

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 3rd, – February 9th, 2006**

Willamette Valley/Metro- Sturgeon anglers in the gorge are finding greater success watching sea lion predation on sturgeon versus reeling in their own. One guide reported 8 mortalities, of which 2 were oversized sturgeon for a pack of the hungry marine mammals. No catch was reported for one boat and 20 bank rods participating in this area.

Downriver, keeper fishing was just a bit better with 35 boat anglers checking 2 legal sturgeon and 79 sub-legals. Fresh smelt is best to use for bait but remains elusive to find despite decent commercial catches. Smelt catches dropped off for commercial netters on the last opener but to date, over 7,300 pounds have been landed in the mainstem.

The first Columbia River spring Chinook was caught by a commercial netter on the January 24th/25th opener. It weighed in at 16 pounds.

Sturgeon anglers in the Bonneville Pool posted some fair results with nine legal fish kept and 505 sub-legal sturgeon released for 29 boats. Nine sub-legal sturgeon were released for 47 bank rods.

Steelhead counts are nearly stalled at Willamette Falls where fewer than 350 fish have crossed. These are wild steelhead bound in greatest part for the Santiam system. The lower Willamette and Multnomah Channel may offer possibilities for sturgeon, but stay off the water if logs and debris are present.

Pro guide Trevor Storlie (503-307-5601) reports the Sandy has been high and getting higher although the water was of fishable clarity early this week. Good catches were reported from Oxbow to Lewis and Clark and for the few anglers that have access to productive water above Marmot Dam. The wild component may be strong on this system this season as well.

While the upper Clackamas was marginally productive over the weekend, storm fronts this week are expected to raise and roil the water. Eagle Creek was a viable option when water levels were friendly and may be the metro "go-to" location for this week as well.

E E Wilson, Junction City, Walling and Huddleston ponds along with Walter Wirth Lake are scheduled to be planted with trout this week.

Northwest - Steelheaders on the North Oregon Coast were finally rewarded with good catches last week. **Pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** reports the Wilson, Trask and Nestucca Rivers produced nicely for wild winter steelhead before rising again on the weekend. Fresh wild fish made up the bulk of the catch indicating that indeed, the wild component of the winter run may come through for anglers this year. The hatchery component of the run is waning but broodstock fish are available for harvest on the Nestucca and Wilson Rivers.

Rainfall this week knocked out these producing rivers until the weekend at the very least. Smaller streams may fish as early as Thursday, barring any further significant rainfall. High winds and saturated stream banks have created navigational hazards- especially on smaller rivers.

The Alsea River is experiencing a great run of fish but like most coastal streams, conditions have not been friendly to anglers. The hatchery run there will only last another week before natives dominate catches. At last report, the Mill Creek ramp on the Alsea was closed due to a downed

tree blocking passage downriver, but the water will be too high this week for fishing in any case.

The Siletz has been the surprise of the season. When the river is fishable, catches have been good. There are good numbers of wild fish present but most anglers are ranting about the large hatchery broodstock available. Smolt losses of 1-salt fish were severe but evidence points to good survival of the 2-salt returning fish. Higher drifts are producing the best as is usually the case in higher flows.

Despite favorable tides, foul weather kept most bay fishermen off the water. Tides will again provide opportunity for sturgeon anglers on Tillamook Bay early next week. Low effort has kept accurate reports inconsistent.

The heavy fresh water intrusion will keep crabbing in a state of flux for at least another week on most coastal estuaries. The exception may be Netarts Bay where effort remains high due to success levels and the lack of other opportunity.

Extensive trout stocking is scheduled to take place in the lakes of the Northwest Zone the week of February 6th.

Southwest - Rivers on the South Coast fished well over the weekend and into Monday, January 30th. The next round of fronts moving in are forecast to raise water levels to bank-full or worse by mid-week.

Steelheaders have reported good catches of hatchery fish on the Coquille "between floods."

The Umpqua has been productive when water levels and clarity has allowed for fishing.

Cross the Rogue River off your fishing list this week as it is forecast to exceed flood stage on February 2nd and will be slow to recover.

Eastern - **Pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688)** reports steelhead fishing remains productive on the Grande Ronde but doesn't draw much attention this time of year. Catch rates are calculated in landed fish per hour and recent statistics indicate it only takes 3 hours to land a steelhead in this region. Water levels are expected to return to stable levels by mid-week and with ideal temperatures, the Grande Ronde will provide ample opportunity.

Southwest Washington- Cowlitz and Kalama River steelheading is headed downhill but several dozen steelhead were still being recycled downstream from the dam to the Olequa boat launch.

