filling out better although soft-shelled crab was not a big issue this fall. Be aware that the east wind is a frequent visitor to the lower Columbia this time of year. It's best to check weather conditions before departure because in these conditions, proper gear is a must.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – According to the latest available data as of December 13th, fewer than 150 winter steelhead have crossed at Willamette Falls.

Willamette sturgeon fishing is nearly at a standstill.

The Guide's Forecast – The bank anglers fishing at Meldrum Bar are likely to remain idle. Most of the regulars are more likely to remain at home where it's warm. Sturgeon fishing won't improve until there's more water in the river and the temperature of that water is higher and it has more color. None of those things will occur until the next decent rainfall.

There are a few fish around as **Pro Guide Jack Glass (503-666-5370)** discovered earlier this week, "I fished Willamette on Sunday my first steelhead trip and Doug Hall of Tigard caught our first winter steelhead of the season Dec, 11."

The North Santiam is low and clear with Detroit Reservoir at the headwaters also at its lowest seasonal level. That leaves only rainfall or snowmelt to contribute to the flows and we know now much of either of those things we've been getting.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Clackamas anglers report seeing a few winter steelhead in the system but catches are rare.

It's still too early for the Sandy winter steelhead run to turn on as the transition to broodstock means the run timing will be that of native fish.

Pro Guide Jack Glass (503-666-5370) adds this, "Sandy river is low and clear 9.0. There are a few fish around but there's very light effort for them. Bobber and jig fishing is a good bet as is casting spinner to cover a lot of water. Bring on some rain! No wind here on Monday or Tuesday."

Both rivers would benefit from rainfall. Between the two, the Sandy holds more promise for early runners but hit the Clackamas if the East winds kick up again as forecasted. Employ low water techniques such as bobber and jigs and target the deeper, slower water as holding fish will concentrate here.

North Coast District Fishing Report – Salmon fishers found little reward over the week as dry, cool weather persisted. The good tide series may have moved some Chinook into tidewater and steelhead were likely migrants too. Pressure was light and Tillamook Bay had more sturgeon

anglers than salmon last weekend. One boat that I had talked to was marking fish pretty regularly in the Ghost Hole but they drew no action. Although salmon fishing is not quite over yet, precipitation will draw salmon into the waters that most anglers are comfortable fishing in while pursuing the season's last shot. The question is, when will that rain come?

Sturgeon was the main focus on Tillamook Bay last week. About 15 boats were out in pursuit of the 'gators on Sunday. We fished the south (some call it west) channel but didn't see the action we had heard about from the previous days. We did however draw about 5 good bites that didn't materialize. Then we must have got the hang of it as we caught the next 3 fish- 1 keeper at 46" and 2 shakers. We moved a little further down the bay and got one more shaker. Crab were not an issue as is the case when there are plenty of sturgeon around. The two don't play well together so if you are not getting robbed by crab, you stand a good chance to find sturgeon if your patience holds out. We were most successful when we moved away from other boats. Competition doesn't bode well for sturgeon fishing.

Crabbing remains fair in the Tillamook district. On Netarts Bay, crabbers indicated limits are not easy to come by but the size of the keepers more than makes up for the limited numbers. On Tillamook, effort has been light but the extreme tides and the fact high tide has been earlier in the morning has kept crabbers from putting in a full effort. Nehalem Bay remains fair at best for keepers. The ocean remains closed to sport crabbers- we have to wait until the commercial interests get a fair shot at them as well.

Clamming was quite productive at mid-week. Optimum tides and a friendly surf allowed good access to clam beds but we still had to work for a limit if digging in the surf. Dry digging was productive too however, you just have to know what to look for. We clammed close to Gearhart but diggers working the beaches north to the south jetty of the Columbia River also took limits of clams. Each day is different as clams were rumored not to be showing quite as well by Thursday. Clamming is always better on the beginning part of the minus tide series and you don't even need a minus tide to clam! I try and hit the days before the peak minus low tide day. On this series, that was Thursday the 15th. There are spawning crab in the surf as well. They are all females so diggers should be aware of what they are digging as a crab "show" looks very similar to a clam "show".

