

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

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

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro - Although the spring Chinook hype is stealing the show in NW Oregon, the best catches remain in the commercial fleet on the Columbia River. In last weeks commercial salmon and sturgeon fishery, 37 salmon were landed while weekend anglers tallied only a few steelhead.

Sturgeon success remains best in the Bonneville Pool with only a rare keeper being taken in the Portland to Longview stretch.

Smelt have yet to make a strong showing on the Cowlitz and the mainstem Columbia remains below optimum temperature for in-river migration.

Winter steelhead counts for the year-to-date at Willamette Falls were at 3,379 as of February 27th. Daily counts fell to single digits as water temperatures dropped but have shown some improvement in the last few days.

The first spring chinook was counted crossing the Falls Monday this week.

A few spring Chinook have been taken at Oregon City and some boats reported multiple opportunities. Sellwood Bridge and the Multnomah Channel were also putting out an occasional salmon last week. Although it is still premature, this activity bodes well for a better-than-expected return this spring.

Although the pre-rain condition of the Clackamas River was Ideal for steelheading, fishing has remained very slow.

Large baits and lures may provide some catch-and-release action for wild steelhead on the North Santiam as this is the destination of most steelhead crossing Willamette Falls.

Plug-pullers have been scoring decent numbers of mostly native steelhead on the Sandy River. Steelheaders, anxious for action for fin-clipped broodstock fish, await the rewards of the recent rain freshet.

Henry Hagg Lake opens Saturday, March 4th. In anticipation of the expected crowds, 18,000 hatchery rainbows will be planted this week. Other waters scheduled for stocking include Huddleston Pond, Sheridan Pond, St. Louis Pond, Alton Baker Pond, Cottage Grove Reservoir, E. E. Wilson Pond and Junction City Pond.

Middle Columbia - Steelhead catches were close to 3.5 fish per boat in the Dalles Pool last week with an equal mix of wild and hatchery fish.

The walleye bite is underway in the Bonneville, The Dalles and John Day Pools. The Bonneville Pool produced the best catch rates but the Dalles Pool catch was a little over 1.5 fish retained per boat.

Northwest – **pro guide Kent Anderson (503-550-6303)** and **pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** report North Coast streams were in prime shape on Tuesday and success rates proved it. The Wilson and Nestucca were producing nicely early in the week and broodstock steelhead catches were significant. A bright Chinook was caught and released on the Wilson River Tuesday- Tillamook area streams remain closed to Chinook until April 1st. Higher flows forecasted for this week may push

anglers to smaller streams like the Kilchis and North Fork Nehalem. These streams will produce mostly wild catches this time of year.

Sturgeon are scattered in Tillamook Bay causing sporadic catch rates for concentrated anglers. Most effort is taking place in the west channel.

Crabbing remains good on Tillamook and Netarts Bays but may change with the weather front moving in.

Alsea steelheading slowed in the low water prior to the resumption of showers this week, and stealthy anglers were catching a few wild and hatchery fish from the clear water.

Heavy pressure on the Siletz has discouraged some anglers from trying this productive fishery. Action has been consistent and likely to improve with the recent rain freshet.

Southwest - Pro guide Bill Kremers (541-754-6411) reports offshore bottom fishing is good for rockfish and ling cod. Ocean crabbing has been fair with Dungeness reported in prime condition. Rock and jetty fishing has been fair to good when the wind and wave action allow for safe access.

Pro guide Ken Streater (800-797-4293) reports south coast rivers were slammed by another storm front on Monday this week. The Coquille at Powers rocketed from 1.5 to 6.0 overnight February 27th. Prior to the precipitation, the Chetco, Sixes and Rogue produced excellent catches. The rivers remain cold and brighter colored drift bobbers were producing best. The rain was much-needed, but the latest deluge knocked the river out of shape again earlier this week.

Steelheading in Southwest Oregon will be good when the rivers recover from the latest storm front.

Eastern - Pro guide Mac Huff (1-800-940-3688) reports success rates on the Grande Ronde remain near 6 or 7 hours per fish although experienced anglers are doing much better than that. The Willowa River is beginning to produce steelhead at a rate of 5 hours per fish. Water levels should remain constant until the weather warms. Spring thaw will create larger fluctuations in water levels and sporadic success rates.

Southwest Washington- The Cowlitz and Kalama hatchery steelhead seasons are on their way out. Wild steelhead remain in fair numbers on the Cowlitz however. Consistent catches of spring Chinook are still several weeks away.

