

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 27th, – February 2nd, 2006**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Columbia anglers are still looking for consistent action from the sturgeon fisheries downstream of Bonneville Dam. Historically, anglers used to concentrate in fair numbers in the Portland to Longview stretch in anticipation of opportunistic keepers utilizing a staging smelt run at the mouth of the Cowlitz. With the downturn in smelt numbers, this fishery has yet to be realized.

Although numbers remain modest, fresh smelt continue to be harvested in the mainstem Columbia by gillnetters. Smelt were in higher concentrations closer to Longview indicating some may soon be available in the Cowlitz River for sport dippers.

Reservoirs upstream of Bonneville are offering some options for keeper sturgeon and the improving weather had anglers out in higher numbers.

Waters of the lower Willamette continued to rise through Friday, January 20th, which has led to a slow recovery. Visibility remains less than a foot with temperatures hovering in the mid-40s. Anglers are still waiting for winter sturgeon fishing to heat up.

Bank fishers have the best shot at steelhead in the high water as fish will be closer to shore. The hardcore plunkers who have kept at it on the lower Willamette continue to take the occasional fish. Prospects are improving.

Clackamas anglers have encountered modest steelhead action this week with levels dropping and visibility showing some improvement. Although the Sandy River has been a more consistent performer this season and is kicking out a few steelhead, the Clackamas is out-performing the Sandy now. Barring another deluge to once again put the skids on fishing, there will be more steelhead to catch into February.

Huddleston Pond has been stocked with "catchable-sized" trout. Local waters receiving a mix of rainbows from eight to 12 inches this week include Junction City Pond, Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake.

Mid Columbia - Only an occasional keeper sturgeon is being harvested from The Dalles Reservoir. A few boats are targeting walleye in this same reach with limited results.

Northwest - Anxious steelheaders finally were able to get on the water early in the week. Results were fair to good for most systems and the bigger rivers were fishing good by mid-week. The Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem put out good numbers of steelhead last weekend but the majority of the fish taken were spawned out fish. These fish are much more aggressive on their way downstream and eggs were by far, the preferred bait. These rivers may have too many obstacles in low water for weekend driftboaters.

Fresh steelhead were taken on the upper Trask River on Monday and the Wilson on Tuesday. **Pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** reports, "conditions for the Wilson, Trask and Nestucca should be prime at midweek." Weekend anglers should have an array of options for steelhead on the North Oregon coast with the mainstem Nehalem being the high water option. Broodstock collection is way behind on the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers so contact the ODF&W at

(503) 842-2741 on details for wild fish collection.

Sturgeon anglers were out in fair numbers by mid-week and catch was fair at best. Fish are scattered but opportunity is good with the bulk of the Dungeness crab at sea due to fresh water intrusion.

Crabbing has been poor in Tillamook Bay but when boats can get outside, the ocean, north of the jetty has been very productive. Call the Coast Guard station at Tillamook Bay to determine bar conditions. The best estuary for crabbing is by far Netarts Bay.

Bottomfishing effort is low on the North Oregon Coast as un dependable seasons cause winter shutdowns for charter operators. Conditions were good for productive fishing early in the week but bar restrictions have smaller boats held up at dockside.

Clam diggers working the Clatsop area beaches did well on Monday but increasing surf dropped success rates by Tuesday. A good minus tide series begins on Thursday but marine weather is forecasted to be unfriendly to clammers.

Alder Lake, Big Creek Reservoirs 1 and 2, Cleawox Lake, Dune Lake, Munsel Lake and Olalla Creek Reservoir have been planted with trout this week.

Southwest - With wind and wave moderating over last weekend, rock fishermen are once again hitting outcroppings and jetties with fair to good results.

Sturgeon fishing has been good on the lower Umpqua but be prepared to hook some really large fish here.

Steelheaders on the Coos are landing winter fish daily with the rivers in fine shape. While the greater percentage of steelhead hooked are wild, numbers are good enough that persistence is rewarding anglers with hatchery fish to take home.

Rogue anglers should try plunking the lower river now for fresh, bright winter steelhead.

Chetco anglers are seeing some steelhead action on drifts and off gravel bars with the river finally returning to a fishable condition.