Sport smelt dippers working the Cowlitz have yet to tally measurable results. The sport dipping season remains open on Saturdays from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. Seals were reported in the Cowlitz River near Longview- an indication that smelt may be staging.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Despite the fact the first spring Chinook was caught on the mainstem Columbia last week (in a gillnet), focus remains on sturgeon. So much so, it seems the sea lions can't get enough! Guides working the area are witnessing ever more oversize and smaller sturgeon being taken by the pinnipeds. If the trend continues, we can kiss another NW icon goodbye. I am not an advocate for giving the bad news without a solution but I don't know where we can go with this. It will remain a topic of concern with the organizations I work with.

Now that your blood pressure is up, can I tell you how the fishing is for anglers? Well, that news isn't so good either. Catches remain light for anglers working the gorge. Effort was low and catch

was negligible. For anglers fishing in the Portland to Longview stretch, 35 boats landed two legal sturgeon and 79 shakers. The hot spot was the Bonneville Pool with nine legal fish retained and 505 short sturgeon released for 29 boats. 47 Bank anglers in this section released another by short sturgeon.

Commercial smelt landings in the mainstem Columbia River slowed to somewhat last week but to date over 7,300 pounds of smelt have been taken. The commercial fleet fishes on Mondays and Thursdays of each week. For sport dippers, the smelt seem to be staging near the mouth of the Cowlitz River. A pod of the seals was witnessed working the area last week. Water temperatures in the mainstem are fluctuating which often results in the exit of schools of smelt this time of year. Sport dippers are allowed to target smelt on Saturdays only on the Cowlitz River.

We are still several weeks away from productive spring Chinook fishing on the Columbia River however the first salmon was taken in the target gillnet fishery for sturgeon last week. The fish weighed 16 pounds and the going price was \$6.50 a pound.

The Guide's Forecast – sturgeon fishing should remain sporadic for lower Columbia River anglers. The gorge does not seem like a good option that this time but just upriver in the Bonneville Pool, fresh smelt or a combination of smelt and shrimp should work well for keepers and shakers. Anglers working the Portland to Longview stretch will likely only find mediocre results. Anglers may find that fresh smelt will be a rare commodity to come by but these will provide the best bait. Don't look for action to really take off in this section even though it wasn't that many years ago that we used to have a really viable fishery this time of year. I think the sturgeon have come not to expect smelt as a staple and therefore seek other food sources in other estuaries this time of year.

Don't bother getting excited about spring Chinook fishing in the Columbia or Willamette Rivers. River condition is not the only factor but run forecast gives us the indication that fishable numbers are not likely this early in the season. Remember the days when guides used to bring in fresh caught spring Chinook to the Sportsmen Show?

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Steelhead remain slow to cross Willamette Falls in the muddy water. As of the latest data, January 28th, 372 had been counted. Water temperatures remain in the mid-40s with visibility less than one foot.

Steelhead bound for the Clackamas River hug the bank on the way upstream in the lower Willamette. These fish are the target of bank anglers below the mouth. See **Reader Email** for the latest on-the-scene report from Kapt Ken.

The Guide's Forecast – The Willamette will produce sturgeon but a word of caution to those trying. Logs and debris washing downstream have the potential to sink a boat. Keep an eye out.

That said, Fresh smelt seems to be the key to taking keeper- sized sturgeon in the lower Willamette. Since there are no smelt available to recreational dippers, that means finding some which have been commercially netted, a task which may prove as difficult as locating a keeper sturgeon and those who successfully find some may expect to pay about a dollar per smelt. That's about six bucks a pound.

Legal-sized sturgeon have been taken around St. Johns this week by the few of those who have invested in that spendy bait or gotten lucky on frozen smelt from previous seasons. Squid and sand shrimp run a distant second, tempting mostly shakers.

Anglers remain hopeful that smelt will show in the Cowlitz, but dipping is only allowed on Saturdays from 6 AM to 10 at night.

It'll be another couple of weeks before the North Santiam flows start to moderate.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – The Sandy has been high and getting higher although the water was of fishable clarity early this week. Good steelhead catches were reported from Oxbow to Lewis and Clark and for the few anglers that have access to productive water above Marmot Dam.

Pro Guide Trevor Storlie (503-307-5601) adds this, "The Sandy has been having sort of a hit or miss season. We have not yet seen big numbers of our wild broodstock fish back yet which last year at this time we were well into real good numbers of larger broodstock, meaning 12lbs to 15lbs sized fish spread throughout the entire system. Most of the fish I have been hooking and seeing the other guys getting have be in that 8lbs to 10lbs range and the reports that I getting in from Marmot Dam are the fish are even smaller. This should all change though in the next week. A few larger fresh fish have already trickled in. I did hear of a 19lbs hatchery fish caught out of Oxbow Park on Sunday. The Sandy run continues to be getting later and later every year.