British Columbia fish managers are planning to cancel the Frasier River smelt fishery this season. BC biologists use the Cowlitz fishery to gauge the Frasier River population. Sport dippers are beginning to wonder if the run is going to materialize this year.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Despite the improving conditions on the lower Columbia River, the gillnetters are reaping all the reward for this area. There was however, the first officially reported sport catch of a spring Chinook on Diblee Beach on the last day of February. The minus tide series that we are just now coming off of, should have produced a few more salmon- but that is just my opinion. We still have a season to go. The next commercial salmon opener is scheduled for 24 hours starting at noon on 3/2. Nets will be allowed to fish from the mouth of the river to Kelly Point Park- (mouth of the Willamette). The last test fishery was conducted on February 28th in which 6 Chinook were caught and 11 steelhead (6 wild, 5 hatchery). Visual stock indexing showed 2 of the 6 Chinook landed were upriver (Columbia bound) salmon, indicating the Columbia run is officially underway. Although Willamette fish should continue to dominate catches in the mainstem Columbia for several more weeks, to see the Columbia fish is a good sign.

The winter sturgeon gillnet fishery concluded on February 22nd with landings of 276 sturgeon and 39 spring Chinook. Fishery managers indicated to me that this fishery is performing closely with last years results- which isn't really good news. This trend lead to poor production on the estuary last summer although quotas were met by both upper and lower river anglers.

This is a sportangler publication isn't it? Unfortunately, there isn't much sportfishing to report on. For sturgeon, catches of keepers (and shakers for that matter) were poor over the week with best catches coming from the Bonneville Pool- and those were poor to boot. The Bonneville Pool put out more walleye than sturgeon last week and for that matter, walleye fishing was pretty good in The Dalles and John Day Reservoirs too! Almost 1.5 fish per boat was tallied in the Dalles Pool.

Smelt continue to be a no show in the mainstem as cold weather likely sent them west again. It is getting pretty late in the season for a no-show of these fish. Sport dippers are quite anxious.

The Guide's Forecast – Sportfishing on the mainstem Columbia doesn't look good for anybody this week. The bright spot may continue to be the walleye fishery with Bonneville and The Dalles Pool leading options. The fish are getting close to spawning and therefore concentrated and eager to bite.

Sturgeon anglers shouldn't hold out much hope as cold temperatures and a lack of smelt have sturgeon feeding elsewhere. The Bonneville Pool remains an anglers best opportunity for catching a keeper- and that chance isn't very good.

Tides are less than ideal for spring Chinook fishers on the Columbia River. Tides are not extreme so fish will not travel as close to the river bank and colder water temperatures may slow migration rates. The commercial fishery remains the best gauge as to if the fish are showing up.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Latest data from Willamette Falls indicates a water temperature of 43 degrees. Look for the counts to increase as the water temperature rises. Rain showers earlier this week reduced visibility at the Falls to 2.0 feet.

Boat and bank anglers continue to take the occasional spring chinook. Bank fishing for steelhead has been slow but steady. See **Reader Email**, below, for details on the bank fishery.

As water conditions improve, so do the number of wild steelhead in the North Santiam.

There has been little interest in sturgeon fishing on the lower Willamette as the steelhead and burgeoning spring chinook runs garner most angler's attention. The few trying are seeing marginal results.

The Guide's Forecast – The first spring chinook crossing Willamette Falls Monday this week did nothing but exacerbate the ongoing spring chinook fever which is reaching pandemic proportion.

Pressure is mounting on the lower Willamette as hog lines form and a greater number of anglers line the banks along below the mouth of the Clackamas.

Actually, plunkers are catching fish pretty regularly now, although the catch is mostly steelhead. Two or three springers a week seems to be plenty to keep the dream alive, though.

Why all the fuss?

In addition to being a fine sports fish and great fun to catch, due to the high oil content (think Good Oil as in Omega 3) combined with an extraordinarily mild flavor, spring chinook are considered to be one of

the world's finest eating fish.

Effort for spring chinook will be on the increase this weekend despite very low catch rates. Expect to find the banks jammed at Meldrum Bar and scores of boats at the Sellwood Bridge. It's likely a few springers will be barbequed this weekend with catch rates ramping up through March.

Most boaters rely on trolling or anchor fishing prawn spinners to tempt spring chinook although a few Kwikfish are being used.

Sturgeon fishing is likely to remain a low priority to anglers with the single-minded focus now on spring chinook. Sturgeon fishing is overdue for an improvement and is historically better in the lower Willamette and Multnomah Channel than in the Columbia at this time of year.

The North Santiam River Guides Association's first of a series of "Learn the River" float trips is Saturday, March 4th, from Green's Bridge in Jefferson to Buena Vista on the Willamette River. Participants in this free event should be unloaded and rigged up before the drift starts at 10 AM. Meeting at the Plantation for breakfast at 7 AM is an enjoyable option. The next trip will be April 1st. Fishing is another enjoyable option on the educative trip.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – The color of the Clackamas is good but it's still a little high and the flow is swift. Steelhead fishing has been fair here.

The Sandy River is in fine shape and color now, offering good prospects for the weekend.

The Guide's Forecast – Clackamas anglers are hopeful for a good showing of spring chinook later in the season. Despite late-running broodstock winter steelhead, it's been a lackluster season. Fortunately, more fish have been entering and the catch rate is on the upswing.

Steelheaders on the Sandy will find fish everywhere this weekend, from low to high, but should expect to find a mix of natives and broodstock because the run timing of both coincide. Drift baits in the heavier water of the lower sections. Bobber and jig has been an effective combo in the skinnier water.