The Guide's Forecast – Softer tides will cause a decline in fish mobility. This signals a downturn in saltwater influenced fisheries. Sturgeon fishing in Tillamook Bay will likely slow this week and it's too bad the bottom fishing is closed as soft tides will make for favorable bottom fishing.

Salmon fishers may find some success in the tidewater sections of the Wilson and Kilchis Rivers but effort (and success) will likely remain low. No sign of measurable precipitation this week so river salmon and steelhead fisheries will remain idle for at least another week. Motivated anglers should try their hand at tidewater fishing for both salmon and steelhead. Bobbers and bait or jigs should work well for either. Both species should inhabit the same holes in the low, clear flows. The faster flows at the heads of holes should also hold salmon and steelhead. These types of situations will be one of the rare times where you will see both species utilizing the same types of water. There should be plenty of room to experiment as most anglers aren't motivated to be innovative.

Crabbers should find good success on most coastal estuaries this week. The weaker tides will allow crabbers to place pots in deeper, less crabbed areas. In conditions like this, I don't hesitate to put gear as close to the ocean as legal. It can pay big dividends as ocean pressure is non-existent until the 12/31 opener. Tillamook, Netarts and the lower Columbia are the best options.

Central & South Coast Reports – Sometimes it's easy writing a fishing report. Find out where they're catching them, write it down. Not so when extended low temperatures are coupled with an unseasonable lack of precipitation.

Steelheading is supposed to be underway in many rivers. Instead, runs are stalled at many locations otherwise productive given normal seasonal flows and color.. Rivers are low, clear and cold with no rain in sight to turn around this situation. This is a one-two, well, three punch for anglers hoping to score winter chrome.

Proper technique coupled with a little insight as to the behavior of this species will tip the odds, if only a little, in favor of the angler.

The lower rivers near tidewater will be most productive. Some rivers (most notably the Siuslaw) may offer up late-run chinook. Late-season salmon can be tempted with bobber and bait in tidewater, but pass on late-season hens even if they appear bright. Bucks are far more likely to cut well for table fare. The Wilson closes for chinook on New Years Eve.

For steelhead, sneak up on 'em. Use long leaders and small baits or lures. This is a great time to fish a jig tipped with a tiny bit of sand shrimp tail beneath a float. Concentrate efforts mid-day when the air and water temperatures are similar. Travel will be safer as well.

When the rain does come as it surely will, these fish will be more than ready to rocket upstream.

An early-season showing of winter steelhead at the Alsea hatchery bodes well for the run which has only just started. According to angler's reports, more coho were being hooked than steelhead recently with low, clear water stalling fishing almost entirely this week.

Pro guide Bill Kremers (541-754-6411) shares his recent experiences: "As you might expect the Alsea River is low and clear and getting a little lower every day. We did manage to make drift on Monday where we caught two coho, one chinook jack, one steelhead and a big cutthroat. I will be off the river until it rains, so it looks like crabbing in Waldport is your best bet for the coming week. Here are a couple of hints for low water steelhead fishing. First I like to divers and dime salmon size eggs. For a leader I use 10 or 12 lb fluocarbon, a 2/0 hook and I add a size 12 or 14 spin-N-glo to help keep the eggs off the bottom and attract a steelhead. Then when it comes to using plugs in the slow deep holes, trying switching to a T-4 flatfish - cooper on the bright days and green or blue pirates during low light. Don't forget to add you favorite scent. Let hope we get some rain soon."

Despite unfilled quotas for the wild coho fisheries at Siltcoos and Tahkenitch lakes, anglers will not get an extension on the fishery as rumored earlier. It will definitely close December 15th in light of concern that low catches may indicate a declining run.

Steelheading is fair in the mainstem Umpqua River with the water clear and cold. Fish are being taken from Scottsburg upstream. Steelheading and coho action is fair on the North Fork with the better catches coming around Idleyd. The South Fork Umpqua opened December 1st and winter steelhead are now available up to Stanton Park.

The Coos and Coquille Rivers are producing a few winter steelies but action has tapered off with rivers running low and clear. South coast streams will take off with the next round of precipitation.

