

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 5th – January 11th, 2007**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Columbia River sturgeon anglers are focusing their efforts downstream of the I-5 Bridge. Some anglers favor the higher flows and fish have historically congregated near the mouth of the Cowlitz in anticipation of arriving smelt runs. Anglers fishing near the mouth of the Willamette are witnessing the best action with an occasional keeper, but lots of shakers falling to frozen smelt.

Anglers are taking good numbers of sturgeon from the lower Willamette but the vast majority have been too small to keep. St Johns has been productive at times as has Multnomah Channel. The flats seem to be more productive than deep water with sand shrimp a top bait. Meldrum Bar was jammed with rigs as plunkers celebrated New Years and an improving steelhead bite.

Clackamas steelheaders experienced a very slow weekend with many anglers going all day without a bump. Action picked up slightly earlier this week. The occasional winter steelhead and late summer has been taken on Eagle Creek in crowded conditions.

A few steelhead are being taken on the Sandy by anglers anxious for the run to get underway. The water level and clarity were good early this week, but rain is likely to put it out of shape.

With water from Detroit once again being released into the North Santiam, river levels are expected to remain high for the next week or two. A catch-and-release fishery for wild winter steelhead will start up here when run numbers improve.

The ODFW plants rainbow brood trout in local lakes and ponds over the winter months every year. These fish run from 12 to 22 pounds and can be quite a thrill from the smaller waters. This week, 25 brood trout will be planted at Walling Pond, 65 at Walter Wirth Lake and 60 at Junction City Pond.

Northwest – Anglers targeting steelhead on the north coast are not having the success witnessed in years past. Action is fair with best hatchery opportunities coming from the Wilson, Kilchis, North Fork Nehalem and Necanicum Rivers. **Pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** reports, "Nestucca anglers were doing fair while those targeting hatchery fish on Three Rivers continue to come up disappointed. Rising rivers will put most larger streams out of action until the middle of next week." More debris will create navigational hazards for boaters when rivers recede.

Tillamook Bay sturgeon anglers that waited out the last of the outgoing tide over the weekend did good at Bay City. Most fish were undersized but a few quality keepers were taken. Bay crabbing has been good at Lyster's corner but slow in other favored areas.

The ocean has been too rough for recreational vessels to cross but the new years bottomfish quota is waiting to be tapped. The new ling-cod minimum size for 2007 is 22 inches- down from 24 inches in years past. Action should be good when the large ocean swell subsides which isn't forecasted until at least next week.

Siletz anglers are experiencing fair to good results pulling plugs although about half of the fish taken early this week were natives.

Pro guide Bill Kremers (541-754-6411) reports, "With the mainstem Alsea River still too high to

fish, crowds of anglers jammed the North Fork over the weekend. With numbers of steelhead still low early in the run, catches were sparse.”

Southwest – Most rivers in Southwest Oregon dropped and cleared over the long holiday weekend, providing anglers in a number of locations with improved conditions and catches. Rain started on late Tuesday this week and is forecasted to continue through the week causing south coast rivers to rise again.

The North and mainstem Umpqua delivered quality steelhead although catches were spotty. It's slow to fair on the South Umpqua.

The Coos dropped into fishable shape Saturday, rewarding anglers with fresh, bright steelhead.

Restricted primarily to boat fishing, the Elk produced steelhead earlier this week along with a few bright, late-running Fall Chinook reports **pro guide Jeff Jackson (541-268-6944)**. Use caution here as floodwaters made some major changes in the river.

Rogue River steelheaders were allowed a window of opportunity over the New Years weekend. A strong winter steelhead return is expected on the Rogue which will provide fishing opportunities through March.

Chetco anglers were rewarded with fishable conditions over the long weekend but river levels are on the rise and will put anglers on the bank through the weekend.

Eastern – The Grande Ronde River is expected to stay in fishable condition and will continue to provide excellent opportunity for summer run steelhead this month reports **pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688)**. Anglers often average several opportunities a day this time of year.

