

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 26th – February 1st, 2007**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Fishery managers will meet today to decide how leftover keepers from the 2006 fishery will provide opportunity to anglers from the Wauna Powerlines to Bonneville Dam. Recreational fishery advisors favored increasing the retention days per week to four from three.

As the flows continue to moderate, winter steelhead are streaming over Willamette Falls. Counts as of the 21st topped 1,150. The water temperature is gradually increasing with the visibility up to 2.5 feet. Sturgeon fishing has been spotty in the still-cold water of the lower Willamette, but a few keepers have been taken by those willing to move around in order to locate larger fish.

With rumors of earlier arriving spring chinook, a 20 pounder was actually caught by an angler plunking a Spin 'n' Glo off Meldrum Bar the morning of Saturday, January 20th. It was weighed at Fisherman's Marine in Oregon City.

Fishing low and slow in the cold Clackamas River has produced a few steelhead recently with sidedrifted baits producing the best results.

Eagle Creek is extremely low and clear. Expect to encounter plenty of other anglers on weekends.

It's still too early for the Sandy to have sufficient numbers of steelhead to make it worthwhile but a few fish are being taken.

The North Santiam has come down a bit and while still a little high, will fish this weekend. With strong numbers across the falls, the native winter steelhead population will increase proportionately.

Northwest – Excited steelheaders came into a reality check this week as catches slowed on most north coast streams. Although some quality fish are still coming from the larger systems like the Wilson and Nestucca, anglers are playing the tides in the lower reaches instead of river levels. An occasional bright chinook still shows in the catches and these fish must be released. Steelheaders are once again hoping for rain.

Although smaller streams aren't the best option for steelhead, the North Fork Nehalem, Necanicum and Three Rivers are putting out a few steelhead.

Good tides over the weekend will favor Tillamook Bay sturgeon anglers and crabbers can put out pots late in the tide, catching the last trickle of outgoing and the first part of incoming tide. Netarts Bay however has slowed significantly.

A large ocean swell is forecasted over the weekend making bottomfishing on the north coast a poor option.

Clam diggers will have good opportunity in the afternoons this weekend but Clatsop Beaches are not producing results like years past.

Siletz steelheaders experienced fair to good winter steelheading action over the weekend but success significantly slowed early in the week.

Crabbing has slowed on Yaquina Bay with a day's effort yielding keepers in the low single digits.

Alsea steelheaders went fishless late last week with the river low, clear and cold. Steelhead are more challenging to catch in these conditions. The broodstock collection program is getting underway. To participate, call the Alsea hatchery at 541-487-7240.

Southwest – Mild tides over the coming weekend favors crabbing but it's been slow in most bays and estuaries.

Many South coast streams and rivers are low and clear. Rain would improve prospects.

Pro guide Bill Kremers (541 754 6411) reports the Alsea to be low, clear and dropping but a few steelhead are being taken.

Umpqua steelheaders are enjoying the good numbers of fish present with most getting a number of hookups daily. Expect to release a number of unclipped fish but finding a hatchery fish or two shouldn't be a problem now.

Coos and East Fork Millicoma steelheaders were experiencing fair to good fishing over the weekend.

The Rogue has dropped two feet at Agness over the last week which has slowed incoming steelhead. Fishing in the lower river has been spotty. It's been fair in the Grants Pass stretch.

The Chetco River has delivered some great steelheading this year. While it's not over, the level and flow is far too low this week to be productive. Try this one following the next round of precipitation when it's on the drop.

SW Washington – Anglers are finding steelhead success on the Cowlitz and Kalama Rivers. Highest success rates are coming from the Blue Creek area where anglers are coming shy of a 1 fish per rod average.

Kalama River boaters are fishing fine conditions where 1 to 2 fish per boat averages are becoming common.

As is usually the case this time of year, the Columbia mainstem continues to chill drawing smelt back to the estuary and out of reach to recreational dippers. No commercial landings were recorded last week.

Eastern – Trollers are taking a few quality bull trout at Lake Billy Chinook with the warming trend.

Pro guide Rick Arnold (541-480-1570) reports Bull trout are being taken at Lake Billy Chinook.

The Grande Ronde and Umatilla Rivers should experience a jump in steelhead success with the warming trend taking place in this region according to **Pro Guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688)**. Summer run fish don't run large in these systems but good numbers provide excellent opportunity this time of year.