While the Elk and Sixes Rivers are usually in full swing by this time, low flows have many anglers changing plans. Little change in river levels is forecast, leaving anglers anxious for the next wet

cycle to improve conditions.

Angling action for coho and summers on the middle and upper Rogue as persistent chilly weather has caused water temperatures to dip as well. Winter steelhead continue to enter the lower river but those lower water temps combined with low levels and high visibility have had a negative impact on the catch rate. Plunkers using Spin 'n' Glos are intercepting a few metalheads at the inside turns of gravel bars but conditions aren't getting better and no relief is in sight.

Effective Jan. 1, rainbow trout over 16 inches are considered steelhead in the Southwest Zone when caught in streams and must be entered on a tag if harvested. Attempted research online to determine if this rule will be in effect in the Northwest Zone as well was foiled as the 2006 regulations are temporarily unavailable. When we know, you'll know.

Dungeness crab are prime now with specimens generally large, hard and full of meat. A productive trip will easily pay for itself compared to the cost of purchasing these delectable crustaceans by the dozen at market price.

Crabbing is rewarding out of Netarts and Newport, better out of Waldport and at Winchester Bay. The ocean crabbing season for both commercial and recreational crabbers will open on December 31st, 2005, following the most recent round of crab quality testing.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Hardy anglers traveling cautiously are catching fish in the frigid East. Upon arrival, another challenge has arisen, however: finding water that's more liquid than solid.

Fly anglers on the Deschutes will fare better on days when the river is stable, that is, neither rising *nor* falling. Keep an eye on the sky, fish the warmer hours of the day and stick with Blue-Winged olives or Midges, the latter in both dry and pupae patterns. Steelhead are being taken with some regularity as there's almost no pressure on the lower river. With snow on the ground and a bitter chill in the air, don't expect a lot of company.

Crooked River, Fall River and the Metolius are giving up trout to long rodders flinging BWOs, midges and caddis nymphs. Hand warmers are a must.

SW Washington - Through mid-December, **winter steelhead** fishing was generally slow, although anglers were starting to see some action in some areas. At Blue Creek on the Cowlitz River, 30 boat anglers caught 14 winter-run steelhead in five days of fishing, Dec. 5-9. "That's not bad, but it's still a little early," said Joe Hymer, WDFW fish biologist. "Usually the first big bump is right around the holidays." Or the bite could begin sooner if the area gets some rain, said Hymer, noting that most rivers in the area - except the Cowlitz and the Lewis - have been running low and clear. "Fishing should perk up once we get a decent rain," he said. Hymer noted that Grays River is scheduled to open for hatchery steelhead fishing Dec. 15 from the Highway 4 Bridge to the South Fork and from mouth of the West Fork to the intake/footbridge of the Grays River Salmon Hatchery. The North Fork of the Lewis River will open Dec. 16 from Colvin Creek to the overhead power lines below Merwin Dam. So how is the winter steelhead season shaping up at this point? "The jury's still out," said Hymer, noting that early returns in November were a "mixed bag." More fish returned to the North Fork of the Lewis and Elochoman rivers than a year ago, but numbers are down in the Cowlitz, Kalama and Washougal, he said. "Again, we'll have a better idea once we get a decent rain."

Sturgeon anglers, meanwhile, have been fighting strong easterly winds with little to show for it below Bonneville Dam, but will have some new options come Jan. 1. Starting New Year's Day,