SW Washington – Most SW Washington streams will go out with the current weather system. When rivers recede, action should be fair on the Cowlitz, Kalama and Lewis Rivers. Hatchery fish are no longer being recycled on the Cowlitz River but released in nearby lakes instead.

A few smelt have been rumored in the Cowlitz River. The season is set to open on January 6th from 6:00 a.m. to 10 p.m. with a 10 pound per person limit.

Soapbox Update

For Immediate Release Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2007

ODFW Angler and Aquatic Education Program needs instructors

SALEM, Ore — If you have a passion for fishing and want to share your love of the sport with others, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is looking for you.

The ODFW's Angler and Aquatic Education Program is recruiting individuals to become instructors to introduce children and adults to the sport of fishing. You must be at least 21-years-old to participate in the instructor program.

“It is very rewarding to see children and adults excited about fishing and instructors play an important role in making sure the learning environment is a positive experience,” said ODFW Angler and Aquatic Education Program Coordinator Chris Willard.

The Angler and Aquatic Education Program is a certified training program that teaches Angling Skills,

Angler Ethics and Responsibilities, Water Safety and Basic Understanding of Aquatic Ecology.

Training courses are available over the next three months at the following locations; January 27th in Bend, February 17th in Salem and March 3rd in La Grande.

This training will provide individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to successfully share their fishing expertise with others. Programs are conducted throughout Oregon in conjunction with a variety of groups including schools, boys and girls clubs, 4-H, police athletic leagues, scouting troops, Campfire Girls groups, park and recreation departments, senior centers and retail stores.

"Getting involved in the Angler and Aquatic Education Program is a great way to give back to the sport," said Willard.

If interested please contact Chris Willard, ODFW Angler and Aquatic Education Coordinator, at 503-947-6017 (email: chris.a.willard@state.or.us)

Columbia River Fishing Report – Sturgeon effort continues to be light in the lower Columbia despite new opportunities presenting themselves in 2007. Sturgeon fishing has also reopened above Bonneville Dam to McNary. Retention is allowed 7 days per week and catch guidelines will be established for these reservoirs later this month. Greatest amount of catch and effort is taking place near the mouth of the Willamette River. Smelt is the ticket and most anglers are using their supply from previous years. Fresh smelt are rumored for sale in Astoria fish markets with prices nearing \$6.00 per pound. Catches of sturgeon are also rumored near the mouth of the Cowlitz where small numbers of smelt are rumored to have entered the river. Dipping will open 1 day per week (Saturdays) starting on January 6th.

Steelhead effort and success are waning in the John Day area. Bank anglers are catching a few but most fish have moved into tributaries in preparation for the winter spawn. Tributaries of the Snake and upper Columbia will be where the bulk of the success will take place now. The ladder on the Oregon side of McNary is closed. The Washington side ladder will remain open.

The Guide's Forecast – Even if a stronger than anticipated smelt run does arrive, action in the middle river around the Cowlitz will likely be fair at best. Sturgeon have now become accustomed to searching for winter fare in other coastal estuaries as the smelt run has become unreliable. The best action will remain near the mouth of the Willamette as fish seek the warmer water during the winter. For a full days effort, you'll still have to count on luck as keepers are not all that common for everyone fishing. Anglers may want to try the water above Bonneville Dam but be sure to read the health warnings for the area immediately above Bonneville Dam. Smelt will be a top producing bait up there as well along with squid and roll mop herring the further you go upstream.

Try dipping fresh smelt this weekend if you are desperate to get out. The fresh smelt is sure to be a big hit with hungry sturgeon anywhere below the mouth of the Willamette. Half a bait will still produce good results so don't hesitate to conserve bait at these prices and effort.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Willamette Falls 399 on the last day of the year with water visibility less than one foot. Regulations from 2006 remain in place allowing sturgeon retention Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, but may be expanded to allow an additional retention day later in 2007.

Of note is the opening of spring Chinook season on January 1st. Give it a little time. Like four months.