Many steelhead, running the distance under cover of high water, have eluded fishermen. There are more to be targeted, however, so hopefuls are encouraged to take advantage of improved water conditions.

Southwest Washington- The Cowlitz and Kalama Rivers are the steelhead options this time of year. Both rivers are on the mend from the recent high water and should fish well into the weekend. Most of the fish being caught on the Kalama River are of wild stock and although the Cowlitz is past its peak, some fresh hatchery winter steelhead are being recycled to ramps below I-5.

Eastern - Pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688) reports, "The Grande Ronde is producing its typical excellent "winter" steelhead fishing this week. The weekend creel survey for the Grande Ronde in Oregon and Washington showed anglers averaging 3 hours per fish."

There have been approximately 1,000 hatchery steelhead have been released into Hells Canyon Reservoir for angler opportunity.

Columbia River Fishing Report – It wasn't an exciting week of sturgeon fishing on the Columbia River. Anglers from Longview to Portland made up the bulk of the effort this week but only a few keepers were caught. The Columbia River Gorge continues to be mediocre fishing at best. The Bonneville Pool also produced disappointing results this week- that's despite an increase in effort too. The Dalles Pool also had fair effort but light catch. Smelt remains the best bait in the Bonneville Pool downstream to Longview while shrimp, when available, is best in The Dalles Pool.

Walleye anglers are beginning to show some interest in the John Day Pool. Effort remains light however as anglers are waiting for fish to concentrate in higher numbers.

Smelt netters continue to take fair numbers of fish from the river below the Cowlitz River. I think even the fishery biologists are surprised how good success rates have been. Sport netters have yet to see any positive signs in the Cowlitz mainstem. The next opener is on Saturday.

Crabbing is very poor in the Columbia River Estuary. There is simply too much fresh water for crab to remain comfortable in the river. Preliminary catch rates in the Pacific out of the mouth of the Columbia indicate a downturn from previous years. This is to be expected due to the fact record landings have been tallied the last few years.

Steelhead fishing has tapered off in around the mouth of the John Day River. This was expected and many are surprised by how long this fishery held out.

The Guide's Forecast – Despite the volatile weather pattern we have been experiencing in recent weeks, smelt continue to arrive into the Columbia River. Sport dippers are anxious to get on the Cowlitz and take in some sturgeon bait but the fish just haven't made the run into the mainstem Cowlitz yet. If it's going to happen for sport interests, the run should begin within the next 2 weeks.

The smelt run will dictate sturgeon catch and effort but many of the keepers have decided to explore more fertile grounds in recent years likely due to the inconsistent smelt run. Coastal estuaries may be a better bet if you are looking for keepers.

If you are going to fish the mainstem Columbia, the best area for action will continue to be the Portland to Longview stretch. Most of these fish will be undersize but more keepers should begin to build in that area if they are to take advantage of the smelt run. The fresher the bait, the better the results and there are fresh smelt available on occasion.

The Bonneville and The Dalles Pool will continue to put out a few keepers for a mediocre effort. Sand shrimp will be the best bait in those areas when available. If you are coming from the metro area, you may wish to supply yourself well with sand shrimp or call ahead to the bait shop to see if they have any available.

Crabbing will remain poor and rough seas will keep jetty anglers on the sand- or it should anyway.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Waters of the lower Willamette continued to rise through Friday, January 20th, which has led to a slow recovery. Visibility remains less than a foot with temperatures hovering in the mid-40s. Anglers are still waiting for winter sturgeon fishing to heat up.

Despite the slow fishing, sturgeon anglers who are confident it will improve are anxiously awaiting smelt to return to the Cowlitz where they can be dipped on Saturdays for the price of fuel to get there. Commercial nets are getting a few hundred pounds each week, but they're also getting \$6 a pound for the baitfish. In a great year (unlikely in 2006), smelt will enter the Sandy, providing a narrow window of opportunity for obtaining bait there.

Bank fishers have the best shot at steelhead in the high water of the lower Willamette as fish will be close to shore. The hardcore plunkers who have kept at it on the lower Willamette continue to take the occasional fish. Prospects are improving.