Normally, the week of the Sportsman show is always been one of the best weeks to catch a Winter Steelhead on the Sandy. The river is very high guys fishing out of Dodge Park on up have been having the most success. Plunkers have also been pretty consistent. These fish are on the move and the traditional water is not producing. Shallow water close to the bank and slower water on the inside of bends or turns in the river are the hot tickets. Bait has been out producing bobber and jigs."

While the upper Clackamas was marginally productive over the weekend, storm fronts this week are expected to raise and roil the water.

The Guide's Forecast – With a dry spell, both the Sandy and Clackamas will produce.

The Clackamas River is high but the color's not bad. Steelhead are entering and will be vulnerable to anglers who have good high-water technique. If the water colors up, try a big gob liberally-scented eggs.

Over 200 winter steelhead have returned to the hatchery on Eagle Creek. This Clackamas tributary has shown good color for a couple of weeks although it has been high and fairly swift. A popular destination, Eagle Creek will achieve fishable condition ahead of the Clack. Expect

some company if you go.

With the cessation of rainfall and lowering of the freezing level, the Sandy should fish well. Due to the switch to hearty, late-running broodstock steelhead here, this run should entertain into March. Expect to hook a few wild fish in the process. Can spring chinook be far behind?

Marc Davis kills 'em on the Sandy River, and sometimes shows others how to do it. This week he writes, "Here's a shot of Ryan Lewis' first steelie ever. It was landed on the Sandy River. This one had been to the doctor a few years back and Ryan got to take it home for a lovely dinner or three. Slick's Secret Sauce and a corkie did the trick for a total of four steelhead for Ryan on his first day. When the river comes into shape it is yielding fish. The broodstock steelies are beginning to show."



North Coast District Fishing Report – Anglers did get a reprieve from poor river conditions last week and the results were favorable. Good action was had on all the larger systems like the Nestucca, Trask and Wilson Rivers. Pressure was high on some days as anglers have been forced from the rivers for such a long period of time. With this kind of competition, double digit days are not likely but consistent action for most anglers was the rule. The more popular drifts on these systems produced nicely for anglers working both bait and plugs. The nice thing about the river conditions of last week is that fish are not only spread throughout the system, they are also spread throughout the drifts as well. When fish aren't concentrated in pockets of water of deep holes when low water is the situation, anglers can pick off steelhead on any seam, edge or tailout in the drift. This is the reason for consistent results no matter what your skill level. **NW icon Buzz Ramsey** reported hooking several fish at the Dam Hole on the Trask River, landing 4 of them in an afternoon's effort.

On the Nestucca, **pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** reported this, "Yep! It's raining again. And, the Nestucca is shot to pieces. Again...We fished last week and did quite well. We caught fish through the entire river, despite the higher flow. Fishing plugs would have been a good option, for a majority of the action was in the flats. Most boats had caught fish, and some had great success. Our best day was Wednesday, and then there was a decline, due to some rain and water clarity issues. We were dragging baits as usual, and we did best on black, and on pink. River flow was a bit on the high side, but they are there, you just have to fish hard and take your time. We hope to fish by the end of the week, it just depends on the sky falling.

Next week, we will be at the Portland Expo show. Please stop by and say hello. We will have bait at the show this year, so stop by and check it out. Our booth is 1236. Hope to see you there."

As Jesse stated, by the weekend, rains were already affecting water condition and even the smaller streams weren't an option. And so the story goes.....when will we fish again?

Only a few sturgeon boats ventured out over the dry spell and since there hasn't been a recent history of activity, most anglers turned their efforts towards steelhead.

Crabbing remains best in Netarts Bay as other estuaries are too deluged with fresh water to produce any consistent results.

The Guide's Forecast – Is hope on the way for the NW steelheader? I would not bank on it. It appears there may be another front moving in that may damper hopes for weekend opportunity. Smaller streams may be an option and even the upper Trask at the Dam Hole may produce some results.

Look to the smaller streams like the North Fork Nehalem, Necanicum and the Kilchis to be the best bets before the next rise in river levels scheduled for Saturday. Most of these rivers will continue to see catches of spawned out hatchery fish as they make their way back downstream to the ocean. Fresh wild steelhead should become more evident in the catches as the month progresses and in recent history, catches have been excellent- but that year, we had a prolonged period of low water conditions. I anticipate most anglers won't be too excited about fishing this weekend. We simply just need a break in the weather. Larger streams may be an option by early next week if weather predictions come true.

Sturgeon tides will also be an option by early next week. Even though the tides won't reach minus status until mid-week, the low afternoon tides are ideal for sturgeon that haven't been harassed by consistent effort. Sand shrimp will be the best bait and with all the fresh water, anglers should be encouraged to pursue keepers lower in the estuary if their traditional haunts don't pan out. Fish should be present.

Tides are also favorable for clam diggers early next week. Depending on surf height, digging along the Clatsop Beaches could be pretty good. The swell is forecasted to subside to a paltry 14 foot (from 24 foot) by Monday. It just may not be an option.