The Guide's Forecast – Once again, debris has become a problem with high water. Sturgeon anglers are likely to score, but should expect to sort a lot of 'shorts' in the course of finding a keeper. Don't neglect shallow flats in your search for a biter and use a variety of baits including some or all: sand shrimp, roll mop herring, squid and of course, smelt. Plunking for steelhead is likely to be off the activities list for a while.

The Santiams are too high to fish and is likely to stay that way for over a week. Foster Dam counts haven't been updated since the first of December, but with fewer than 300 winter steelhead over Willamette Falls, there are too few anywhere in the Santiam system to create a fishery regardless.

The McKenzie crested overnight on Wednesday this week and was dropping Thursday, but between the mud and more rain in the forecast, won't be a possibility for a while.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Although winter steelhead have started entering the Clackamas, fishing has been slow. It's on the rise now and will be unfishable 'til next week at the earliest. Many steelheaders tried their luck on Eagle Creek over the long holiday weekend. With winter steelhead starting to enter the hatchery facility, catches were fair. Just like the rest, it's blown out this week.

By the time the Sandy returns to a fishable state (possibly next week with snow in the forecast), the winter run of broodstock steelhead may actually be underway.

Looking back over 2006 it's interesting to note that ODFW biologist were pleasantly surprised by the strong coho run. Over 10,000 coho entered the Sandy hatchery with numbers at the Eagle Creek facility on the Clackamas exceeding 15,000.

North Coast District Fishing Report – Anglers starting seeing glimmers of hope for a few steelhead that began to show on North Coast streams. Although action was far from hot, consistent steelhead catches were coming from many coastal favorites including the mainstem Nestucca, Wilson, Kilchis, N. Fork Nehalem and Necanicum Rivers. Anglers will still be lucky to get one or two quality fish on a drift and spawned out fish are already being witnessed on some streams. **Pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)** reports, "The Nestucca has been fishing pretty well. Most of the drifts have produced fish for all. Seems they are in little groups, and they are spread through the entire river. Everyone has been doing different techniques, so it is hard to pin point what is doing the best. Have heard that shrimp and corkies, has been doing well on the lower river. This could be subject to change here in the next few days. We are looking at yet another good storm to slow things down, but it should fish well by the end of the week. Three Rivers is just not producing much at all. In fact, it is just a total waste of time for most. Either they are going right by, and taking the main river. Or, someone made a mistake in hatchery production. This could certainly change upon the hour, but there just aren't many fish available. Have a good week, and we will see you on the river..."

A fair number of wild fish are beginning to show on the north coast. Although far from the numbers of February and March, surely a good sign for this early in the season. The wild steelhead runs on the north coast are becoming almost as consistent as the fall Chinook!

Sturgeon fishing on Tillamook Bay has picked up although most of the fish being landed are shakers. An occasional keeper is coming from the Bay City area and shrimp are taking the most strikes. With so much fresh water this season, the crab are staying lower in the estuary but debris is a navigational hazard when underway.

Crabbing is good near Lyster's Corner with shells well filled out. Seals are working the area too so be sure to cage your baits.

The Guide's Forecast – Recent rainfall will put rivers back out of shape but smaller streams could fish for short periods of time over the weekend. Higher drifts and fishing holes will produce the best results as fish make tracks in higher flows. The Highway 30 streams like Big Creek and Gnat Creek along with the Necanicum, N. Fork Nehalem and Three Rivers will produce the best chances. Use large baits and drift bobbers with lots of scent to draw attention to your lures. Hatchery fish may utilize smaller tributaries to spawn in but may be closed to fishing. Larger streams likely won't fish until the middle of next week at the earliest. The Trask River at the Dam Hole will be a good option for bank anglers seeking a mostly catch and release experience.

Sturgeon anglers don't have very good tides to work with this weekend on Tillamook Bay. Although you don't need a minus tide to stimulate sturgeon to bite, it concentrates fish better in the deeper slots. The weaker tide series we are going to experience on the coast this week is better left up to crabbers but we're not going to see very favorable conditions for that either. It may be a good weekend to tie steelhead rigs to head to Washington to dip smelt.