The Guide's Forecast – Water conditions on a larger river like the Willamette change slowly and are subject to bank runoff and upstream tributaries. Rain this weekend will further impede any improvement in the level or clarity. Bank anglers plunking virtually at their feet will take steelhead, but the catch rate will remain very low until there's some improvement. High, muddy water doesn't deter the sturgeon bite, but the action won't pick up dramatically until the lower Willamette water temperature increases. 'Til then, it'll be pretty much a shaker show.

The North Santiam will remain quite high for another couple of weeks while capacity at Detroit Reservoir is recovered to ensure its function as a flood control system. Wild winter steelhead numbers will increase as this occurs.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Clackamas anglers have experienced modest steelhead action this week with levels dropping and visibility showing great improvement.

The Sandy shows positive potential. It attained fishable color last weekend but it wasn't 'til Tuesday this week that water levels were truly appealing. The fish are there, although not in great numbers.

The Guide's Forecast – If the showers forecasted for later this week don't become a deluge to once again put the skids on fishing, the Clackamas will be a worthwhile destination with more steelhead to catch into February.

Persistence is likely to be rewarded on the Sandy River if the color doesn't go too far into the muddy range. As always, the freezing level plays a major role in water clarity here. In roiled water, try bait, then shift to lures as the water clears. Bait adds the allure of natural scent which steelhead follow to find an angler's offering prior to actually seeing it.

North Coast District Fishing Report – North Coast rivers finally came in to shape early this week. For the first time in several weeks, larger systems like the Wilson, Trask and Nestucca were viable options for motivated anglers. Of course this pattern isn't scheduled to last as more wet weather comes from offshore at midweek. Most importantly, when water levels were ideal for fishing, success rates were only fair at best.

We started the fishable week off on the Trask River, floating the Stone's Camp to upper Peninsula drift on Monday, January 23rd. We took an assortment of plugs but spend most of our morning driftfishing corkies and yarn tipped with sand shrimp. We hooked 4 steelhead in the first hole- all on drift gear. Landing 2 of them, they were both wild hens and were promptly released. The next hole we fished, we hooked one fish, landing it- a spent wild hen of about 7 pounds. There was only one other boat on the float and we didn't get a chance to talk to them to verify their results. We pulled off the water by noon but one of our guests, Robert Campbell of Fisherman's Marine and Outdoor landed another steelhead at the Dam Hole and one fish on the

Wilson River below Sollie Smith Bridge fishing from the bank. The lower Trask and Wilson were still a bit high on Monday for good fishing. By Tuesday however, effort was climbing on the Wilson as the rare color of steelhead green reared its face once again. Most anglers were rather disappointed in the results of their efforts despite perfect water conditions. Most boats averaged a fish or two for an all day float on the 24th. There was one boat rumored to be close to a double digit day however but this was by far the exception, rather than the rule. Success on the Wilson didn't get any better as the week progressed either.

Nestucca angling wasn't anything to write home about either. The river has been so high for so long, it is quite possible the majority of the fish ran right through when water conditions permitted. **Pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** reports this, "We are finally seeing some dry weather. Yeah!!! We have nothing here now but a little fog. We even saw stars last night. Look for the Nestucca to come into fishable shape by early to mid week. The color will probably remain in the dirty stage for some time, due to some huge slides up river. It is coming into a green stage today, but is still a bit high for safe boating. Look for fish to be spread through the entire river. Even up in the no bait zone, there should be a ton of fish up there. There is a ton of bank access, and it is a beautiful stretch of water. The fish up high respond well to jigs and spinners. On the lower end, they will touch most anything, from plugs to good bait. From the start, we will fish the tail ends of the drifts, and as the flow slows, we will find fish in all of the fishy spots. After this little spell of rain we had, we will see what happens. We are going to give them a couple more days to clean their gills, and we will find them somewhere. Please be careful with the divers and bait. We just want to keep our wild stocks in tact, and there is sure to be some fresh natives in the river. Fatal hooked fish are not good, and we all like to catch them. They are a very special fish... I'm pumped up and ready to go. We have a good two weeks of fishing and then we will be at the Portland Expo, at the Sportsman's Show from February 8 through the 12th. Please stop by. We have great bait products this year, and we would love to see you. Our booth is 1236, by the fly casting pond. Have a good week, and we will see you on the river."