Soapbox Update -

Sportfishing Advocates Applaud Federal Court Decision To Reinstate Fish Passage Center

Ruling is a major victory for sound science and salmon recovery

January 24, 2006 – PORTLAND, Oregon – Representatives of a broad-based coalition of fishing businesses, conservation groups and Indian tribes today applauded a U.S. federal appeals court

decision to order Bonneville Power Association to continue funding the Fish Passage Center, an agency that collects and provides unbiased scientific information about endangered salmon and other fish in the Columbia River Basin.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals' ruling found that the Bonneville Power Administration illegally discontinued funding the Portland, Ore.-based Fish Passage Center, and ordered it reinstated. The court wrote that BPA lacked "a rational basis for its decision" and termed the agency's action "arbitrary, capricious and contrary to law."

"Today, law and science has trumped politics," said Liz Hamilton, executive director of the Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association, and one of the plaintiffs in the case. "For now, at least, the science of salmon remains uncorrupted, despite attempts by this administration to subvert science, silence the messengers, and discredit data that doesn't fit its preconceived notions."

Created by the Northwest Power and Conservation Council under the authority of the Northwest Power Act, the FPC has been collecting, analyzing and providing unbiased scientific information about salmon and steelhead in the Columbia and Snake rivers for the past 20 years.

Bonneville's decision in late 2005 to cut off funding for the FPC effectively stripped Northwest state and tribal fisheries managers of their access to sound salmon science and hindered their ability to participate on equal footing with federal agencies in regional salmon recovery efforts, including the current court-ordered rewrite of the 2005 Biological Opinion (also known as the federal Salmon Plan) for the Columbia and Snake rivers.

When data from the Fish Passage Center figured in a 2005 U.S. district court order ordering BPA to spill water over the dams to aid migrating salmon, rather than running the water through turbines to generate additional electricity revenue, Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, inserted a provision in a spending bill directing Bonneville to eliminate the center's budget.

"Many of our elected officials - federal and state - haven't been honest with us about salmon, dams and water," said Hamilton. "While the Senior Senator from Idaho is certainly entitled to advocate for hydropower interests, it goes too far when science is subverted, and an agency whose mission is simply to provide basic, unbiased data is attacked and undermined. We're delighted that the Court has turned back this insincere and blatant attack; it's a great victory for fish, and an even better day for science. But we still have deep concerns about Bonneville's complicity, and believe the agency's actions, particularly related to protecting and restoring salmon, may warrant further scrutiny and oversight."

"The Ninth Circuit held BPA accountable," said Stephanie Parent of the Pacific Environmental Advocacy Center (PEAC) who filed the petition. Not only does BPA have a duty to fish, it has a duty to the public to engage in good government."

The action to reinstate the Fish Passage center was brought by Northwest Environmental Defense Center, the Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility and the Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association, who were represented by Stephanie Parent of the Pacific Environmental Advocacy Center in Portland, Ore., and joined by the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakima Indian Nation.

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"Dedicated to the preservation, restoration and enhancement of sport fisheries and the businesses dependent upon them."

Columbia River Fishing Report – Effort for sturgeon continues to decline so accurate catch data is hard to obtain. For the few boats targeting sturgeon, success is low- mostly attributed to dropping water temperatures. The Columbia is currently running about 39 degrees and even commercial catches of smelt have dwindled on the mainstem. A few keepers are coming from the Portland to Longview stretch for both boat and bank anglers.

Upstream, Bonneville Pool anglers often see a jump in activity upon the re-opener. Although weather has kept many anglers away, action has not been all that impressive in any of the upper impoundments. It's unlikely to improve until water temperatures are again on the rise.

Walleye anglers are beginning to ply their favorite spots. Catches are in the increase with 7 walleye kept for 2 boats in The Dalles Pool.

The Guide's Forecast – Sturgeon effort and catch may improve slightly with the warming trend. Unless you have a consistent producing spot, your chances for success are not all that high. It will likely be until spring before temperatures become stable enough to motivate sturgeon to bite more aggressively.

When water temperatures draw closer to 42 degrees and up, both smelt and sturgeon should become more active.

Walleye anglers may want to take advantage of good weather patterns to stake out potential producing areas. Walleye action should be improving as we draw closer to the traditional spawning time for these fish. The Dalles and John Day Pools will produce the best results but the Bonneville Pool can also provide ample opportunity.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – As discussed in this space a couple of weeks ago, sturgeon anglers failed to catch the allotted number of legal sturgeon by 4,000 fish in 2006. As a result, an additional day will be added in 2007 for retention of legal-sized fish. The most likely (and most popular) day will be Sunday. ODFW officials believe this will allow anglers to take home an additional 1,000 sturgeon this year, opening the possibility of even more opportunities in 2008.