Netarts Bay will be the best option for crabbers. Seals will be working pots over there too.

Central & South Coast Reports – Anglers are hoping that high, muddy water will finally jump-start the estuary sturgeon fishery below Reedsport. One wild steelhead may be kept on the mainstem and North Umpqua but it's finclipped only on the South Fork which is open up to Jackson Creek Bridge.

Coos/Coquille offer good prospects as water recedes. Use cured eggs for best results. South Fork of the Coquille and managed 4 hookups and 3 hatchery steelhead. The Fall Chinook season was a disappointment but prospects are good for a decent winter steelhead run.

Recycling of summer steelhead from the hatchery to Touvelle Park is ongoing and while catches are fair, many of these fish are past their prime.

Pro guide Jeff Jackson (541-268-6944) wrote to tell us how he spent the long holiday weekend, "Just got back from fishing the Elk River for three days. Friday - water still high. Color was a little dirty, but fishable. Nothing going on.

"Sat. was the day. Hooked 5, landed 2. Bright chinook on a wrapped Kwikfish and a hatchery steelhead side drifting eggs. At the takeout a total of 8 fish landed for 12 boats.

"Sun. water still had some good color but dropping quickly. Went 1 for 3, landing a bright chinook.

"Still plenty of chinook in the system, but even though they're bright they're not cutting all that good.

"Boaters should be advised: the river has changed significantly from last winter. The path you took last year may not be the path to take this year. When in doubt, scout it out. Also, by Sun we had to drag the boat through a few places."

The Elk and Sixes, both small rivers, will be the first to fall into fishable shape on the South coast. The Elk River will drop and clear about one day ahead of the Sixes, but the latter has only wild steelhead available.

Steelheading was excellent on the Rogue River for plunkers over last weekend as most everyone had multiple hookups. As with other South coast rivers, the Rogue has risen and roiled with precipitation this week. When the flow drops to about 18,000 cfs or so, plunking will start to be productive. Anchor fishing is practical at 10,000 cfs. The Rogue was over 30,000 cfs at this writing the afternoon of January 4th with the flow increasing hourly. It will be the middle stretch below Grants Pass which will come into shape and start to fish first, however, and bait will be the best choice for the winter steelhead which should be in that area by then. The limit in the Rogue from Graves Creek to the mouth as of January 1st is two steelhead per day, one of which may be wild, but only five unclipped fish may be retained for the year.

The Chetco is blown out with the storm and probably won't fish until next week. The slide which occurred upriver on New Year's Eve will make this river particularly volatile with any further precipitation even after the current rains subside. Steelheading is expected to be very good here when conditions are right.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688) reports, "Winter keeps lurking around northeast Oregon, but for the past couple weeks the weather has been moderate (after all, this *is* steelhead fishing!) and catching has been just fine with catch rates around 4 hours per fish. My results for the past couple weeks has been nothing but bucks, which suggests that fish are moving up the river and, since bucks lead the run, many more fish are on their way and we have consistently matched the state creel survey results at about 4 hours per fish. Expect January to remain chilly in the mornings with temperatures moving into the 40s most afternoons. February's expectations are for similar water conditions as January, but somewhat milder temperatures. Oregon's steelhead fishing remains excellent into early March before fish move out of the Troy area. In Washington steelhead fishing, particularly for gear angling, gets even better after mid-March."

Northwest Trout – Try This week Walling Pond Walter Wirth Lake or Junction City Pond for brood trout over the weekend with rivers out of shape. Next week, Sheridan Pond, Huddleston Pond and West Salish pond will get brooders.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report December 13th – January 9th:

North Puget Sound

Effort has been light on Puget Sound, but stalwart anglers venturing out onto the saltwater have found some **chinook salmon** in recent days, especially in Marine Area 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay). "Fishing for blackmouth has been pretty good recently for some anglers," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fisheries biologist. "We've seen a number of keeper-fish caught in the selective fishery and even a few further south in Marine Area 10 near Jefferson Head and Kingston."