Central & South Coast Reports – High water continues to hamper steelheaders this week.

Not that flooding rivers are entirely a bad thing. High, swift water serves to scour out silt and debris, creating better-quality riverbeds for spawning fish. An additional plus is the now-healthy snowpack which, combined with full reservoirs and tributaries ensure decent river conditions later in the year.

Here's an opportunity to catch steelhead, help a broodstock program and get a shot at winning a new rod and reel. Who wouldn't want to do this? Every angler contributing a fish to the broodstock program on the Alsea River gets his name added to the "hat." When sufficient steelhead have been harvested (or the season ends), one lucky angler will win a 10' Loomis GL2 spinning rod and Daiwa Regal spinning reel. Call the North Fork Alsea Hatchery at (541) 487 7240 to pre-arrange for participation.

The Coos and Coquille rivers have been on fire with water dropping and clearing earlier this week. Most anglers experienced multiple hookups with many steelheaders landing limits early.

Whether or not these rivers will fish this weekend is contingent upon the severity of the rain passing through on Friday and Saturday. If the dry weather next week comes to pass as predicted, the Coos and Coquille systems will be prime destinations that will continue to deliver through February providing weather fronts aren't so severe as to once again cause blowout conditions. Go get 'em.

Rogue River steelheaders will have to wait for the precipitation to stop and then a few days for the water to drop and clear. It's a raging torrent currently, but the worst of the weather has past. Look for fresh, bright steelhead in the system, particularly below the Applegate tributary. Plunking will be most effective and keep in mind that in swift flows, steelies stick close to the bank.

Look for the Chetco to turn on when water attains fishable level and color. There has been a great run of fish here with many of the steelhead running large. Start high and work down as the water stops and clears.

Crabbing on the South coast hit the skids as high river flows lowered bay and estuary salinity but is expected to turn around of the dry weather holds. Ocean crabbing has been good during those rare windows of opportunity when the weather has allowed safe access.

The first all-depth halibut fishing opportunity has been set for May 11th through the 13th and 25th through 27th for the central Oregon coast from Cape Falcon to Humbug Mountain. Additional dates have been set for June and July. More all-depth days will be added until the spring quota of 175,474 pounds of halibut is reached. That's about 2,000 pounds more than last year. Halibut fishing is allowed inside the 40-fathom line seven days a week starting May 1st.

Central and Eastern Oregon – The Grande Ronde River is still in the game. **Pro guide Mac Huff (1-800-940-3688)** reports, "The catch rate remains in the single digits on the Grande Ronde. There will be a little glitch during the week while Monday's runoff clears out and then it's "business as usual." I had an outing during the week and we matched the 3-hours per fish catch rate during the morning fly fishing that the gear guys are reporting. Water levels are good. Water quality is superb. The fish are there. The water temperature when I was on the river was 35 degrees. When it warms up a degree or so the fishing will be even better. Good fishing."

Avid angler Jerry "Dobe" Harding writes, "On a follow up to the fishing last Tuesday at Haystack, my friend, and sometimes fishing partner, Bob Pengra, who works at Sportsman's Warehouse in Bend, had fished Haystack last Monday and 2 of them caught 2 Brown trout casting plugs and spinners from the bank."

Nymphing is productive on Fall River with hatches of Baetis and midges in the afternoons providing some dry fly opportunities. The Metolius is also producing in the afternoons as the caddis hatch takes place.

Anglers and those just sight-seeing should use caution in approaching the Owyhee River. Flows approaching 2400 cfm are twice that of a week ago and at bankfull, it continues to rise.

Received from the ODFW just today (February 2nd) this bulleting regarding Crane Prairie was deemed of potential interest to readers. Rather than delay the publication of TGF while editing it, we offer it here in full:

For Immediate Release Thursday, Feb. 2, 2006

Grant will fund Crane Prairie Reservoir trout study BEND - When the 2006 fishing season opens at Crane Prairie Reservoir on April 21, in central Oregon's Cascade Mountains, marks the beginning of a two-year survey to determine the survival rates and fishery benefits of the two different stocks of rainbow trout inhabiting the lake.

Historically a premier rainbow trout fishery, Crane Prairie Reservoir has declined during the last decade, primarily due to unauthorized introductions of exotic fish species.

The study, funded with a \$45,845 grant from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Fish Restoration and Enhancement Program, will help researchers understand the development of locally adapted hatchery stock from Crane Prairie redband trout as a means of preserving the genetic integrity of native fish.

"We're working to determine if trout from locally-derived broodstock of Crane Prairie origin could ultimately replace the artificially cultured hatchery stocks we have been using for decades," said assistant district fish biologist Ted Wise.

Overall, this project is consistent with the Native Fish Conservation Policy to manage non-native fish and hatchery-based fisheries to optimize user benefits while balancing the conservation of naturally produced native fishes.