North Coast District Fishing Report – Steelheading slowed briefly as flows dropped after a prolonged period of dry weather. Anglers went to low water tactics but overall, catch rates dropped until we received our last bout of precipitation on 2/27. By the 28th, the river levels were already dropping and steelheaders were rewarded with good catches. Guides that fished the Wilson on the 28th came across ample numbers of wild and broodstock fish but by March 1st, action had already slowed. The Nestucca and Trask Rivers have also been producing nicely with the bulk of the effort taking place on the rivers that offer hatchery fish as an option (Wilson and Nestucca). Both plug pullers and side drifters have been faring well and some quality fish have been coming from these rivers. **Pro guide Kent Anderson (503-550-6303)** reported nearly a double digit day on the lower Trask on 3/1. Although the river was running clear Kent stated, fishing plugs was very productive- particularly on the first half of the float. Kent landed one really nice buck steelhead close to the put in at Loren's Drift.

On the Nestucca, **pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** reports, "The Nestucca is fishing well. The recent rains certainly helped warm the water and get some color back. For a time it was like fishing in a gin bottle. The lower river has been good and fresh fish are there. They were responding well to jigs, but we took them to the cleaners on bait over the last couple of days. Pinks and greens have been really good for us, and tiny baits of eggs. Jig colors were peach and red and peach and white.

We are also getting some nice hatchery brood fish. We figure as best as we can tell, about one in five or six is a keeper. I'm seeing some fatal fish, and a bunch of people pulling divers and bait. I strongly

recommend you DO NOT pull bait behind a diving device simply because we need to protect the wild stock and this combo kills fish. We have worked hard to rebuild the wild population, and lets all take care of a very special fish. If we abuse these things, we might not be able to fish at all. A wild steelhead is pretty special...At least to me. Have a great week!"

The mainstem Nehalem River reported mixed results last weekend. Plug pullers did best although the Nehalem is an excellent sidedrifting river. The river rose in recent days and no new reports were available but the water level is forecasted to stay a bit on the high side.

Sturgeon effort has dropped off in Tillamook Bay but fish are still present. Crabbing has made a nice addition to a sturgeon trip. Crabbing remains best in the lower bay near Lyster's corner and crab harbor.

The Guide's Forecast – Steelheading may remain steady this week as water levels are forecasted to fluctuate but with the wide array of options on the north coast, there should always be one fishing well. I use the Wilson River gauge as an indicator. If the river is 5 foot or below on this gauge: <http://www.nwrfc.noaa.gov/river/station/flowplot/flowplot.cgi?TLMO3> I will fish the Wilson or Trask Rivers. The Nestucca also typically fishes well in these conditions. If the Wilson goes above 6 foot, smaller streams like the Kilchis, Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem are all options. If the Wilson falls to around 4 foot, the mainstem Nehalem is a great option. All north coast rivers seem to be fishing quite well this season. Most guides feel we are in for a good run in March. There have been years however that the majority of fish return prior to mid-March and water conditions dictate this type of situation. It's too early to tell but by the action we are witnessing on these streams, we are certainly in the thick of the run.

The K11 Xtreme Kwifish have been working well for all that have tried them. They are new on the market and the last greatest gift that Buzz Ramsey left sportanglers prior to his departure of Luhr Jensen. These plugs are going fast so call ahead to verify that stores are stocked. Side drifters will have to match the water conditions. In higher flows, bigger offerings produce nicely. In lower flows, smaller, more subtle colors are working well. It looks like a high flow week depending on which river system you intend to fish.

Tides are not great for Tillamook Bay sturgeon and crabbers could experience some unfavorable conditions this week. High seas and a cold front will likely keep many anglers from fishing Tillamook Bay. On one hand, with little competition, fishing could be good but weather and water factors are not adding up for productive fishing.

Central & South Coast Reports – Bottom fishing off the central Oregon coast has been rewarding whenever boats can get out safely.

Pro Guide Bill Kremers (541 754 6411) writes this week with a report and some good advice, "I did run one trip out of Depoe on Saturday. Bottom fishing was good for both ling cod and rock fish. We did have to move around some as the fish would go off the bite once we made a pass or two on a reef. The lings were between ten and twenty pounds. On the way back, I had a vehicle rear end me on Highway 20 when a vehicle head of us of decide to stop in the middle of road. The excuse of the driver who hit my boat was that my trailer lights were not working. Fortunately I was able to prove to the state police that they were working and the driver end up with a ticket and smash vehicle - North River builds a tough boat. The lesson is that it could have been serious for me if my trailer were not working - so everyone please check your trailer lights. It cost me about \$200 to keep my lighters working on my drift boat trailer and sled trailer, but that is real cheap compared to being sued."

The Siletz and Alsea are dropping rapidly back into shape and should fish well this weekend.