Anglers participating in the selective fishery in marine areas 8-1 and 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) can keep up to two hatchery chinook per day, so long as the fish measure at least 22 inches in length. Wild chinook salmon, which have an intact adipose fin, cannot be brought aboard the boat.

In Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton), anglers have a daily limit of one salmon, and chinook must be at least 22 inches long. Thiesfeld reminds anglers that **crabbing** also is a possibility in Marine Area 10, where the fishery is open seven days a week through Jan. 2. "If you're in that marine area, you can drop a crab pot while fishing for blackmouth," Thiesfeld said.

Crabbing also is open each day through Jan. 2 in marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu), 6 (eastern

Strait of Juan de Fuca), 9 (Admiralty Inlet), 12 (Hood Canal) and 13 (south Puget Sound). Other waters - including marine areas 7S (San Juan Islands), 7E (Anacortes to Bellingham), 7N (Bellingham to Pt. Roberts), 8-1, 8-2 and 11 (Tacoma-Vashon Island) - are closed to sport crabbing for the season.

Meanwhile, the **steelhead** fishery, which usually peaks around Christmas, is under way in the region. And fishing continues to be fair for **chum salmon** in a number of rivers, including the Green, Nooksack, Skagit and Skykomish, said Thiesfeld, who noted that salmon fishing closes in those and most other rivers after Dec. 31.

Anglers should check WDFW's *2006/2007 Fishing in Washington* pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>) for more information on fishing closures and regulations.

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

Tired of turkey, ham and other traditional holiday fare? Anglers and shell fishers around the region can choose from a number of other options in the days ahead, including fresh-caught steelhead, salmon and - if all goes as planned - razor clams.

For the second straight year, favorable tides have allowed WDFW to schedule a **razor clam** dig over the New Year's holiday. So long as marine toxin levels remain within the acceptable range, an evening dig will be held Dec. 31 at all five ocean beaches - including Copalis - followed by another evening of digging Jan. 1 at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks and Kalaloch. One beach, Twin Harbors, is also scheduled to remain open for an evening dig Jan. 2. Final word on the dig will be issued about a week ahead of time, after a final round of marine toxin tests has been completed.

"Razor clam digging has become a New Years tradition for tens of thousands of people, and we don't want to let them down," said Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager. "The tides look good for digging, and we'll let people know whether it's a 'go' as soon as we can."

For best results, Ayres recommends that people start digging at least one hour before low tide. No digging will be allowed before noon any day. Evening low tides for the upcoming dig are as follows:

- o Sunday, Dec. 31, (4:00 p.m., -0.0 ft.) all beaches, including Copalis
- o Monday, Jan. 1, (4:53 p.m., -0.3 ft.) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks and Kalaloch
- o Tuesday, Jan. 2, (5:43 p.m., -0.5 ft.) Twin Harbors only

Under state rules, harvesters are allowed to take no more than 15 razor clams and must keep the first 15 they dig, regardless of size or condition. Each digger's clams must be kept in a separate container.

Meanwhile, **steelhead** fishing is heating up on rivers throughout the region. The Bogachiel/Quillayute system was the biggest draw during the first 10 days of December, when 433 anglers reported catching 243 hatchery steelhead and five wild, unmarked steelhead. Forty-two of the hatchery fish and four of the wild fish were released.

Although the Hoh, Queets and Calawah rivers drew far fewer anglers, all north coast rivers are likely to see more action in the weeks ahead, said Mike Gross, a WDFW fish biologist. "If past years are any guide, we should see angler effort - and catch rates - pick up through New Year's Day," he said.

Farther south, steelhead fishing is also picking up on the Humptulips, Satsop and Wynoochee rivers, particularly around Black Creek, said Scott Barbour, another WDFW fish biologist. Anglers are also still picking up some bright coho salmon in the Satsop and Wishkah rivers, he said. "Those are some nice, big fish," said Barbour, who also recommended plunking for steelhead on the Chehalis River this time of year.