Hatchery rainbow trout have been stocked in Crane Prairie Reservoir since 1955. Past stocking has utilized 150,000 to 200,000 fingerlings with an average length from three to four inches. Biologists have transitioned to larger fish to avoid competition and predation from exotic species to improve fingerling survival and the fishery.

"Angler reported very good fishing in Crane Prairie Reservoir during the 2005 season," Wise said. "ODFW strongly encourages anglers to take advantage of the fishery in the upcoming fishing season."

In 1996, ODFW began a program to develop a new stock of hatchery fish derived from native redband trout from the Deschutes River. Eggs are incubated at Klamath Fish Hatchery and then raised to large fingerlings at the Fall River Hatchery near Sunriver and at the Wizard Falls Hatchery in Camp Sherman. Because these hatchery fish have a genetic background from native fish, they have less of an impact when mixed with native redband trout in the reservoir. Trout from this program have been stocked in the reservoir, and several other area lakes, since 1999.

In order to collect necessary information, a seasonal technician will be hired to interview anglers at the reservoir during the 2006 and 2007 fishing seasons to determine how many rainbow trout they have caught and if they are the cultured, locally-derived or naturally produced native fish. Fish from each hatchery stock have been uniquely marked with fin clips for identification.

"We will be looking at the number of rainbow trout caught by anglers, their size and whether they are the old hatchery stock or the newer stock" said Wise. "While the trout are the focal point of the creel survey, information gathered will include the entire fishery of Crane Prairie Reservoir."

In addition to the R&E Program grant, ODFW, Central Oregon Flyfishers, Sunriver Anglers and Crane Prairie Resort owner and operator, Pat Schatz, also are contributing to the project.

Created by the Oregon Legislature in 1989, the Fish Restoration and Enhancement Program is funded by a surcharge on sport and commercial fishing licenses and commercial poundage fees. The program's seven-member citizen board reviews fish restoration and enhancement project

proposals and makes funding recommendations to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission.

For more information on the Crane Prairie Reservoir Broodstock Evaluation Program or about fishing the area, contact Steve Marx, District Fish Biologist for ODFW or Ted Wise at 541-388-6363. For more information on the Fish Restoration and Enhancement Program, or to view information regarding current R&E Program applications, visit www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/RE or contact program coordinator Laura Tesler at (503) 947-6259.

Northwest Trout - E E Wilson, Junction City, Walling and Huddleston ponds along with Walter Wirth Lake are scheduled to be planted with trout this week. Additional plants of brood trout have been made at Walling and Wirth. Early next week, Alder Lake, Buck Lake, Carter Lake, Cleawox Lake, Dune Lake, Elbow Lake, Erhart Lake, Georgia Lake, Lost Lake (Lane County), Munsel Lake, North Georgia Lake, Perkins Lake and Thissel Pond, all in the Norwest Zone, will all be stocked with rainbows.

SW Washington - The "**smelt** watch" is intensifying on the Cowlitz River. With the river dropping and commercial landings mounting in the Columbia River, the popular fish could start entering the Cowlitz at any time, said Joe Hymer, WDFW fish biologist. "We had one unsubstantiated report of some guys getting smelt in the river last Saturday, but nothing's confirmed yet," Hymer said Jan. 24. "All I can say at this point is the conditions are right." The recreational smelt fishery in the Cowlitz River is open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturdays only, with a 10-pound daily limit. No other tributaries are open to smelt dipping, but the mainstem Columbia River is open seven days per week, 24-hours a day, with a 25-pound daily limit. Updates on the [smelt fishery](#) are posted on WDFW's website.

Lower stream flows are also improving **steelhead** fishing, particularly on the smaller rivers. No current reports were available for the Cowlitz River since water levels started dropping, but anglers reported good steelhead fishing on the Kalama River during the weekend of Jan. 21-22. However, Hymer noted that a majority of those fish were wild, unmarked steelhead, which must be released unharmed. During the previous week, hatchery workers recycled 217 hatchery winter steelhead into the river below Kalama Falls Hatchery, planted 74 hatchery fish into Kress Lake and passed 70 wild fish above the hatchery.

Despite high water, 28 bank anglers caught 31 catchable-size rainbow trout in Kline Pond that week. Those fishing in the swimming area with worms or Rapala lures had the best results. Since Jan. 17, WDFW has planted 1,250 catchable-size rainbows in Kline Pond, 1,500 in Kress Lake, 5,200 in Battleground Lake and 1,000 in Kidney Lake near North Bonneville.

Anglers are also catching some legal-size **sturgeon** on the mainstem Columbia River, notably in the pools above Bonneville and The Dalles dams. Sturgeon retention is allowed seven days per week below the Wauna power lines and on Thursdays, Friday and Saturdays from the power lines upriver to Bonneville dam. For regulations above Bonneville Dam, see the 2005-06 Fishing in Washington rules pamphlet.