sturgeon retention will be allowed from Bonneville Dam to McNary Dam with a one-fish daily limit. Minimum size limits vary on that stretch of the river, so anglers are advised to check the [Fishing in Washington](#) rule pamphlet before they head out. A new sturgeon-management policy approved Dec. 5 by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission maintains most of the same guidelines in effect during the current season, including catch allocations and size limits. It does, however, call for the creation of a new sturgeon spawning sanctuary from McNary Dam downstream to the Highway 82 Bridge and a possible expansion of the existing spawning sanctuary below Bonneville Dam during the 2006-07 season. Again, anglers are advised to check out specific rules for the season ahead once the 2006-07 pamphlet becomes available. Lake Scanewa on the Cowlitz River is still attracting some salmon anglers, but most of the coho they're catching are in dark condition, Hymer said. A better bet may be area lakes and ponds, some of which WDFW is still planting with good-sized **rainbow trout**. On a recent day at Klineline Pond in Vancouver, 17 bank anglers scored a fish apiece after the department planted 1,500 catchable-size rainbows. The department plans to plant about 1,000 fish in Klineline every other week throughout the winter, said John Weinheimer, another WDFW fish biologist. Other lakes recently planted with rainbows include Battleground (3,000), Lacamas (5,000), Sacajawea (1,500), Rowland (3,000), Fort Borst (2,400) and Icehouse (1,500). "But we want to caution anglers not to venture out on lakes that are iced up," Weinheimer said. "No lake in the region is safe for ice fishing."

North Central Washington – WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff of Omak says **steelhead** fishing has slowed considerably due to colder water temperatures and ice in both the Methow and Okanogan rivers. "But steelhead are still being caught in the mainstem Columbia River between Chief Joseph and Rocky Reach Dams," he said. Jateff also notes that an additional area just opened Dec. 13 to steelhead fishing in the upper Columbia from the Highway 17 bridge at Bridgeport to 400 feet below Chief Joseph Dam. Anglers are permitted to harvest only hatchery-origin steelhead with a clipped adipose fin and a healed scar in the location of the missing fin. Adipose fin-clipped steelhead with a disk tag may not be harvested. The daily catch limit is two fish with a minimum size of 20 inches. All steelhead with an intact adipose fin must be immediately released unharmed. Statewide gear rules and night closures are in effect.

Jateff reminds **whitefish** anglers that in areas where there is an ongoing steelhead fishery, normal whitefish gear rules do not apply. In the open steelhead sections of the Similkameen and Methow Rivers, during the Dec. 1 to March 31 whitefish seasons, selective gear rules will apply, with no bait allowed.

"Continuing cold temperatures in the Okanogan should provide good opportunities for **rainbow trout** ice fishing into the new year," Jateff said. "Little Twin and Davis lakes in the Methow area, and Sidley and Bonaparte lakes in the Tonasket-Oroville area, are good bets for nice catches." Jateff advised ice-fishers to keep fishing holes under 10 inches in diameter to avoid creating hazards on the ice.

South Central Washington - The region's winter-only fishing season is at the North Elton Pond alongside Interstate 82 near Selah in Yakima County. The pond should provide good catches through the holidays after receiving 2,000 half-pound hatchery **rainbow trout** this month. Anglers are reminded that North Elton Pond has a two-trout daily catch limit. For those who want to take home more fish, several of the I-82 ponds in the same area are open to fishing year-round with the standard five-fish daily catch limit. With hatchery stocking last month, one of the best producers is Pond #4. Also still producing rainbows are Rotary and Myron lakes in Yakima.

Whitefish season is open on portions of the Bumping, Klickitat, Naches, Tieton and Yakima rivers. Only one single hook 3/16-inch or smaller measured point to shank (size 14) may be used

to avoid hooking off-limits fish such as steelhead or salmon. There's no minimum size limit on whitefish and up to 15 can be taken daily. As a highly under-used resource, WDFW fish biologists say whitefish may be one of the best kept fishing secrets in Washington. Anglers can do fairly well on whitefish once they find the winter schools, and they make for very tasty tablefare, especially smoked. The long season, Dec. 1 - March 31, is a good excuse to get out of the house and escape the winter doldrums or hectic holidays.

Puget Sound – An early surge of **steelhead** kicked off the holiday season in North Puget Sound rivers. However, after a couple weeks of better-than-expected fishing, harvest numbers fell. "I was hearing a lot of good reports on the Snoqualmie and upper Snohomish rivers in late November and early December, but that has tapered off a bit," said Chad Jackson, WDFW fish biologist. "Water levels have dropped to summer-like flows, and we haven't gotten that push of new fish." Fishing might be slow now, but the steelhead run is expected to increase in the coming weeks, said Jackson. "It usually picks up around Christmas time," he said.