Smaller streams like the Necanicum gave up big numbers of steelhead to driftboaters working that water. As predicted, the bulk of those fish were spent hatchery fish that gave anglers a great fight but weren't the best option for tablefare. The North Fork Nehalem has been another great small stream option but more of those fish are becoming ripe as we progress into spawning time.

The coast experienced two days of glorious weather on Monday and Tuesday and some anglers got out on the bay to attempt for sturgeon. The tides weren't the best but an afternoon outgoing provided some opportunity for these fish. Accurate reports weren't obtained but with the lack of effort due to poor weather and prime conditions in the bay, fishing should have been good.

Clammers working Clatsop Beaches did well on Monday with a mild surf but when conditions got rougher by Tuesday, success once again dropped off.

Crabbing has been poor on most North Coast estuaries with the exception of Netarts Bay. Crabbing in Netarts has been very good recently but effort is climbing as the word gets out. Success hasn't been consistent but the boats sticking it out into high slack have been doing the best.

The Guide's Forecast – The North Coast rivers are again forecasted to be on the rise which will challenge anglers in their efforts for river running steelhead. Smaller streams will once again become the best option with the Kilchis, North Fork Nehalem and Necanicum leading the charge. Like the previous week, the bulk of the catch will be made up of spawned out hatchery fish but a few wild fish should be intermixed. The North Coast rivers will experience several weeks of lag time between steelhead runs this time of year. More wild fish will begin to show towards the last

half of February but until then, expect a mixed bag in quality and quantity. Bait and plugs work equally well but the fish are more apt to fall for plugs on a dropping river.

The Wilson, Trask and Nestucca Rivers will fluctuate in level but for the most part, will be too high to expect great results. When the rivers are in this state of flux, the higher drifts tend to produce the best results. Stick to the sides of the river and work the softer water in the tailouts as fish will seek refuge from the faster flows. River forecasts are calling for high water until the end of the month.

Sturgeon anglers on Tillamook Bay will have little opportunity for prime fishing time this week. Despite the great minus tide series beginning on the 27th, the tides are just too late in the evening for anglers to take advantage of. The best opportunity will take place on the 27th and 28th but anglers need to practice caution if they intend to be out late into the early evening. The forecasted rough weather will be reason enough not to pursue sturgeon this week. It's just too challenging to read a bite when your rod tip is bouncing all over the boat.

Crabbing will likely remain poor in most coastal estuaries and the bar on Tillamook will be too rough to cross. There are ample catches awaiting sport crabbers just outside of the bay entrance and Netarts Bay should continue to offer crabbers some opportunity for quality keepers. The minus tides may offer some opportunity for razor clam diggers but a rough surf will likely keep the clams from feeding near the surface.

Central & South Coast Reports – Anglers who donned sunglasses earlier this week will once again haul out rain gear for the weekend and it's hoped that rain won't negatively impact river conditions which were improving earlier.

Siletz River water levels are expected to be in the eight-to-nine-foot range for the weekend. That's a bit high, but if the water clarity is passable this should be on steelheader's best bet list.

Good river conditions and decent hatchery returns indicate the Alsea should be rewarding destination for steelheaders this weekend, providing, that is, that the precipitation doesn't change from "shower mode" to "deluge."

With wind and wave moderating over last weekend, rock fishermen were once again hitting outcroppings and jetties with fair to good results.

Sturgeon fishing has been good on the lower Umpqua but be prepared to hook some really large fish here. The South Fork and mainstem are most likely to be fishable for steelhead this weekend.

Steelheaders on the Coos are landing winter fish daily with the river in fine shape mid-week. While the greater percentage of steelies hooked are wild, numbers are good enough that persistence is rewarding anglers with hatchery fish or two to take home.

The Coquille blew out this week and is won't be a possibility by this weekend.

The Rogue River is extremely volatile now as the ground is saturated and any precipitation may push it out of shape. Check the latest conditions before making the trip. If water conditions allow approach, Rogue anglers should try plunking the lower river now for fresh, bright winter steelhead. In decent water levels with passable clarity, this technique will produce.