For anglers who want to stay dry, WDFW will have a booth Feb. 8-12 at the Pacific Northwest Sportsmen's Show at the Portland Expo Center.

North Central Washington – Upper Columbia River **steelhead** fishing has slowed a bit due to cooler temperatures, said WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff of Omak. "But anglers should keep a close eye on any warming trends," he said, "since a few degrees can make a big difference in fish activity and success rates." That fishery includes portions of the Okanogan and

Methow rivers; steelheaders should check all [regulation details](#) of the season on WDFW's website. **Whitefish** fishing can also be productive at this time of the year on both the Methow and Similkameen rivers, Jateff said. But whitefish anglers need to remember that in sections of the river that have an ongoing steelhead fishery, selective gear rules are in effect. Jateff also noted that Rufous Woods Lake continues to be good fishing for **triploid rainbow trout** up to five pounds for both bank and boat anglers. The daily limit is two trout.

WDFW district fish biologist Art Viola of Wenatchee said **yellow perch** and trout fishing through the ice at Fish Lake north of Leavenworth in Chelan County remains excellent but ice conditions have deteriorated. "There is at least 12 inches of water-soaked snow on top the ice, making walking very difficult," he said. "And the ice is beginning to weaken." Viola noted that the ice is unsafe on Roses Lake, another popular Chelan County year-round fishery north of Manson. He also noted that steelhead angling remains slow on the Columbia River between Rocky Reach and Wells dams.

Walleye and **yellow perch** fishing at the Interstate-90 bridge on Moses Lake has been sporadic, says WDFW district fish biologist Jeff Korth of Moses Lake. "It's still pretty much iced up," he said. "But things are starting to thaw."

South Central Washington - The catch-and-keep season for **sturgeon** got under way this month on a portion of the Columbia River from the Dalles Dam to McNary Dam in Benton County. Minimum size for keeping a sturgeon is 48 inches, maximum size is 60 inches, and the daily catch limit is one fish. The stretch of the Columbia from McNary Dam to the Old Hanford townsite wooden power-line towers are open year-round for sturgeon, under the same rules. Feb. 1 is the opening of sturgeon fishing on the stretch from the Old Hanford townsite wooden power-line towers to Vernita Bridge, also under the same size and catch rules.

Whitefish are available on portions of the Bumping, Klickitat, Naches, Tieton and Yakima rivers. Anglers can do fairly well on whitefish once they find the winter schools. Whitefish make for very tasty tablefare, especially smoked. 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.

Warmer weather and rain has melted most of the ice on the region's year-round lowland **rainbow trout** lakes, so they may be more accessible. Anglers are reminded that the region's winter-only fishery at North Elton Pond has a two-trout daily catch limit.

Puget Sound – As the weather improved, so did the fishing. And if the conditions stay favorable, anglers will continue to have more opportunities to catch fish. The recent respite from rain and wind gave anglers a chance to get out on Puget Sound and hook some **blackmouth**. "I've heard there's some nice fish out there," said Steve Thiesfeld, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "With a break in the weather, more people headed out on the sound to fish for blackmouth, and those that did seem to have had some success."

As participation in the saltwater fishery grows, so does the harvest. Catch counts at the Everett boat ramp showed 35 anglers checked in 12 chinook on Jan. 21, and 54 anglers accounted for another 12 blackmouth on Jan. 22. At the Camano Island public ramp 32 anglers hauled in 11 chinook on Jan. 21, and 44 anglers accounted for seven blackmouth Jan. 22.

Thiesfeld recommends pursuing blackmouth in Marine Areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay) and 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) through January. "Those are the areas

where people are picking up fish right now," Thiesfeld said. "But once Marine Areas 7 (San Juan Islands) and 9 (Admiralty Inlet) open in February, anglers might want to consider those areas as well." Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) is also open for blackmouth fishing through Jan. 31. Marine Areas 7 and 9 are scheduled to open on Feb. 1, with a daily bag limit of one chinook in both areas. Marine Areas 8-1 and 8-2 each have a daily bag limit of two hatchery chinook, and wild chinook must be released. Anglers should check the 2005/2006 [Fishing in Washington](#) pamphlet for more information.

After nearly a month of rain, the region's swollen rivers finally began to subside. And if the weather continues to cooperate, **steelhead** harvests could pick up. "The rivers are coming back into shape, and the fishing should be getting better," said Chad Jackson, WDFW fish biologist. Anglers should have a shot at hooking hatchery steelhead in the Snoqualmie and the Skykomish rivers into February, Jackson said. Anglers might want to keep an eye on the area's stream gauges before heading out.

If river conditions don't improve, Jackson recommends dropping a line in one of the region's lakes that have been stocked with **kokanee**. "Winter is a good time to fish for kokanee because they are usually up high in the water column," he said.