Blackmouth fishing might be the best bet for anglers while they wait for those river levels to rise and bring in steelhead. Decent catch reports are coming out of Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton), and nice size fish are being hooked in marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay) and 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner), said Steve Thiesfeld, a WDFW biologist. "Anglers taking their time to learn the area are having pretty good results when it comes to blackmouth," Thiesfeld said. Several 15-plus-pound blackmouth have been hooked in 8-1 and 8-2. Thiesfeld reminds anglers that the key to catching blackmouth is finding the bait. "Hit the historical spots and check them out, but if there are no bait or fish in the area, it's best to move on," he said. "You have to be flexible."

Blackmouth catch counts at the Everett boat ramp gave some indication of angler success. On Dec. 9, 13 anglers checked in five chinook, and 23 anglers accounted for seven chinook on Dec. 11. Elsewhere, 28 anglers brought in a total of four chinook at the Camano Island ramp on Dec. 11, while eight anglers accounted for three chinook on Dec. 10 at the island's Maple Grove ramp. Marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands) and 9 (Admiralty Inlet) remain closed for blackmouth. Anglers should check the 2005/2006 [Fishing in Washington](#) pamphlet for more information.

While out saltwater fishing, why not drop a **crab** pot? The crab fishery is currently open Wednesdays through Saturdays in marine areas 7, 9 and 10, but will open for seven days a week beginning Dec. 21. The season closes at 6 p.m. on Jan. 2, 2006.

Olympic Peninsula – The tribal netting schedule is not available for peninsula area streams. It is online at: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/tribal/index.htm>

Winter-run hatchery **steelhead** are steadily returning to north coast rivers and elsewhere in the region. In WDFW creel checks conducted Dec. 1-Dec. 11, the catch rate was .58 steelhead per angler (238 anglers/138 fish) in the Bogachiel and Quillayute rivers and 4.7 (194 anglers/91 steelhead) in the lower Hoh River. ([Creel checks](#) can be viewed on the WDFW website. The Queets has also been giving up fish, said Mike Gross, WDFW fish biologist.

Gross noted that the north Olympic rivers have been fishable since the steelhead season opened on Dec. 1, but a lack of rainfall has kept the water clear, low and less than ideal. A good downpour should start moving more steelhead up the streams, Gross said. He suggests fishing the riffles and the seams between quiet water and current, as well as the usual places - overhanging roots, behind rocks and along logs.

That's also good advice for anglers fishing the Satsop, Wynoochee and Humptulips rivers, which are also producing winter-run steelhead as well as some late-run coho salmon. So are the Green and Puyallup Rivers, which year in and year out are the top bets for metro-area steelhead fishing, said Hal Michael, WDFW biologist. "If somebody wanted to fish steelhead locally, that

would be the best direction to go," he said.

Gross noted that all but seven of the 229 steelhead counted in creel checks on the north coast rivers were hatchery fish, two of which can be retained per day. Anglers can retain one wild steelhead per license year on Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Goodman, Green, Hoh, Hoko, Pysht, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc rivers. Elsewhere, they must be released. Wild steelhead can be distinguished from hatchery fish by their intact adipose and ventral fins. Steelheaders waiting for the rain to start falling might want to chase **blackmouth salmon** on Puget Sound, where clear days are welcome. "I think blackmouth are your best bet right now, with the rivers as low as they are," said Pete Topping, another WDFW fish biologist. "The fish are real fat and healthy this year, but there's practically no (fishing) effort. I'm sure if we had a fleet of anglers out there we'd be seeing some pretty darn good catches."

Topping recommends fishing Point Defiance north into Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton). Other good bets include Gibson Point at the south end of Fox Island, Allen Bank between Blake Island and the north end of Vashon Island, and Manchester, Topping said. But don't delay, because the season is winding down some areas. Marine areas 11 (Tacoma/Vashon Island) and 12 (Hood Canal) will both close to salmon fishing on Dec. 31. Marine areas 10 and 13 will remain open, but the catch limit will drop on Jan. 1 from two fish to one in Area 13 (South Puget Sound), the same as in Area 10.