Chetco anglers saw some fine steelhead action on drifts and off gravel bars with the river finally

returning to a fishable condition mid-week. Rainfall late this week could louse it up again, but if not, this is a "hottie". One wild steelhead may be kept per day here up to five per year.

Many steelhead, running the distance under cover of high water, have eluded fishermen. There are more to be targeted, however, so hopefuls are encouraged to take advantage any time there's an improvement in water conditions.

Central and Eastern Oregon – A few sunny days will increase activity on the Metolius in wintertime. Whitefish and bull trout will readily cooperate with fly anglers.

The crystal clear water at Fall River has been providing decent action for long rodders when the May fly hatch is on mid-day. Fish accordingly with long, light leaders for best results.

Northwest Trout - Alder Lake, Big Creek Reservoirs 1 and 2, Cleawox Lake, Dune Lake, Munsel Lake and Olalla Creek Reservoir have been planted with trout this week.

Coffenbury Lake, Sunset Lake, Vernonia Pond, Cape Meares Lake, and Town Lake, all of which were stocked with surplus adult hatchery winter steelhead last week, got very little angler attention due to the weather. These fish will be available to fisherfolk now.

SW Washington - High, dirty water has brought steelhead fishing to a virtual standstill in rivers throughout the region, but **sturgeon** are a different story. "Sturgeon actually seem to like these conditions," said Joe Hymer, WDFW fish biologist. "Warm, turbid water with lots of debris seems to invigorate them." The best place to find those conditions right now is around the mouth of the Willamette River, which is where Hymer suggests anglers go if they're looking to hook a sturgeon in the lower Columbia River.

Other options include the pools farther upstream. At the Bonneville Pool, boat anglers have been averaging one legal-sized sturgeon for every six rods, although fishing has been slow for bank anglers. The Dalles Pool and John Day Pool have also been giving up some legal-sized fish. All three pools are open to sturgeon fishing under the same rules as last year. (See WDFW's 2005-06 Fishing in Washington rules pamphlet.) Below Bonneville Dam, the fishery is open Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays downstream to the Wauna powerlines near Cathlamet and seven days per week below the Wauna powerlines to Buoy 10.

Smelt make great sturgeon bait, but they don't come cheap. Hymer said fresh/frozen smelt were retailing for nearly a dollar per fish after commercial boats landed 399 pounds in the lower Columbia on Jan. 5. (Another 445 pounds were landed Jan. 9). No recreational landings had been reported on the Cowlitz River as of Jan. 10, but Hymer said that should change once river conditions improve. The popular fishery on the Cowlitz runs from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. each Saturday through March 31, with a daily catch limit of 10 pounds per person. All other tributaries to the Columbia River are closed to smelt dipping until further notice.

With waters already running high throughout the region, 22 anglers interviewed Jan. 2-6 on the Cowlitz River had caught just two **steelhead** - one at Mission Bar, the other at Olequa. Although the peak of the early hatchery run has passed on most area rivers, Hymer noted that the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers have late runs that should provide good fishing into March. Anglers have been catching some steelhead in the Dalles Pool, but fishing effort has been down in most areas as the rain continues to fall.

Meanwhile, Tacoma Power employees recovered more than 1,000 salmon during the first week of 2006 at the Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery - including the **first adult spring chinook** of the new year. More than 750 adult coho and 13 winter-run steelhead were released into the upper Cowlitz River at the Lake Scanewa Day Use site above Cowlitz Falls Dam. Crews also released 132 adult coho at Franklin Bridge in Packwood, 85 winter-run steelhead at the Massy Bar boat launch and 150 adult coho into the Tilton River at Gust Backstrom Park in Morton.

Still, looking for a way to shake the high-water blues? Lake fishing may be the answer. During the first week of January, WDFW stocked Sacajawea Lake in Longview with 123 five-pound rainbow trout and 36 ten-pounders. Horseshoe Lake in Woodland got 16 five-pound fish and four ten-pounders; Rowland Lake near Lyle got 100 five-pounders and 75 ten-pounders; and Spearfish Lake near Dallesport got 90 five-pounders and 25 ten-pounders. The department plans to continue planting approximately 1,000 catchable-size rainbows in Kline Pond every other week through the winter.