The areas effected by the extended sturgeon retention days will include the Columbia from Wauna Powerlines to Bonneville Dam, Multnomah Channel and the lower Willamette River. The Columbia estuary from Wauna Powerlines downstream to Buoy 10 is open seven days a week, but the fishing in this stretch heats up in springtime.

An announcement will be made following a meeting Thursday this week, where the rule change will be finalized and graven in stone. No information was yet available late Friday afternoon when TGF goes to "press."

Winter steelhead numbers at Willamette Falls totaled nearly 1,300 as of the 23rd, about four times the total as this time last year. It remains to be seen if the strong early numbers will equate to a larger run of wild steelhead this season. Visibility in the lower river is continuing to improve but water temperatures are hovering stubbornly at the 40-degree mark. The dredging taking place in the vicinity of the Cedar Oak will keep the boat ramp at that location closed until the 1st of February. Commercial nets will be targeting sturgeon every Tuesday and may be working in the lower Willamette through

February 21st.

Spring Chinook are typically a topic of discussion and subject of rumor at this time of year.

Just when the spring Chinook rumor mill was starting to grind out stories, the first verified springer hit the scales at Fishermen's Marine in Oregon City. Local angler Ron Dean had the springer nail his Spin 'N' Glo as he was plunking off Meldrum Bar. The fish was just over the 20-pound mark. Boats have been spotted this week working the lower Willamette in the Oregon City area and below the Falls. So it begins.

The Guide's Forecast – Sturgeon are light biters when the water is cold. Leaving your rod in the holder is likely to result in missed fish, and this when there won't be a lot of opportunities. Smelt is a given at this time of year, but it's a good idea to have other baits on hand as the preference has changed almost daily of late. Among alternate baits to consider would be squid, sand shrimp, herring and nightcrawlers. Keepers will come those moving around to find pods of larger fish. The location, depth and even bait preferences can and has changed each week and sometimes from day to day. A depth finder to help spot fish is a must.

Anglers are trying for springers even though numbers are bound to be miniscule. There's reason to be optimistic about picking up a winter steelhead, however, so size terminal gear accordingly.

The McKenzie River has dropped and is coming into fishable shape. Fly anglers should find some trout willing to take Blue-Winged Olive patterns.

Catches will gradually improve for wild steelhead in the North Santiam as numbers improve. It'll be worthwhile in February or so.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – The Clackamas is at reasonable level, but is getting very clear. As with most Oregon rivers, some rain would improve the water color along with the bite. The lower river is getting a plenty of pressure even on weekdays. Water temps at the Clackamas have finally topped 40 degrees, which combined with stable, fishable levels is reason for optimism. Steelhead are scattered throughout the river with the better catches coming from Barton downstream to the mouth. Both boat and bank anglers have had some success despite increasing pressure. PGE announced last April the start of a project to install a new, improved fish ladder at River Mill Dam, scheduled to be completed in Fall 2006. Unfortunately, construction has run long and the boat ramp has not yet opened.

Not many steelhead are moving up Eagle Creek with the very low, gin-clear water still below 40 degrees. Without precipitation in the forecast, while the water temps will improve, other conditions will deteriorate. About 150 winter steelhead have returned to the hatchery facility, most of which showed prior to the recent colder weather.

Hopeful optimists are taking very few winter steelies on the Sandy where the stocked hatchery fish of yore have been supplanted entirely by later running, first generation offspring of native fish referred to as broodstock. Since these finclipped fish keep the timetable of their wild parentage, numbers are too low this early for the Sandy to be productive. Catches will improve in February and March.

Catches on the Clackamas and Sandy will improve as water temperatures rise and as the run gets into full swing. For an in-depth look at what to expect, see **Random Links**, below!

North Coast District Fishing Report – After a great run of steelheading, anglers working the north

coast streams are finding some tougher conditions to work with. Even the larger systems are low and clear but anglers working stretches that are influenced by tide are finding some success. The weaker tide series we are currently witnessing is not having a positive impact on the fishery.

Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reported fair action on the Wilson River for a trip he did on Monday. After coming off a couple of 5 fish opportunities, Chris went 1 for 3 on Monday. The fish they landed was a decent broodstock fish but Chris reported slow action for most boaters he had talked to. Trask River anglers were faring slightly better with the bulk of those fish being of wild origin. Like the Wilson, the lower stretches from Loren's Drift to Highway 101 were producing the best results.

Smaller streams to the north, anglers were reporting good numbers of steelhead present but low flows has fish very spooky. Fish are kegged up in the deeper holes and slots and when boat traffic is not high, the tailouts are holding a lot of fish too. The early hatchery returns are still in the process of spawning which may be the reason folks are seeing them in the tailouts. Post-spawn, these fish are much better biters and anglers are already catching these fish in fair numbers. A mix of wild and a rare late hatchery fish is also in the creel. These rivers are too low to float a boat safely down- the Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem are the rivers I am referencing.

Down south, the Nestucca River is still giving up some fish to the stealthy angler. **Pro guide Jim Nicol (503-550-3166)** reports, "I fished the Nestucca last week. We were landing 4 to 12 fish per day- a good percent being natives. I was drifting from the 4th bridge to 3 Rivers. I caught most of my fish "side drifting" and few fell victim to plug's and later in the week as the water started to clear float fishing with jig's became a go-to technique. I was finding some big natives holding in some slower, deeper pools normally noted for holding Chinook. I usually pass this water up, but if you are side drifting down the river it may pay to make a cast and let your gear work through some of these deeper holes. It goes back to a saying that I have always believed in *"Fish are where you find them"*. Remember, when you are applying the side drifting technique, don't hesitate to make cast into every little pocket or small slot that creates a deeper portion on the river. Covering the entire river is the key to filling the boat with North Coast Missiles. Good luck with this technique and give me a call with any questions or email me at jlpro68@hotmail.com."

The weather has been nice for sturgeon anglers but effort has not been high. There were a few boats working the south channel this week and results varied.

Crabbers in Netarts Bay have come up disappointed lately. A lot of effort for little reward. The tides have been favorable and the lack of rain makes for ideal crabbing conditions. Tillamook Bay has fared only slightly better.

The ocean has remained rough on the north coast keeping recreational bottomfishers from making the trek to the reefs. There is no relief in sight but motivated anglers can target ling cod a sea-bass along the jetty near Garibaldi using jigs or herring.

The Guide's Forecast – Steelheaders may want to look to the biggest system on the north coast for ideal steelhead conditions this week- the Nehalem. This river fishes best when other area rivers are too low. The most favored drift is from the Beaver Slide to Roy Creek or Mohler Sand and Gravel. Keep in mind that the gravel pit is not open during the weekends making Roy Creek the only option. Sidedrifted baits will likely produce the best results but in slower flows, bobber and jigs or bait will also produce.

Larger systems like the Wilson and Nestucca should also produce fair results over the weekend for anglers working the lower stretches of these systems. Low water techniques will be necessary with bobber and jigs or bait producing the best results. Fish will be wary so anglers will need to present with care.

Bank anglers will have good opportunity to work over ample numbers of fish that have come in during the recent weeks. Steelhead should be well distributed throughout the upper watersheds of most coastal systems. The upper Wilson, Nestucca, Trask and Necanicum Rivers should offer some of the best prospects. Small drifted baits or bobber and jigs will perform the best.

Crabbers will have some early morning opportunity this weekend for the salty crustaceans. Extreme afternoon tides however will dictate an early withdrawal from the estuary if you plan on retrieving your pots. You may want to explore Tillamook Bay for an excellent afternoon chance at a sturgeon. Use sand shrimp and keep in mind, the lower in the estuary you target these fish, the more bait you will be forfeiting to the hungry crabs. The west and middle channels along with the middle bay should produce a mix of both keepers and shakers this weekend.

If the surf forecast is correct, the ocean will not be all that friendly of a place for bottomfishers this weekend. It will be best to work the jetty while you let your crab pots soak. The best (and safest) time for jigging for bottomfish will be the incoming tide through the first part of outgoing tide.

Central & South Coast Reports – In an evening meeting Wednesday this week, the ODFW presented information and requested input regarding the 2007 halibut season. The attendees, evenly divided between representatives of commercial and sports interests, were relieved to hear that the reduction in this year's quota will be only 3%. A lower quota was expected following the most generous allotment in a decade in the 2006 season, every pound of which was caught. Discussion of the number of days took place but no decision was made. Halibut fishing inside the 40-fathom line will resume May 1st and continue through the 31st of October. All-depth halibut retention will be allowed on Thursday, Friday and Saturday beginning May 10th with additional days contingent upon the quota filling. When finalized, the decisions quotas and allowable retention days will remain in place through 2008.