Steelheading on the Southern Oregon coast was good over last weekend. While most valley anglers are becoming delirious at the prospect of nailing a spring chinook, the real fishery is for coastal metalheads. The rain showers this week should only serve to improve prospects.

As recently as Monday this week, South coast rivers remained in at good condition. Anglers had their way with returning broodstock steelhead on the Wilson and Nestucca rivers.

Cold water which caused a lull in the action on the South Umpqua over the weekend should be alleviated by the rain this week. It's expected to be fishable by Friday. The North Umpqua which was providing fine steelhead action prior to the last storm is on about the same schedule. Mild tides this weekend are likely to slow the sturgeon bite below Reedsport.

The Coos and Coquille rivers were high and muddy at the last report.

As with all of the larger river systems, the Rogue will be slower to recover from the deluge which hit overnight Monday this week. The lower river was high and swift mid-week, but should be fit for plunking by the weekend. The report from Gold Beach is "no chinook, yet." The Grants Pass stretch will drop into shape before the lower river. This latest freshet is hoped to rejuvenate steelheading action which had stalled last week.

Pro Guide Ken Streater (800-797-4293) adds this, "This has been a great week for steelhead on virtually every southern Oregon river. The Rogue in the Grants Pass area and near the coast has been real strong, with double digit landings coming from many of the boats. Water levels have been steady as the cold and drier weather has given the mountains a chance to dry up a bit. The Chetco and Sixes did well for a few days but the water got pretty low for the best fishing (how about that for a reverse problem this winter!) but it has shot up in the past two days to good levels with this latest storm. Even though the rivers are colder than normal the fish are still biting. More colorful lures are working well. The bottom line seems to be this on the southern Oregon rivers right now: if one river may be a bit too low or too high to fish, others right around the corner are doing great. So, go fishing in southern Oregon for world-class steelhead. You can keep two a day, including one wild steelhead if it is over 24 inches. And, spring chinook are hopefully on the way!"

Southwestern beaches remain closed to razor clamming. This week's rain put the kibosh on crabbing in bays and estuaries.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Steelhead fishing in the Grande Ronde River continues this week at a good and reliable pace of 6 to 7 hours per fish and the Willowa River is coming on line with a catch rate of about 5 hours per fish reports **pro guide Mac Huff (1-800-940-3688)**. There are lots of fish to be caught and lots of people catching, but the statistics suggest that old maxim that 10 percent of the anglers are catching 90 percent of the fish, because there are anglers that are averaging well below 2 hours per fish. Water levels usually - and this year there seems to be no "usual" - remain relatively low, 2,000 cfs or so, until about March 10, then runoff begins and has a greater influence on days of good fishing and even days of any fishing."

Owyhee fly fishers are finding a new river which was reconfigured by the last torrential rains. Channels have been cut and with the water down to an easily fishable level, angling has been very good with dark-colored flies fished in these deep slots. Don't bother rising early to pursue trout here. The fish aren't stirring 'til after noon.

Northwest Trout - Henry Hagg Lake opens Saturday, March 4th. According to the ODFW, 18,000 hatchery rainbows eight to ten inches will be planted this week along with 450 "trophy" trout to 16 inches. The agency indicates correctly that it takes time for these fish to acclimate, but they will (and do) bite right away. Look for freshly planted trout to move in schools around the perimeter of the lake.

Having been raised in concrete ponds, they'll stay in shallow water for two weeks or so. Bank anglers will see flurries of action as these pods of fish move past, so patience is truly a virtue. No need moving to find hatchery trout; they'll come to you.

Also scheduled for stocking this week are Huddleston Pond, Sheridan Pond, St. Louis Pond, Alton Baker Pond, Cottage Grove Reservoir, E. E. Wilson Pond and Junction City Pond.

From an ODFW Bulletin which arrived mid-afternoon on March 2nd: "Young people interested in angling can find a great fishing opportunity March 11 at Cottage Grove Ponds in Cottage Grove. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is stocking 1,000 rainbow trout into Garden Lake as part of the Youth Angling Enhancement Program, now in its third year. ODFW staff and volunteers will be available from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. to provide access to fishing equipment and angling instruction. Contact the Springfield ODFW office at 541-726-3515 for more information."

SW Washington - As of today (Feb. 22), a month and a half into the season, dippers had taken only a handful of **smelt** from the Cowlitz River. "Conditions looked pretty good a couple of weeks ago, but the smelt just didn't materialize," said Joe Hymer, WDFW fish biologist. "It isn't over yet, but the current prognosis isn't that great."

Hymer, who has monitored the smelt run for years, cited several reasons for diminished expectations. First, the smelt harvest by commercial boats in the mainstem Columbia River has dropped off in recent days. Second, the assembly of seals and cormorants at the mouth of the Cowlitz have largely dispersed. And third, the water temperature in the Cowlitz, chilled by recent cold weather, is currently registering 37 degrees. "Smelt like it around 42 degrees or higher," Hymer said.

But there is still a chance that smelt could run up the Cowlitz in harvestable numbers before the season ends March 31, Hymer said. "We've seen the smelt arrive in March before," he said. "It's just a question of whether they show up before we run out of time."