North Central Washington – Fishing for **hatchery steelhead** has improved considerably in the upper Columbia River system with recent warmer weather melting most of the ice in both the Methow and Okanogan rivers. WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff of Omak says steelhead that have been relatively undisturbed for more than a month are now biting, although WDFW enforcement officers report that participation has been low. Most fish are being caught with small jigs used with a foam-type bobber as a strike indicator.

By law, anglers must release any steelhead with an intact adipose fin or a disc tag they intercept in the fishery. Officers estimated that only one out of six steelhead recently caught were hatchery-reared "keepers." The daily catch limit is two fish with a minimum size of 20 inches. Statewide gear rules and night closures are in effect. Anglers can check the WDFW access areas for signs about gear rules and closed areas.

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

Winter fishing is currently very slow for **rainbow trout** in such Okanogan County lakes as Little Twin, Davis, Sidley and Bonaparte, where warm temperatures have made the ice unsafe to walk on and shore and boat fishing risky. **Walleye** fishing has been productive recently at Potholes Reservoir, even from the MarDon Resort dock.

South Central Washington - Fishing participation has been low throughout the region with rain and snow melt leaving rivers and streams high and muddy. WDFW enforcement officers recently checked a few die-hard **whitefish** anglers on the Yakima River near Cle Elum but catches were light. Other recent river and stream patrols have turned up few or no anglers. Just one steelhead was checked from the Columbia River near Plymouth in Benton County. As water levels and conditions settle out, catch rates should improve.

WDFW fish biologist Jim Cummins of Yakima reports the warmer weather has melted most of the ice on the region's year-round lowland **rainbow trout** lakes, so they may be more accessible. Anglers can bone up and gear up for future opportunities at the 13th annual **Tri-Cities Sportsmen Show**, Jan. 20-22, at the TRAC in Pasco. Among the many fishing guide and gear vendor displays and demonstrations, there's a kids' fishing pond and free seminars, including fly-fishing expert Jim Teeny and an outdoor cooking camp hosted by TV personality Butch "C.W." Welch. Show hours are 1-8 p.m. Jan. 20, 10 a.m.-7 p.m. Jan. 21 and 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Jan. 22. Admission prices are \$7 for adults, \$3.50 for kids six to 12, and free for kids five and under.

Puget Sound – Heavy rains and rising rivers have forced anglers to avoid the region's murky streams and instead turn to saltwater for fishing opportunities. **Steelhead** fishing has come to a virtual halt as rain continues to fill North Sound rivers. But stalwart anglers willing to brave the wind and rain in Puget Sound are having some success with **blackmouth**. The best bet for anglers seems to be the waters near Everett, said Steve Foley, WDFW biologist. The weather, however, is keeping most people off the water. "The few people that are out there fishing are catching some fish," Foley said. "But with this weather pattern the way it is, it's tough for people to get out." Blackmouth catch counts at the Everett boat ramp gave some indication of angler success. On Jan. 8, 13 anglers checked in six chinook.

Those heading out on the Sound can take advantage of the region's islands for some protection from harsh weather. If a south wind is blowing, anglers might want to try the east side of Whidbey Island, said Steve Thiesfeld, a WDFW fish biologist. "Areas like Penn Cove, Holmes Harbor and Utsalady Bay give anglers a shot at catching some blackmouth while providing protection from a south wind," Thiesfeld said. This is also a good time for anglers to take their time and learn the blackmouth fishery. "It really pays off," he said. "Those that have learned the fishery are having success."

Marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) and 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) are open for blackmouth fishing, although Area 10 closes Jan. 31. Marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands) and 9 (Admiralty Inlet) remain closed for blackmouth. Anglers should check the 2005/2006 [Fishing in Washington](https://fortress.wa.gov/dfw/erules/efishrules/index.jsp) (<https://fortress.wa.gov/dfw/erules/efishrules/index.jsp>) pamphlet for more information.

When the rain does let up and rivers in the region start to drop, anglers should first try fishing the upper reaches of rivers, said Foley, who recommended Tokul Creek, a tributary of the Snoqualmie River, and the Cascade River, which is a tributary of the Skagit River. "Upper reaches drop and clear up first, while the lower reaches can remain dirty," he said.