Anglers interested in hitting the Big Pond for flatties should be aware that the first days of the all-depth fishery are the most productive of the season by a considerable margin.

Pro guide Bill Kremers (541 754 6411) reports, " ... the Alsea is low and clear and still dropping. There a few steelhead being caught in the Five Rivers area, mostly on plugs. Fishing pressure has been fairly light this week, giving anglers an opportunity to enjoy their day on the water."

About 550 winter steelhead have returned to the hatchery facility so far this season on the Alsea.

The Alsea hatchery is soliciting volunteers for collection of native steelhead for the broodstock program here. To sweeten the deal, for each wild steelhead contributed, the angler catching the fish will get a chance at a Lamiglas G-1000 spinning rod and a Team Daiwa Advantage 2500 spinning reel. Each fish contributed gets another chance to win. Contact Matt Frank at the Alsea Hatchery (541-487-7240) for information on participating.

Steelheaders on the mainstem of the Umpqua River are enjoying fair to good steelheading in the Roseburg area with both plug-pullers and bait fishermen seeing action.

Fishing on the Coos and Coquille is slow in low water conditions.

The popular Elk and Sixes rivers won't fish until the next round of precipitation.

Pocket water has become the target of steelheaders on the Rogue River as water levels continue to recede. As regular readers know, steelhead are far more challenging to tempt when they're holding rather than when they're on the move. The low, slow, clear flows of the Rogue has metalheads

hunkered down. Presentations have to be right on their noses to draw a strike. The Grants Pass stretch has been most productive but has still only provided fair fishing. Steelhead have stopped crossing Gold Ray dam, making the upper river particularly tough. Action has been slow in the lower river with few fresh fish entering in these conditions.

Crossing the bar, either heading out to the ocean or returning to the bay, is the last place a boater needs problems. That's just what has happened to a couple of recreational anglers, however, due to lost commercial crabbing gear at the narrow jaws of the Chetco. As many as 200 pots may be involved, the invisible lines from which are often shallow enough to tangle in a boat's outdrive. No successful action has taken place nor is scheduled, but the Coast Guard has issued a warning and is considering 'action' against the Chevelle, the West Port, Washington-based vessel responsible for the incident.

The low, cold waters of the Chetco have been mostly unproductive although a few steelhead are being caught high on the system. The fish that are being taken are averaging around 12 pounds, however.

Central and Eastern Oregon – The lower Deschutes has been slow to fair for steelheading with large, dark flies or lures most effective in frog water.

Pro Guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688) writes this week, "Grande Ronde River steelhead took a week off during a period of cold weather that iced the river over. Vacation ended a few days ago when slightly warmer weather reversed the icing trend, but has remained cool enough to prevent even an appreciable change in water level, let alone even an inkling of a blowout. Typical of these "warming" conditions, the fish were really on the prod when the ice started moving out and the water warmed just a few degrees. Catch rates in last week's creel survey were as low as 2 hours per fish. No surprise. These fish are as happy as we are when things start warming up. We have three months of the season remaining and some of the best fishing will be during the next month."

Pro guide Rick Arnold (541-480-1570) reports, "With warmer weather, a few anglers are getting out after the bull trout at Lake Billy Chinook. Some nice fish to 26 in. taken lately. Things will improve over the next few weeks. This about the only game in town during the winter in Central Or."

Northwest Trout – No trout planting took place this week in any Oregon waters.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report January 24th – February 6th, 2007:

North Puget Sound

Fishing: After several weeks of rough weather, conditions have improved and so has fishing. Anglers on the saltwater have had some success recently with **blackmouth** and catch numbers could continue to rise as two more marine areas open for salmon Feb. 1. Meanwhile, the region's rivers have come back into shape and steelheaders are finding hatchery fish in some streams.

On Puget Sound, anglers in Marine Area 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay) continue to do well for blackmouth. "Recent reports from our test boat in 8-1 indicate that there's pretty good fishing in the area," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fisheries biologist. "Folks who know how to fish that area in the winter are doing very well."

Anglers 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.