Anglers fishing for **sturgeon** and steelhead haven't done much better, said Wolf Dammers, another WDFW fish biologist working out of the southwest regional office in Vancouver. Of 13 boat anglers fishing the Bonneville, The Dalles and John Day pools from Feb. 13-19, none landed a legal-size sturgeon although they averaged more than one sub-legal per rod.

Steelhead catches were also slow that week, largely due to low flows on the Columbia's tributaries, Hymer said. "First we had too much water, now we don't have enough," he said. "On most of the tributaries, we're back to hoping for some more rain."

Once the skies open up, the Kalama and Cowlitz rivers are probably the best bet for steelhead, Hymer said. "There's still time for some good fishing on those rivers if we get some rain."

Meanwhile, Hymer noted that Columbia River anglers have caught several **spring chinook salmon** in recent days. Fishing rules adopted by Washington and Oregon allow anglers to catch and keep adipose fin-clipped chinook caught below the I-5 bridge at least through April 19. The fishery runs seven days a week. "We're just starting to see the early arrivals," Hymer said. "We're hoping to see a lot more spring chinook in the weeks ahead."

North Central Washington – With 50-degree days - and nights barely below freezing - the Columbia Basin might just warm up enough to thaw ice on dozens of lakes that open to fishing on March 1. "A little wind would help, too," said WDFW district fish biologist Jeff Korth of Moses Lake. The largest and usually most popular of these early-opening lakes - Burke and Quincy on the Quincy Wildlife Area - were still solid as of mid-February, preventing hatchery crews from stocking the 5,000 catchable-size (9-10-inch) **rainbow trout** scheduled for each. Korth said both lakes were treated last fall to reduce an

over-abundance of sunfish. "So until we get them back to growing trout," he said, "the only fish available this season will be those catchables." Once they do go in, Korth expects Burke and Quincy to provide a fair fishery for the first few weeks of the season. About 20,000 rainbow fingerlings will be stocked in each lake later in the spring, he said. "We do the best we can after a rehabilitation treatment," he said, "but the real payoff comes a year and more later."

Korth said the best bet in the Basin for the second year running will be Martha Lake near the town of George. "Last year's opener was good there with an average of 4.1 trout per angler," he said. "This year we've added some catchables as 'insurance,' although Martha has to make it on the strength of the 11,200 fingerlings we put in there last spring."

Fish-eating cormorants have not been as big a problem at Martha as in the past, he noted. The Caliche lakes - Upper, Lower and West - have had inconsistent fingerling survival, possibly due to cormorant predation. But Korth thinks fishing in those lakes could be good this year if the fingerlings planted last spring survive. Upper Caliche received 6,500 fingerling rainbows, Lower Caliche got 5,000 and West Caliche 500 last spring.

Dusty Lake, on the Quincy Wildlife Area, is in great shape, but usually gets off to a slow start because it's so deep and fish remain suspended longer, Korth said. Since its 2003 rehabilitation, the lake has been well stocked with trout, including 1,000 one-and-half-pound triploid rainbows, 3,000 catchable-size rainbow, 8,000 fingerling rainbow and 1,000 fingerling **tiger trout** two years ago. "That means there should be a fair number of two and three year-old fish in the catches this year," Korth said. Last year Dusty was stocked with 8,300 rainbow fingerlings, 2,000 brown trout fingerlings, and 800 tiger trout fingerlings, so yearlings will also be plentiful. Anglers need to remember that selective fishery rules are in effect on Dusty Lake - no bait, a single barbless hook and a one-fish limit.

Two other waters that open March 1 under selective gear rules - Lenice and Nunnally lakes in WDFW's Crab Creek Wildlife Area just east of Beverly - should also be pretty good, Korth said. Both have been receiving regular plants of one-and-a-half-pound triploid rainbows to boost fingerling survival against an onslaught of sunfish. Last year's fingerling plant in Lenice Lake included 9,400 rainbows, 3,000 tiger trout, and 4,500 **brown trout**. Nunnally Lake received 12,000 rainbows and 4,500 browns. Korth says surviving yearlings from those plants should be 14 inches by now. There should also be some carryovers from earlier years' fingerling plants, now running 16 to 18 inches.

Lake Lenore, north of the town of Soap Lake, will also open March 1 under selective gear rules. Korth says three to four year-old **Lahontan cutthroat trout** at about three to five pounds should be numerous this year. Lake Lenore, where fishing is catch-and-release until June, receives about 55,000 fingerlings annually.

Other waters opening March 1 in the Columbia Basin include the Quincy Wildlife Area's small "walk-in" lakes. Among them, Crystal, Cup and Spring lakes have been the most consistent. Fingerling rainbows are stocked as follows: Cascade, 500; Cliff, 1,000; Crystal, 1,000; Cup, 1,000; Dot, 500; Scout, 600; Lower Spring, 500; and Upper Spring, 1,000. Yearling trout from these plants range from 9 to 12 inches, and carryovers can be found from 14 to 18 inches.