"Steelhead fishing should continue to improve, so long as the rivers don't blow out," Barbour said. "Snow or a little rain would be OK, but another deluge could put the fishery on hold for a while."

Anglers are still catching **chum salmon** "hand over fist" at Minter Creek, but fishing remains slow on the Nisqually River, where erosion has turned the water the color of a latte, said Hal Michael, WDFW district fish biologist. "Visibility can be measured in millimeters, and I don't see that situation improving anytime soon," he said. Anglers can catch four chum salmon per day at Minter Creek, which is open to salmon fishing through Dec. 31. The Nisqually River remains open through Jan. 31, with a limit of six salmon, only two of which may be adults. Wild, unmarked chinook must be released.

For these and other fisheries, anglers are advised to review WDFW's *Fishing in Washington* rules pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/reggs/fishreggs.htm>) for regulations currently in effect.

Saltwater fishing has been slow in most areas of Puget Sound, but some adventuresome fishers are still catching **crab** in Marine Area 13. "People have to work pretty hard at it - often sinking their pots 100 feet or more - but they are getting one or two Dungeness crab per pot," Michael said.

o The crab season will remain open seven days per week in marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu), 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 9 (Admiralty Inlet), 10 (Seattle/Bremerton), 12 (Hood Canal) and 13 (south Puget Sound) through Jan. 2, unless the catch quotas for those areas are reached before then. All other areas of Puget Sound, including Marine Area 11 (Tacoma/Vashon), are closed to crabbing for the season.

Southwest Washington:

Hatchery winter steelhead have taken center stage on most tributaries to the lower Columbia River, although some boat anglers fishing the North Fork Lewis River have been catching bright fall chinook salmon weighing up to 50 pounds. Those hoping to claim one of those Lewis River hogs for themselves will have to hurry, because anglers must release any wild, unmarked chinook salmon they catch on the river starting Jan. 1, said Joe Hymer, WDFW fish biologist. "Most, if not all, of the chinook salmon being caught on the Lewis River are wild, so the retention fishery effectively ends on the last day of the year," he said.

Returns of **winter steelhead** got off to a fast start at the Cowlitz River hatcheries in early December, prompting fishery managers to increase the daily limit to six hatchery fish per day through Jan. 31. The six-fish daily limit is now in effect from the mouth of the Cowlitz River to Mayfield Dam and from the mouth of Blue Creek to Spencer Road. WDFW also extended the rule allowing anglers to fish up to 100 feet below the Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery barrier dam through January, rather than allow it to expire Dec. 31 as originally planned.

"It's clear that we'll have plenty of fish available for hatchery broodstock, so the rest are available for harvest," said Hymer, noting that 792 hatchery winter steelhead had returned to Cowlitz River hatcheries through the first week in December. That compares to 53 fish by the same time last year. During the week ending Dec. 10, the 72 anglers checked in creel surveys had caught 16 hatchery steelhead, six adult coho and one adult chinook. Anglers fishing the Cowlitz near Blue Creek were catching steelhead, while those fishing near the barrier dam were mostly catching coho. Steelhead were a mixture of bright winter-run fish and darker, recycled summer-run fish. Ten other anglers checked on Blue Creek, a tributary to the Cowlitz, had landed six steelhead and released one. Some of the region's best catch rates have been at Lake Scanewa (Cowlitz Falls Reservoir), where 50 boat anglers landed 38 adult coho and released 34 others during the week ending Dec. 10. Of the eight bank anglers checked, one had released a coho salmon.

Although hatchery steelhead returns have been outpacing last year's count on the Cowlitz River, they have been lagging somewhat on the Kalama and Lewis rivers. On the Kalama, 28 winter steelhead had returned to the Kalama Falls hatchery as of Dec. 6, compared to 87 by the same date last year. On the Lewis River, 153 winter steelhead had returned to the hatchery as of Dec. 5, compared to 460 last year.