Meanwhile, anglers have only a few more days to catch blackmouth in Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton), which closes at the end of the month. However, angling opportunities in the region will increase Feb. 1, when marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands) and 9 (Admiralty Inlet) open for salmon. Anglers in those two marine areas will have a daily limit of one salmon, and chinook must measure at least 22 inches in length.

The traditional fishing spots in those two marine areas should be a good bet for anglers during the first two weeks of February, Thiesfeld said. "Over the past few years, marine areas 7 and 9 have been two of the top areas for blackmouth fishing in Puget Sound," he said. "We're expecting anglers to have similar success this year."

In November, a large number of shakers were caught and released in marine areas 7 and 9, and some of those fish are probably still out there, Thiesfeld said. "Anglers should use larger spoons and plugs in order to minimize their catch of those juvenile chinook," he said. "Treat those fish with extreme care when releasing them because they are next year's crop of blackmouth."

In the freshwater, hatchery **steelhead** fishing has been great in the upper Skagit River, said Brett Barkdull, WDFW fish biologist. "Anglers on the Skagit have been doing really well above the Sauk River," he said. "The river has come back into shape and the effort has definitely increased." Angler effort on the Cascade River, however, has slowed recently, and steelheading has been spotty, depending on river conditions.

Barkdull reminds anglers that wild steelhead start entering the region's rivers in late January. As most anglers know, wild steelhead can be distinguished from hatchery fish by their intact adipose and ventral fins. Retention rules for wild steelhead, as well as rules and regulations for other freshwater and saltwater fisheries, can be found in WDFW's 2006/2007 Fishing in Washington pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>).

Looking to fish a derby? Anglers will have an opportunity in March to participate in the inaugural Anacortes Salmon Derby. The derby is scheduled for March 10-11 out of the Cap Sante Marina, and tickets for the event are \$50 per person. Proceeds from the derby will go toward scholarships to benefit young adults interested in pursuing an education in fisheries and a related natural science. Top prize for the derby, which is hosted by the Fidalgo Chapter of Puget Sound Anglers, is \$5,000. For more information visit <http://www.anacortessalmonderby.com>.

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

Fishing: After weeks of heavy rain and high water, rivers have finally dropped into shape on the Olympic Peninsula, where **steelhead** anglers have been out in force since mid-January. Scott Barbour, a WDFW fish biologist, said he counted nearly 70 boat trailers along the Wynoochee River on the third Saturday of the month.

"A lot of anglers are hitting the river, and many are catching fish," Barbour said. "People have been catching steelhead from Shaeffer Creek on downstream." Good fishing conditions are also drawing anglers to the Satsop and Chehalis rivers, although the latter usually doesn't hit its peak until February, Barbour said. Then again, some anglers have been catching steelhead on area rivers since November. "I know one plunker who claims he's hooked at least one steelhead every day since Thanksgiving on the Wynoochee," Barbour said.

Anglers may retain up to two hatchery steelhead per day on those rivers, provided the fish measure at least 20 inches. All wild steelhead, identifiable by an intact adipose fin, must be released. Meanwhile, catch rates have begun to slow on several north coast rivers, where the transition from

hatchery steelhead to wild steelhead is now under way. On the Bogachiel/Quillayute river system, creel checkers interviewed 76 anglers but tallied only 21 fish - kept or released - during the three-day survey period ending Jan. 21. Catch rates were nearly twice that high just a week earlier.

"We're in that 'in-between' phase, when the hatchery fish start to drop off and the wild fish haven't yet started to arrive in large numbers," said Randy Cooper, another WDFW fish biologist. "Once we get some more rain, we should start seeing more wild fish moving up the rivers."

Cooper said the Hoh River has been discolored in recent weeks, discouraging boat angling. But the Sol Duc has been fishing well, producing 32 steelhead for the 39 anglers checked during the three-day period ending Jan. 18. Of that total, anglers released 15 of the 16 wild steelhead they caught and two of the 17 hatchery fish.

Rules for retaining wild steelhead on the north coast rivers are outlined on page 29 of the **Fishing in Washington** rule pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/reqs/fishregs.htm>).

Saltwater anglers eager to catch **salmon** will soon have more options. Blackmouth fishing opens Feb. 1 in Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet) and on Feb. 16 in marine areas 5 (Sekiu), 6 (East Juan de Fuca Strait), 11 (Tacoma/Vashon) and 12 (Hood Canal). See the Fishing in Washington pamphlet for details. Clam diggers can also look forward to another **razor clam** opening in February, provided that upcoming marine toxin tests show the clams are safe to eat.