Korth notes that some Basin waters that used to open March 1 were rehabilitated in 2004, delaying their opening until April 1. These waters include the Hampton Lakes (Upper and Lower), Hen Lake and the Pillar-Widgeon Lakes (Pillar, Gadwall, Shoveler, Lemna, Poacher, Snipe, Cattail, Sago, Hourglass, Widgeon).

On the north end of the region, Spectacle Lake in Okanogan County also opens on March 1, but WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff says it won't have fish to catch until April. Spectacle was rehabilitated last fall, he explained, and it won't be re-stocked with trout until the ice is out near the end of March.

"With our recent cold snap adding to the ice cover, Davis Lake in the Methow Valley and Sidley Lake near Oroville might offer some good rainbow trout fishing," he said. Jateff also noted that **steelhead** fishing in the upper Columbia River system has slowed due to lower water temperatures.

South Central Washington - Stocking of hatchery **rainbow trout** in Yakima Valley lakes and ponds begins Feb. 27 and will continue through March 17. "Since most of our lakes are open year round, anglers can start fishing immediately," said WDFW district fish biologist Eric Anderson of Yakima. Catchable-size trout, 10-12 inches long and weighing about one-third pound, make up the bulk of the plants. Limited numbers of larger jumbo trout (about a pound each) are also scheduled for some waters, Anderson said.

In the Yakima area, hatchery crews are stocking Granger Pond, I-82 Ponds 4 and 6, Myron Lake, Rotary Lake, Sarge Hubbard Park Pond and Wenas Lake. In the Kittitas Valley, the early stocked lakes include Denmark Pond, Fio Rito Lakes, Mattoon Lake, McCabe Pond and Woodhouse Ponds. Anderson said many of these lakes were stocked last fall and still have some carryovers from those plants. There should also be some rainbows in the one-and-a-half to five-pound range in a few of those lakes, including North Fio Rito, Mattoon, I-82 Pond 4, Rotary and Myron Lakes.

Anderson said hatchery trout plants continue through early summer to maintain heavily-fished waters. The complete [fish stocking list](#) is available at WDFW's South Central Region Office in Yakima (1701 S. 24th Ave., phone 509-575-2740), or on the WDFW website. Anglers can also check a list, updated [weekly](#), to see which lakes were recently planted. "Additional lakes at higher elevations in the region will be stocked as the weather continues to warm up and the snow and ice packs recede," Anderson said. "Our next big wave of stocking effort will occur in April." Anderson reminded anglers to check the fishing rules pamphlet for special regulations on gear and catch on some waters.

WDFW fish biologist Jim Cummins reported a few fly fishers recently working the catch-and-release area in the Yakima River canyon. "I'm not sure how successful they were with the cold water temperatures," he said. "Ice has been flowing in the river early in the day, but seems to be gone by afternoon as air temperatures increase above freezing." Cummins noted that some lakes may be ice covered, but are likely not safe for fishing.

Puget Sound – A stretch of calm weather has given anglers a new opportunity to chase **blackmouth**. Decent numbers of chinook have been reported in several areas, particularly Saratoga Passage between Whidbey and Camano islands. The Baby Island area and the "Racetrack," located between Hat Island and Camano Head, are also producing some blackmouth. In the San Juan Islands, anglers are hooking chinook, including reports of a 27-pounder in Lopez Pass. "I'm hearing there are some fish out there, along with some bait," said Steve Foley, a WDFW fish biologist.

Recent creel surveys show anglers are having some success. At the Everett Ramp, 44 anglers hauled in 17 chinook on Feb. 18, and 83 fishers landed 23 blackmouth the following day. At Camano Island's public ramp, 75 anglers checked in 10 chinook on Feb. 18, while 82 fishers accounted for 10 blackmouth on Feb. 19. Elsewhere that day, 26 anglers hauled in nine chinook at the Bellingham Ramp, while 39 fishers landed nine blackmouth at the Washington Park Ramp the same day.

Anglers fishing in marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands) and 9 (Admiralty Inlet) have a daily bag limit of one salmon in both areas. Those fishing in marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay) and 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) have a daily limit of two salmon, but wild chinook must be released. Unlike hatchery fish, wild chinook have an intact adipose fin.

Time is running out for **steelhead** anglers in the northern Puget Sound area. Most area rivers, including the Snohomish, Nooksack and Wallace, close to steelhead fishing Feb. 28. Steelhead fisheries on the north fork Stillaguamish and the Skykomish rivers close by emergency rule March 1. The wild

winter steelhead return to those two rivers is expected to reach only 36 percent of the goal, prompting the closure. "Because of the low returns, we need to minimize hooking mortality and disturbances of spawning fish," said Bob Leland, WDFW steelhead manager.