Olympic Peninsula – After a record-breaking 35 days of rain, fishing prospects are finally looking up. Rivers began dropping back into shape and clam diggers were busy booking motel reservations for a series of evening razor clam digs in late January. Still, conditions remain uncertain in the days ahead, prompting words of caution from fishery managers.

Three ocean beaches - and maybe four - will open to **razor clam** digging on evening tides Jan. 27-29. As of Jan. 20, WDFW had approved digs on evening tides at Long Beach, Mocracks and Twin Harbors beaches after marine toxin tests confirmed that the clams on those beaches are safe to eat. Heavy surf earlier thwarted efforts to test clams at Kalaloch, delaying a decision on opening that beach to a public dig until the afternoon of Jan. 26. WDFW will announce the decision on its Shellfish Hotline (866-880-5431) and post it on the department's [razor clam season](#) website.

Because the surf remains heavy, diggers planning to hit the beach during the three-day opening should make sure to take a good lantern and raingear, said Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager. "It's important to come prepared," Ayres said. "Particularly during night digs, we also ask people to keep a close eye on young children."

Washington State Parks is also advising beach goers to remain 300 feet away from the toe of bluffs where slides have occurred or could occur. Since the last clam season, a major bluff has fallen into the ocean near Roosevelt Beach access road, south of Moclips.

As in previous openings, no digging will be allowed at any beach before noon. Evening low tides during the three-day dig are:

- o Friday, Jan. 27: 5 p.m. (-0.3 ft.)
- o Saturday, Jan. 28: 5:49 p.m. (-0.7 ft.)
- o Sunday, Jan. 29: 6:34 p.m. (-1.0 ft.)

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, Ayres said. The closed beach lies between the Grays Harbor North Jetty and the Copalis River, and includes Ocean Shores, Oyhut, Ocean City and Copalis.

Meanwhile, **steelhead** fishing picked up quickly after the rain clouds parted and the rivers became "fishable" again. "Rivers have been dropping into shape throughout western Washington, drawing an increasing number of anglers," said Mike Gross, WDFW fish biologist. One popular choice was the Sol Duc River, where checkers interviewed 63 anglers with 29 wild steelhead (including 25 that were released) and nine hatchery fish Jan. 20-22. By comparison, checkers counted just 10 anglers on the river - with just five fish among them - during the previous four days. The story was much the same on the Bogachiel, Calawah and Hoh rivers, although catch rates were considerably lower than those on the Sol Duc.

Improving conditions have also brought a flood of steelhead anglers to rivers in the Grays Harbor area, said Scott Barbour, another WDFW fish biologist. "There were lots of boats on the Wynoochee (River) last weekend, and I know a lot of people were catching fish. Barring another torrential downpour, steelhead fishing in other area rivers - including the Satsop, Humptulips and the Chehalis - should also be good in the days ahead." **Sturgeon** fishing on the Chehalis River should also pick up, now that smelt are moving in, he said.

Another change, noted by anglers and fish biologists alike, is that wild steelhead are becoming predominant in the catch. As most anglers know, retention of wild steelhead is limited to one fish per licensing year (April 1-March 31), taken from one of the following rivers: the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Goodman, Green, Hoh, Hoko, Pysht, Quillayute, Quinault or the Sol Duc. (The retention period for wild steelhead on the Green River closed Nov. 30). Elsewhere, they must be released. Wild steelhead can be distinguished from hatchery fish by their intact adipose and ventral fins.

Rather catch a salmon? **Blackmouth** fishing opens Feb. 1 in Marine Area 9, and should afford some good opportunities, said Tim Flint, WDFW statewide salmon manager. "These fish haven't seen a bait or lure since the end of November," Flint said. "That, together with the fact that catch rates are picking up in the chinook selective fishery in Marine Areas 8-1 and 8-2, suggests that fishing in Marine Area 9 could be good." Popular areas include Possession Bar, Midchannel Bank and Point No Point.

Eastern Washington - Snake River **steelhead** fishing is picking up on tributaries that are running high and fast. Latest creel surveys showed an average of just two-and-half hours per steelhead caught on the Touchet River, just under three hours per fish on the Walla Walla River, and a little over four hours per fish on the Tucannon River. The [full report](#), which includes Snake River mainstem stretches, is on the WDFW website.

WDFW district fish biologist Chris Donley of Spokane reports that most of the ice has melted at the district's winter-only **rainbow trout** lakes, Fourth of July on the Lincoln-Adams county line and Hog Canyon in western Spokane County. "Go get 'em," Donley said, "but be careful out there." Boat launching and shore fishing continue to be challenging with thin shoreline ice from freezing nights. Donley recommends fishing Lake Roosevelt for **kokanee** and rainbow trout, either by boat trolling or bank fishing from the mouth of the Spokane River up to Grand Coulee Dam. Donley also noted that Whitman County's year-round Rock Lake continues to produce **brown** and rainbow trout.