Olympic Peninsula – High water and steady rain have put a damper on fishing area rivers, forcing anglers to consider other options. One possibility is a three-day **razor-clam** dig tentatively scheduled Jan. 27-29 at four ocean beaches. WDFW will give the final word on that dig - and another opening tentatively scheduled at all five ocean beaches Feb. 24-26 - once toxin tests determine whether clams remain safe to eat.

Both digs are geared to evening tides, with no digging allowed before noon any day. Low tides during the three-day dig proposed this month are at 5 p.m. Jan. 27, 5:49 p.m. Jan. 28 and 6:34 p.m. Jan. 29.

The four beaches tentatively scheduled to open those days are Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks and Kalaloch. Copalis Beach will remain closed to digging in January to ensure that enough clams are available for harvest in April, when the tides allow for morning digs, said Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager. Copalis is, however, tentatively scheduled to open for digging along with the other four beaches Feb. 24-26, Ayres said. "Since the weather is usually better in February, it made more sense to take a break this month," he said.

Due largely to rough weather, diggers averaged just 6.7 clams per day during the opening held over New Year's weekend, Ayres said. "But a lot of the more experienced, better-prepared diggers did get their 15-clam daily limit," he added. "A lot depended on finding the right location, being able to spot 'shows' and packing a good lantern." "Shows" are small holes in the sand, indicating the presence of a clam below the surface.

Meanwhile, **steelhead** fishing has stalled throughout the Olympic Peninsula, as heavy rains continue to push area rivers out of shape. On the Quillayute River system, where 165 anglers

caught 67 steelhead (including four wild fish) over New Year's weekend, catch totals and angler participation steadily declined as flows increased. By Jan. 10, the Quillayute and virtually every other river in the region was unfishable. "All the rivers in the Grays Harbor area - the Satsop, Chehalis and Wynoochee - are completely blown out," said Scott Barbour, a WDFW fish biologist. "Your best bet (for seafood) right now is to drop a crab pot in the harbor."

Barbour noted that plunkers had some success catching hatchery coho in high water on the Wynoochee River during the first week of January, but gave up when the skies opened up again. "Give the rivers a couple days to drop back into shape after the rain stops," advises Mike Gross, another WDFW fish biologist. "Once they do, there's usually a bunch of fresh fish waiting to move upriver."

Or, anglers can go **blackmouth** fishing. Most marine areas are closed to salmon fishing, but Marine Area 10 is open for blackmouth through the end of January and Marine Area 13 is open through April 30. Catch rates aren't red hot, "but people are getting some nice fish," said Steve Thiesfeld, Puget Sound recreational fishing coordinator for WDFW. Anglers are reminded that several area rivers - including the Humptulips, Copalis, Minter and lower Chehalis (below Porter Bridge) - will close to salmon fishing Jan. 31. Thiesfeld advises anglers to check the WDFW [Fishing in Washington](https://fortress.wa.gov/dfw/erules/efishrules/index.jsp) (<https://fortress.wa.gov/dfw/erules/efishrules/index.jsp>) pamphlet before they head out.

Eastern Washington - Snake River **steelheading** has been slow with high, muddy flows from abundant rain and snow melt in the tributaries and full pool in all sections of the mainstem river. Latest creel checks showed anglers averaged five hours per steelhead caught on the Touchet River and more than 29 hours per fish caught on the Snake between Ice Harbor and Lower Monumental dams. (See the full report at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/snake/index.htm>.) When water conditions settle out from current high levels, steelhead action should pick up, especially in and at the mouth of the tributary streams.

The same wet, unseasonably warm weather has left most of the region's winter or year-round fishing lakes unsafe for ice fishing, which drew crowds in December. Boat launching and shore fishing might also be risky at this time on some waters. A forecasted cold snap might ice things up again, but WDFW district fish biologist Chris Donley of Spokane warns that it will have to be a sustained freeze to make ice fishing safe again. "Now's the time to fish Lake Roosevelt for **kokanee** and **rainbow trout**," Donley said. "It's been good for both boat trolling and bank fishing, from the mouth of the Spokane River all the way to Grand Coulee Dam." Donley also noted that Whitman County's year-round Rock Lake continues to produce catches of **brown** and rainbow trout.