Most areas of the Skagit River, however, remain open for the harvest of hatchery steelhead through March 15, then switch to catch-and-release from March 16 through April 30. Wild steelhead are distinguished from hatchery fish by their intact adipose and ventral fins. On the Sauk River, the catch-and-release fishery begins March 1. Anglers planning to fish for steelhead in northern Puget Sound should check the [2005/2006 Fishing in Washington](#) pamphlet and WDFW's Emergency Rule Changes, which are located on the same website.

Olympic Peninsula – The line-up for the next few weeks includes razor clams, blackmouth and steelhead. But it could also include some changeable weather, as anyone who has gone fishing during the past month well knows.

Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager, said he is advising everyone planning to participate in the **razor-clam** dig Feb. 24-26 to bring warm, waterproof clothes. "We've had some big waves and rough weather during the past two openings," Ayres said. "We're hoping for better conditions this time, but it's always best to prepare for cold, wet weather."

Beaches open for digging during the three-day opening include those at Long Beach, Mocrocks, Copalis, Twin Harbors and Kalaloch. As in previous openings this season, no digging will be allowed at any beach before noon.

As always, Ayres recommends that diggers hit the beach at least an hour before low tide for best results. Evening low tides during the three-day dig are:

- Friday, Feb. 24: 3:43 p.m. +0.4 ft.
- Saturday, Feb. 25: 4:37 p.m. -0.2 ft.
- Sunday, Feb. 26: 5:25 p.m., -0.5 ft.

Diggers may take no more than 15 razor clams and must keep the first 15 taken, regardless of size or condition. They also must carry a valid 2005-06 fishing license and keep their clams in a separate container.

Once this week's dig is over, WDFW will determine whether enough clams remain to be harvested under this year's quota for another afternoon dig in late March and still provide a series of morning digs in April. News about late-season digs will be announced in mid-March.

Meanwhile, participants in the Discovery Bay Salmon Derby caught a break during Presidents Day weekend, when rough weather gave way to clear skies and relatively calm seas. Todd Quisenberry of Poulsbo took the top prize of \$3,250 for a 19-pound, 15-ounce **blackmouth** caught on a squid hootchie. Sixty-five of the 592 other participants also caught salmon, ranging from 19 pounds to just over 3 pounds.

"That's about average for these waters at this time of year," said Larry Bennett, a WDFW technician who checked fish at the event. Those fish were caught in marine areas 6, 7 and 9, reflecting the expanded boundaries of this year's tournament. Blackmouth fishing continues in those areas, as well as in marine areas 11, 12 and 13.

In the **steelhead** fishery, the Hoh River has been getting the most attention, because cold weather has substantially reduced flows in the Quillayute River system. On the lower Hoh, 161 anglers caught 44 steelhead, including 32 wild fish (of which 23 were released). On the upper Hoh, 87 anglers caught 34 steelhead, releasing all 27 of the wild ones.

Mike Gross, WDFW fish biologist, reminds anglers that selective gear rules will take effect on the Hoh starting March 1, when anglers will be required to release any wild steelhead they catch. Gross also reminds anglers that the Hoh will close to all steelhead fishing April 1 - rather than the usual April 16 end date - because of low run returns.

"But fishing on the Quillayute system and other area rivers should pick up once we get some more rain," Gross said. The same could also be said of the Wishkah, the Humptulips and other rivers in the Grays Harbor area, which have also been running low in recent days. Even so, anglers have been catching - and releasing - some nice wild steelhead on the Chehalis and Skookumchuck rivers, said Hal Michael, another WDFW fish biologist. "We also have a good number of hatchery steelhead returning to the Skookumchuck."

Eastern Washington - March 1 marks the opening of the Tucannon River impoundments in Columbia County, but in mid-February only two of the seven lakes were free of enough ice to allow fish stocking. Doug Maxey, of WDFW's Tucannon Fish Hatchery, said he hoped to have all of the lakes stocked with **rainbow trout** before the opener, but it depends on weather. "Big Four in particular is always most difficult when we have ice," Maxey said. "So it's possible that it won't get fish before the first. The first two lakes we stocked this week - Rainbow and Blue - have only about one-eighth open water, just enough to get the fish in. Even if we get the others stocked they might not be very easy to fish." Forecasts indicate a slight warming trend, he noted, so anglers planning on an opening day trip to the Tucannon probably need to keep their fingers crossed.

Rainbow Lake received 3,000 catchable-size (about one-third pound) rainbows and 100 "jumbos" (about two-third pounders) and Blue Lake received 3,500 catchables and 100 jumbos. Beaver Lake is slated to get 500 catchables, Big Four should get 3,000 catchables and 300 jumbos, Deer is slated for 1,000 catchables, Spring will get 2,000 catchables and 100 jumbos, and Watson is slated to receive 2,500 catchables and 100 jumbos. All of the lakes will be stocked several times again through June; check out [total allotments](#) on WDFW's Eastern Washington regional webpage. Anglers heading for the Tucannon lakes should be prepared for possible travel delays on the river road through the Wooten Wildlife Area, where post-wildfire helicopter salvage logging is under way. To further protect public safety during those operations, some of the area's campgrounds near the fishing lakes are also not available for use. Check the status of [Wooten Wildlife Area access](#) on the website or by calling 509-843-1530.