WDFW district fish biologist Curt Vail of Colville said Williams Lake in Stevens County has about four inches of ice covered with almost as much slush and water. "It's pretty risky to walk out on," he said. Those managing to get a line in are doing well, with near limits of **rainbow trout** that run from just under 10 inches to 14 inches.

Reader Email

Kapt Ken Johnson sees a little action this week on the lower Willamette and writes, "Water is at an obvious high today after hard rains literally "dumped" on the entire Portland Metro area over the last several days. That being said, fish are still being caught. Fishing "space," however is at a premium. A small group of adventurous souls hooked 3 Steelies today, with one to take home to mama. These gentlemen were fishing above "The Garden Hole," now referred to "The Bush Hole" because these guys have literally cut out some areas through blackberry bushes to gain access to the water. I doubt they work this hard in their very own yards! (Just kidding guys!) So, what do you do when Mother Nature throws a twist at you, fills the rivers too full, and you still want to go fishing? You trim some blackberry bushes back, clear a spot or three, and throw out your gear hoping for the best. It apparently works as this spot has been consistently producing Steelhead.



Down river, just a piece, is "The Garden Hole." Normally, where these guys are standing is where everyone is parked. The thing is, is there is a 15'-20' drop out about 1'-2' from where the water is here at their feet in this photo.



Normally, when a fish is caught here, you need to scramble down the steep bank, covered with slippery tennis ball and football sized rocks, to land your fish, generally with a bit of help from your neighbor. Because "The Bulkhead," about 300' above "The Garden Hole" fishing area, tumbled into the river a couple of weeks ago, the normally smooth and predictable river current

here is a bit "skewed," to say the least. The water closer to "The Bulkhead" has a reverse current and is boiling about, making the fishing a bit difficult to perfect. The best fishing spot is about where the furthest couple of rods are in the photo because the current begins to flatten out...The turbulence, especially during this extremely high water, created by "The Bulkhead" being in the water has caused a much smaller fishing area there. Now, that is with the high water mind you...Once the river drops, the fishing zone should be much bigger but certainly a bit different before the bulkhead went into the water. The other two photo's show the approach to what is normally a parking area for all of the bank fisherfolks along the extensive gravel bank where a small city of fishermen gather to catch Chinook and Steelhead alike. Obviously, at this time, no one is down there attempting to fish...We hope! Swift currents and very high water has stopped the action in this part of the park. The last photo is from the upper parking lot of the boat ramp there and as you can see, the regular boat ramp is waaaaaaay out there.



The Willamette is actually fishable though...If you can get to the right spot. It is highly recommended that you leave your boat HOME! There is a high amount of life threatening debris floating downstream and it looks like it's cooking along at about 7-10 knots in the Meldrum Bar Area. A tree is not a good thing to have bump into your boat while anchored or under power under any circumstances. These sometimes HUGE hazards (Whole Trees) are also floating or bobbing up and down off the bottom just under the surface. Last week I observed an older guy

in probably a 16' aluminum boat with what looked like about a 25hp tiller motor. He's probably done this for years. He was in the deeper and wider waters closer to Portland, but the current was still going by at about 4-5 mph at the very least. He was strapping rope to floating trees to take back to who knows where, probably to cut it up for Free Firewood. These guys sometimes bring these trees back to their house boats to cut it up! That's fine! Free Firewood is a really nice thing. But, this guy was alone, and he had NO LIFE PRESERVER on either. He probably got some really good wood for free, went home real tired and had a huge dinner with his wife...But, just as easily, he could have fallen or got "bumped" into the water for any number of reasons, and most likely drowned trying to get some free firewood. He would have quickly been separated from his boat because of the currents, and most likely drowned...Just sayin'. Don't even think about it! I just had to put my two cents worth in as seeing that guy made me remember some past "bad times" I have witnessed to do with the river. The water will go down and we'll all get our boats out there soon! And not only that, but "Springer's" are right around the corner too! In the meantime, No Bananas and No Boats. Fughetaboutit! Oh, and, happy fishing!"

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Random Links

Oregon Rambler shares adventures online:

<http://www.cascaderamblings.com/>

Oregon bottomfishing basics:

<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/springfield/bottomfishing.html>

Weekly Quote – "A true and tired rod of graceful proportions and known excellence, which has been the faithful companion on many a jaunt by mountain stream, brawling river, or quiet lake, and has taken its part, and shared the victory in many a struggle with the game beauties of the waters, at last comes to be looked upon as a tried and trusty friend, in which the angler reposes the utmost confidence and reliance, and which he regards with a love and affection that he bestows upon no other inanimate object." - James Henshall, 1881

GOOD LUCK!