Chum salmon fishing has all but wrapped up in most places, but is just beginning in the Nisqually River. The late run doesn't hit full stride until mid- to late December and generally remains strong until at least mid-January, said Larry Phillips, a WDFW biologist who monitors the river. The season ends Jan. 31. The limit is six salmon, no more than two of which can be adults. No fishing is allowed above the tank crossing bridge. "Given the relatively high preseason forecast, I would expect fishing to get good soon," said Phillips, noting that it generally peaks between Christmas and New Year's." Nets are in the river from noon Sunday to noon Wednesday, so anglers might want to avoid those days.

Nisqually chum enter the river much brighter than most chum, and are prized by many anglers for smoking, Phillips said. A green corky and yarn on an incoming tide is a good approach to hook one. "It's not a rocket-science fishery," Phillips said. "When they're in, they're in and when they're not, they're not." Phillips reminds anglers not to remove unmarked steelhead from the water.

The **third razor** clam dig of the fall season is tentatively scheduled Dec. 30, 31 and Jan. 1 at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks and Kalaloch beaches. A fourth evening of digging is set for Monday, Jan. 2, at Twin Harbors and Mocrocks only. Digging is allowed from noon until midnight. Final approval is contingent upon marine toxin tests determining the clams are safe to eat. The test results will be announced about one week before the proposed opening. "So far it's been a great season, with an average of 13 clams harvested per digger trip," said WDFW Coastal Shellfish Manager Dan Ayres, who is looking forward to the New Year's Day weekend opener. The last time digging was allowed over the holiday was in 2001. "That year, 35,000 diggers enjoyed a uniquely Northwest way of welcoming the New Year," Ayers said. Sport fishing for **Dungeness** and **red rock crab** is nearing the home stretch in many inland waters. Marine Area 12 (Hood Canal) is open seven days per week through Jan. 2. Marine areas 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 9 (Admiralty Inlet), 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) and 11 (Tacoma/Vashon), which currently are on a Wednesday-through-Saturday schedule, will also go to seven days a week Dec. 21 before closing for the season Jan. 2. Marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu) and 13 (south Puget Sound) will remain open seven days per week through Feb. 28 unless the catch reaches state harvest share before then.

Eastern Washington - Continuous below-freezing day and night temperatures have frozen many lakes solid enough for ice fishing, although there's never any guarantee about ice safety from lake to lake. Ice fishers should use caution, care, and patience, and pack warm clothes and safety equipment before heading out. The region's two winter-only lakes near Spokane - Hog Canyon in southwest Spokane County and Fourth of July on the Lincoln-Adams county line - are producing limits of **rainbow trout**. Even though those fish are big and plump - most at Fourth of July are over 14 inches - fishing holes do not need to be more than eight inches in diameter, says WDFW district fish biologist Chris Donley of Spokane. "It's just not necessary to cut anything bigger," he said, "That way you're not creating a hazard for someone else." Fishers also need to remember that only two of the five-fish daily limit can be over 14 inches at both lakes. "That means you're likely to have to quit after two at Fourth of July," Donley noted.

The majority of the rainbow caught at winter-only Williams Lake in Stevens County is also in the bigger range - 13.5 to 18 inches - but there's no size restriction on the five-fish limit. WDFW district fish biologist Curt Vail of Colville says those are "carryovers" from last year's fry plants and they've grown well in Williams. The other winter-only lake in the northeast district - Hatch - is a completely different story. "It's producing some puny little perch," Vail said, "but few to no trout since we didn't stock it last year and won't until we decide what to do with it."

Ice fishing is also under way on a few year-round lakes in the region. Sprague Lake's relatively shallow waters are frozen and producing **crappie** and **walleye**, along with a few nice trout. Eloika Lake in north Spokane County has good **yellow perch** and **largemouth bass** fishing through the ice. Crappie have a minimum size of nine inches and a daily limit of 10 fish at Eloika, and the bass are under the statewide "slot limit" - only those less than 12 inches or greater than 17 inches can be kept, and of the five daily catch limit, only one can be over 17 inches. Anglers fishing through the ice at Silver Lake in southwest Spokane County should be especially cautious, particularly near the boat launch, where areas of open water remain.