"That doesn't mean a lot this early in the run," Hymer said. "Let's see what happens after the next big rainstorm." He noted that Colvin Creek, upstream to the power lines below Merwin Dam, opens to hatchery steelhead fishing Dec. 16, although salmon fishing in that area remains closed until Jan. 1.

Sturgeon fishing was slow through the first week of December on the lower Columbia River from the Wauna power lines to Bonneville Dam. Anglers looking for **sea-run cutthroat** trout might want to try Riffe Lake, where WDFW planted 200 one-pounders Dec. 5.

Eastern Washington:

The best fishing for **steelhead trout** in the Snake River drainage is on two tributaries - the Grand Ronde and Tucannon rivers. The latest creel checks conducted by WDFW and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) show steelheaders spending an average of less than three hours of fishing per steelhead caught on the Tucannon and three to four hours on the Washington and Oregon sections of the Grand Ronde. Mainstem stretches of the Snake River saw averages of around 10 hours of effort per steelhead. For complete details of the latest creel surveys, see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/snake/index.htm>.

Now is the time to fish Lake Roosevelt - the Columbia River reservoir behind Grand Coulee Dam - which is open to fishing year-round. The star attraction in winter is the half-million **rainbow trout** reared in and released from in-reservoir net pens. Heather Woller, WDFW fish biologist, said the big rainbows are usually biting well from mid-December through January, especially in the lower reservoir from Grand Coulee to Seven Bays. Roosevelt rainbows usually range from 18 to 24 inches.

Trout anglers should probably try fishing Roosevelt instead of the region's four winter-only rainbow lakes. Chris Donley, WDFW central district fish biologist, said recent warm weather and rain have left ice conditions risky for on-ice walking and frustrating for attempted boat launches at Fourth of July Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line and Hog Canyon Lake in southwest Spokane County. "Of course if we get another deep freeze that can all change," he said. When the two lakes are safely fishable, anglers will find a good number of fish in Fourth of July are 14 inches or better, which means a fishing trip could be short because only two of the daily catch limit of five trout can be over 14 inches. Hog Canyon has more 9- to 11-inchers, although enough 14- to 18-inchers to make fishing interesting.

Safety isn't the only concern for trout anglers at the other two winter-only lakes - Williams and Hatch in Stevens County. Curt Vail, WDFW northeast district fish biologist, said that both lakes have very poor fishing because of illegal introductions of **yellow perch** that feed on and out-compete native trout. "And the perch themselves are pretty puny at this point," Vail said.

North Central Washington:

Recent warm weather and rain may have rivers and streams in the region running high and fast, but anglers itching to go after **whitefish** in those waterways have through March 31 to find better fishing conditions. Portions of the Chewuch, Entiat, Methow, Similkameen, and Wenatchee rivers and Sinlahekin Creek opened Dec. 1 for whitefish. Averaging 10 to 13 inches, these bony fish may be best smoked. They are relatively easily caught on maggots, small grubs, stonefly nymphs or sparsely tied artificial flies and small lures fished along the bottom of deep pools.

The daily catch limit is 15 fish using the standard whitefish gear - one single point hook size 14 or smaller (no more than 3/16-inch from point to shank). The gear rule is designed to provide a winter fishing opportunity but minimize the chances of catching other gamefish, which are not legal to harvest at this time.

Bob Jateff, WDFW district fish biologist, reminds anglers of the recently-announced change to the lowermost boundary of the winter whitefish fishery on the Methow River from the mouth at the Hwy. 97 bridge to Gold Creek. That stretch is open to whitefish only and closed to all other fishing. Jateff said that Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed **steelhead** stage in the area near the mouth of the Methow River. "Steelhead fishing is not open in the Methow River this year due to low numbers of returning wild fish," he said. "Closure of the lower area to fishing during the winter whitefish fishery eliminates the potential impacts to these listed fish." Jateff also noted that at this time the Okanogan and Similkameen rivers are closed to fishing for steelhead.