Other March 1 openings in the region are Coffeepot Lake in Lincoln County and Amber and North Silver lakes in Spokane County - all still iced up as of mid-February. Chris Donley, WDFW district fish biologist, said warmer weather and wind are needed to open access to those waters. When that happens, Coffeepot should be very good for **rainbow trout** on selective gear, which is the rule, along with a two trout daily catch limit. Amber is open only for catch-and-release fishing, and should also be very good for both rainbow and **cutthroat trout**, which grow well in that lake. North Silver Lake has not been stocked because of chronic low water problems, Donley said, so there won't be much to catch.

The recent cold snap temporarily restored some ice-fishing for trout at Fourth of July Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line and Hog Canyon Lake in Spokane County, but anglers are urged to be cautious when warming trends occur and ice deteriorates. Those lakes, along with Williams Lake in northern Stevens County, remain open through March. Waitts Lake in southern Stevens County, which has produced some nice trout through the winter, including recent hauls of 15-inch-plus rainbows and 18-inch browns, closes Feb. 28. It will re-open April 29 after hatchery trout stocking and net-pen releases.

Lake Roosevelt continues to produce **kokanee** and net-pen-reared **rainbow trout**. WDFW Ford Fish Hatchery specialist Ace Trump said during two recent fishing trips with his son to the Spring Canyon

area just east of Coulee Dam they caught a kokanee and three or four rainbows each time within about four hours. The rainbows were 17 to 18 inches and the kokanee were 16 inches.

Steelhead fishing has been excellent on the Grande Ronde in the Snake River drainage, said WDFW Lyons Ferry Hatchery Complex Manager Steve Rodgers. "At least it was excellent until the cold weather sent ice floating down the river," he said. For the latest on Snake River steelhead [creel surveys](#), see the department's website.

Reader Email

First, for those who may have missed it:



This photo drew fire from sports anglers, Bill Monroe and guides alike. Typical comments were similar to this one from **Pro Guide Steve Otto (503.377.9696)** who wrote: "Tell me I'm mistaken, but isn't that a picture of a big dead wild steelhead from the Nestucca? Gee great, congrats on your first illegal fish, dude.... "

Ahem. Michael Teague here. The picture was sent to me, misidentified (by me) as a chinook (and verified as such by a couple of others whom I thought should know). TGF wouldn't publish a picture of any illegal activity, especially involving the precious contingent of wild steelhead.

That said, here's another picture sent by the angler and a close-up of the area in question:



Now, with all that information in place, let's re-tell that story.

Imagine a novice golfer hitting a hole in one on his initial swing. Or a bowler rolling a 300 the first time he picks up a ball. Some steelheaders fish all their lives in hopes of landing a 20-pounder. Fishing the

Nestucca on Monday, February 20th, Jesse Hall of Sheridan did it when he nailed his first steelhead.

On rare occasion, a wild steelhead will be caught and released that is a big as this, but a hatchery fish of such proportion is indeed a rarity. I'd be smiling, too.

In the photo which appears on this page, an unfortunate placement of a vase behind the fish in the proximity of the adipose gives this steelhead the appearance of being unclipped. The additional photos which Hall sent show the fish is clearly of hatchery origin and an ODFW official inspected the giant buck shortly after it was taken drifting a pair of corkies..

Comments are welcomed anytime. Encouraged, even. Really.

Kapt Ken Johnson chimes in again this week with the bank fishing report from the lower Willamette, "With all of the rain you might expect raising waters, which is exactly what happened. But, not too much. The "Point" fishermen are still getting out there and catching Steelhead. I haven't personally been on the beach when a Chinook has been taken, but 2-3 Chinook per week are showing up these days according to the official "Beach Maggots" telling me their stories. Something is going on because mini-hoglines are starting to appear in the Willamette River in several locations. That number will grow as we are now into March. March gives everyone the sense of Spring time and it's apparent everyone is getting a bit itchy to get their lines wet. That and a couple of reported Chinook per week will keep the fever growing and growing. "The Blacktop" is seeing a few of its regulars too. So far, mostly observers are hanging out there, but with March here, that will change as they're already cleaning out their Pole Holder holes in "The Top." It's time to reserve your spot and that takes getting up pretty early. The "regulars" have their favorite holes staked but are willing to give them up without "much" complaint if you're there first. You just need plenty of extra coffee and donuts!!! And, a smile with a few spare prawns to share would be nice! See you all there!"

Write to the TGF staff:

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Doug Rees: drees@TheGuidesForecast.com

Michael Teague: SailCat@SailCat.com

Random Links

Do-it-yourself prawn spinner for spring chinook:

<http://steelheaduniversity.com/simpleprawnspinner.html>

Weekly Quote – "The fisherman fishes. It is at once an act of humility and a small rebellion. And it is something more. To him his fishing is an island of reality in a world of dreams and shadow. " - Robert Traver

GOOD LUCK!