WDFW district fish biologist Curt Vail of Colville reported that fishing at winter-only Williams Lake in Stevens County is available only to brave, small boat anglers, since ice conditions have deteriorated. "Getting your boat in and out will require some risk and ingenuity," he said, "but there are some great rainbows in there for those willing to try." He noted that other waters in the northeast district are in similar shape. "Waitts Lake just barely got completely frozen before the current thaw," he said. Winter-only Hatch Lake, which is in need of rehabilitation to restore its once-healthy trout fishery, is yielding skinny **yellow perch** about six inches long. "You could cook fillets with three passes over a 100-watt light bulb," he said.

Reader Email

Regular contributor Kaptn Ken Johnson sent this late last week: "For those of you fisherfolks familiar with "The Bulkhead" on the Willamette River, just upstream from Meldrum Bar Park...This is it laying on its side in the river. The heavy rains created the bank to give way and with its weight, it toppled over. I guess it has been in the NEWS, but I missed it. Just got a photo

of it...the river is high and when it drops, this HUGE chunk of iron is definitely gong to be in the way! I believe the bulkhead was used decades ago as a loading platform for logs and such....I could be totally wrong, but that would be the first time all year!!!"



Thanks, as always, Ken! As I understand it, there used to be an business at that location which did boat building and repair at that location. The crane they used to move boats on and off the water was mounted there.

This week, Kapt Kan wrote, "Well, the girls are back too as we see more and more ladies out there fishing these days. Glad to have them! Fishing is picking up at Meldrum Bar. Today there was even a 5-6 boat "Hog Line" on the East downriver side of Yuca Island. Yuca Island is that island with the National Heron Reserve straight across the Willamette River from the mouth of the Clackamas. By the time I got my camera back to the river's edge (yes, I forgot to bring it with me the first time) only one boat was left at about 3:30pm. Missed my "Kodak Moment." The boaters might be trying to pick up those upriver "Santiam Steeles." Or, were maybe they Sturgeon Fishing??? Hhmmmm??? The guys are averaging about 1-3 fish per day at Meldrum. Some days are better than others. Yesterday, it was a reported that 6 fish were hooked at the "Bulkhead." Or, should I say, what used to be "The Bulkhead!!!" What are we going to call it now??? The boaters call it "The Garden Hole" where they "Hog Line" straight out from the bankers', especially during the Spring Chinook runs. The community gardens are up on the bank and across the street there in Meldrum Bar Park. The word from the beach at Meldrum were 2 Steelhead hooked today out of about 8 or 9 fishermen. One was lost in the tussle and one was released. Yesterday was the hot day at "The Bulkhead." The Willamette is actually clearing a bit, and quite fishable plus getting better every day. The Clackamas is almost PERFECT as it is a nice Emerald Green with a just a bit of cloudiness. Several fish were reported taken on the Clackamas, yesterday and today too, mostly to drift boaters between the various put in points. Water levels in the Clackamas is still high but, word is that boating down it is quite a treat. Taking a drift boat downriver must be quite nice...I just wouldn't know! The guys at Meldrum are still parking about 30' further back than normal, as the water levels are still on the high side. Their offerings are varied but most are using double rigs and most fish are caught on the bottom lure. The boat ramp at Meldrum is still invisible, except for the dock sitting there with a little bit of debris still hanging on. If the rain keeps coming steady but "gently," like it has for the last couple of days, the fishing should improve every day. For those of you holding back from fishing yet, like I have been, it's time to get serious! Steeles are definitely in the water and ready for the taking. I've

already gone through my gear and I think next week is the week for me. See you all down there!



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Random Links

ODFW Oregon Fishing Forecast for 2006: http://www.dfw.state.or.us/RR/fishing_forecast/

"Once engineering marvels, Oregon dams are now relics" from KATU News:
<http://www.katu.com/stories/82704.html>

Weekly Quote – "Why does Sea World have a seafood restaurant?? I'm half way through my FISH burger and I realize, Oh my God . . . I could be eating a slow learner." - Lyndon B. Johnson

GOOD LUCK!