Four Okanogan County lakes - Little Twin near Winthrop, Big and Little Green near Omak, and Rat near Brewster - are providing decent **rainbow trout** fishing. The daily catch limit is five fish and bait is allowed. All four lakes shifted to a catch-and-keep season with standard fishing gear on Dec. 1.

South Central Washington:

WDFW district fish biologist Eric Anderson of Yakima reports that recent rain and snowmelt from warmer weather has the region's rivers and streams flowing high and fast. "That's not conducive to fishing for **whitefish**, so I doubt many anglers have been out for them in recent days," he said. "When conditions settle, though, it's always a productive fishery."

The whitefish season opened on the Bumping, Naches and Tieton rivers Dec. 1. The Columbia River between Vantage and Priest Rapids Dam and the Yakima River are also open for whitefish. Averaging 10 to 13 inches, these bony fish may be best smoked. They can be caught fairly easily using maggots, small grubs, stonefly nymphs or sparsely tied artificial flies and small lures fished along the bottom of deep pools. The daily catch limit is 15 fish. The standard whitefish gear rule requires that anglers use one single-point hook size 14 or smaller (no more than 3/16-inch from point to shank.) The gear rule is designed to provide a winter fishing opportunity while minimizing the chance of catching other gamefish, which are not legal to harvest at this time. Check the fishing rules pamphlet for all details.

Year-round waters that recently received surplus hatchery **rainbow trout** broodstock are still a good bet, Anderson said. "Many of those five- to ten-pound fish are still out there for the taking and - with the recent warm weather - it's all open-water fishing," he said. North FioRito and Mattoon lakes near Ellensburg in Kittitas County each received 125 broodstock. I-82 Pond #4 and Rotary Lake in Yakima County each received 125 fish and Myron Lake in Yakima County received 84.

North Elton Pond, the region's only designated winter-season **rainbow trout** lake, opened Dec. 1 and is also open and easily accessible, Anderson said. The 15-acre lake near Selah in Yakima County was stocked with 2,000 rainbows that average about ¾-pound and 10 to 13 inches. The daily catch limit is two trout.

Reader Email

Regular reader Roger K wrote this week to as, "I used to fish flounder with sand shrimp at Yaquina Bay, but sea lions apparently have wiped them out. Anywhere else you could recommend such as Netarts or ????"

TGF co-editor Michael Teague replied. "The most reliable source for starry flounder is the Columbia Estuary. Areas above and below the Astoria-Megler Bridge on either side of the river are productive.

Bank and boat fishermen both do well in this area. A couple of other reliable bank fishing spots are behind the High School on Necanicum Bay and at the 12th Street Bridge in Seaside. I used to make good catches at Sand Lake and while I have heard that the flounder were recovering there, I haven't confirmed it personally.

"You probably have a favorite rig for flounder, but I have one that has out-fished the conventional terminal tackle used for perch or greenling. I put the sinker on a dropper and the leader below it for these bottom-hugging fish. Hang-ups are a problem since flounder like shallow, sandy areas. I use a strip from the belly of any fish on the side of a herring or anchovy, allowing it to flutter along the bottom, and keep it moving on a slow retrieve. Flounder seem to be attracted to the movement and take the bait very aggressively. It's far more durable (and less expensive) than sand shrimp.

"Incidentally and for reasons unknown, the bag limit in 2007 is a very generous 25 fish per day. I can't imagine keeping that many if they're big enough to be worth cleaning. They are terrific table fare, however, as you probably know.

"Please let me know how you do out there!"

Write to the TGF staff:

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Random Links

Catching Sturgeon on Tillamook Bay:

<http://www.landbigfish.com/articles/default.cfm?ID=553>



Expanded fly-fishing expo to open March 9th & 10th in Albany:

<http://www.statesmanjournal.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070103/OUTDOORS/701030342/1034>

Weekly Quote – "Why does a salmon rise? Why does a small boy cross the street just to kick a tin can?" - Lee Wulff

GOOD LUCK!