Waitts Lake in Stevens County is open through February and may be slower to provide safe ice. Earlier in the month one fishing party reported catching over 40 large (at least 20-inch) **brown trout**, casting into open water from Waitts' shoreline. Rock Lake in Whitman County is open year-round, both in terms of the fishing season and the water, since it lies in the direct line of prevailing winds. Good size rainbow and brown trout continue to be caught by anglers who know how to safely navigate a boat in winter weather on Rock Lake. Lake Roosevelt continues to provide open water fishing for big net-pen reared rainbows and a few **kokanee**.

Snake River **steelheading** is slow, according to WDFW fish biologist Joe Bumgarner. "Ice is forming along the edges of Walla Walla, Tucannon and Touchet rivers," he said. "Water temperatures are just above freezing. Effort is way down because it's really cold out there. Probably about half of the catch now in the Little Goose/Lyons Ferry area is from recently released adult steelhead not needed for broodstock at the hatchery." Bumgarner noted that some of the latest creel check numbers look good in terms of catch rate, but the number of anglers is very low. So statistically speaking, the chances of others achieving similar catch rates is not good. For example, the latest creel showed just eight anglers in four days on the Tucannon averaging about two hours of effort per steelhead caught. On the other hand, 98 anglers checked in the same four days on the mainstem Snake between Ice Harbor and Lower Monumental dams and averaged more than 27 hours of effort per steelhead caught. For the full report, see the [Snake River creel surveys](#) on the WDFW website.

Northwest Trout - Anglers will find eight-to-10 inch rainbows along with some recently-planted broodstock fish in Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake, both of which are located off Mission Street in Salem. Huddleston, Sheridan and West Salish ponds received a bonus stocking of

broodstock trout this week. Huddleston Pond in Willamina will be planted with rainbows in the 16-inch range next week.

Reader Email

The regular weekly news from **Avid angler Kaptn Ken Johnson** on the lower Willamette reflects a situation similar to most rivers lately: "Reporting from "The Blacktop" and "Meldrum Bar" is getting real easy these days. The Willamette is extremely low with '4' Steelhead counted at Willamette Falls last Sunday, '2' on Monday and '3' on Tuesday...(I wonder if they're hiring "Fish Counters" there??? What a boring job that must be!!! "7:00am, *One.* 4:55pm, *Two*...Time to clock out and go home.") The "Projected" Steelhead run this year, per ODFW, is approximately, 116,900 fish. We have a long ways to go to get to that number and that hopefully that will mean better fishing ahead. As you can see, "The Blacktop" is a lonely place today, for the lone fisherman, "Painter Bill." Bill was taking a break from his hectic schedule hoping for the nearly impossible while fishing for a couple of hours today. The other gentleman, who's name I did not get, mentioned that ZERO fish were caught from the bank adjacent to the boat ramp, but there were two reported Steelies caught yesterday, at the point. "The Point" is a top secret locale and if I told you...Well, I'd be Sturgeon Bait real soon, so mum's the word!!! What we need, is what I and others have been saying all along...RAIN! Nice and steady so as not to blow out the rivers and quite a bit of it. So, let there be rain! Good Luck Fishin'."



Thanks, Ken. Let's hope conditions improve and the number show. It's not looking good for the upcoming forecasts with springers estimated around 60,000. Even the Columbia 2006 spring chinook forecast half that of 2005. We'll have more on this in the future, but let's hope the biologists are being overly conservative after missing the mark on this year's run.

Write to the TGF staff:

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Random Links

Muskie crime of the century? Read more here:

<http://www.statesmanjournal.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20051214/OUTDOORS/512140343/1034>

The ODFW bookstore is open, although we're told Fish Eggs to Fry is not a cookbook:
<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/store/>

Weekly Quote – "The time must come to all of us, who live long, when memory is more than prospect. An angler who has reached this stage and reviews the pleasure of life will be grateful and glad that he has been an angler, for he will look back on days radiant with happiness, peaks of enjoyment that are no less bright because they are lit in memory by the light of a setting sun."
Viscount Grey of Falloden - 1899

GOOD LUCK!