Four beaches - Twin Harbors, North Coast Beach (Long Beach), Mocrocks and Kalaloch - are tentatively scheduled to open for digging Feb. 16 and 17 between noon and midnight. Twin Harbors will also remain open an additional day, Feb. 18, during the same hours if test results allow the dig to proceed as planned. Copalis Beach will remain closed in February because of the relatively low number of clams available for harvest there.

Evening low tides during digs tentatively scheduled in February are:

- Feb. 16, Friday, 5:47 p.m., -0.3 ft., Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Feb. 17, Saturday, 6:28 p.m., -0.5 ft., Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Feb. 18, Sunday, 7:08 p.m., -0.3 ft., Twin Harbors only

Under WDFW rules, harvesters may take no more than 15 razor clams and must keep the first 15 taken, regardless of size or condition. Each digger's limit must be kept in a separate container.

A license is required for anyone age 15 or older. Any 2006 annual shellfish/seaweed, razor clam or combination license is still valid. Licenses can be purchased via the Internet at <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov>, by telephone (1-866-246-9453) or in person at more than 600 license vendors throughout the state. A list of vendors can be found at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/lic/vendors/vendors.htm>.

Southwest Washington:

Fishing: Although the peak has passed for early-run hatchery **steelhead**, anglers haven't been wasting time waiting for late-run fish to arrive at lower Columbia tributaries. Good fishing conditions bolstered catch rates on the Kalama River and Blue Creek during the third week of January, while dozens of anglers hooked up with excess hatchery steelhead recently planted in a number of area lakes and ponds.

"We're in a transition period between early-run hatchery steelhead and late-run stocks, which will build through spring in the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers," said Joe Hymer, WDFW fish biologist. "Meanwhile, we're starting to get a few reports of **spring chinook** returning to the Willamette River, so we should start seeing some springers in the Cowlitz, Kalama, and Lewis rivers before long."

Anglers fishing the Kalama River during the third week in January averaged one-to-two steelhead hook-ups per boat, said Chris Wagemann, a WDFW fish research biologist at the Kalama Falls Hatchery. Fishing conditions, after a week of cold weather, were "the best of the year," he said. No creel counts were available for that week on the Cowlitz River, but 28 anglers were checked with 18 hatchery steelhead on Blue Creek.

Hymer reminds anglers that Blue Creek closes to all fishing Feb. 1, when the catch limit also reverts to two hatchery steelhead per day on the Cowlitz River downstream from Mayfield Dam.

Catching that many fish hasn't been a problem for most anglers fishing Kress Lake, one of several lakes and ponds planted with excess hatchery steelhead in recent weeks. Wagemann said he's heard of some anglers making as many as a dozen hook-ups in one day at the popular fishing lake near Kalama in Cowlitz County. "All the people I've heard from said they had a great time," Wagemann said.

Since mid-December, WDFW and Tacoma Power have planted slightly over 1,400 excess adult hatchery steelhead in Kress Lake, 553 in South Lewis County Park in Toledo and 63 into Horseshoe Lake in Woodland. In addition, 115 coho adults and 11 winter-run steelhead were released into the upper Cowlitz River at the Day Use Park on Lake Scanewa during the third week of January.

While the recent cold snap has energized the steelhead fishery by improving river conditions, it has had the opposite effect on fisheries for **smelt** and **sturgeon**, Hymer said. Smelt dipping, already slow, came to a virtual halt on the Cowlitz River on the third Saturday in January, and few legal-size sturgeon were reported caught in the mainstem Columbia that week.

"Smelt like a water temperature of 42 degrees or above," Hymer said. "In recent days, water temperatures have been ranging from 38 degrees to 40 degrees. That's pretty cold for sturgeon, too. Fishing for both species should improve once the weather warms up a bit."

The Cowlitz is open to smelt fishing only on Saturdays from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., with a daily limit of 10 pounds. No other Washington Columbia River tributary is open to fishing for smelt. Weekly smelt updates can be found at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/smelt/index.htm>.

Sturgeon anglers should be aware that fishery managers will sponsor a public meeting Jan. 25 in Vancouver to consider adopting season modifications for the sturgeon fishery from the Wauna powerlines to Bonneville Dam. At that meeting, fishery managers will consider options for providing additional retention opportunity to access up to 4,000 sturgeon left over from last year's harvest guideline. A report on the outcome of that meeting will be posted on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/>.

Walleye, on the other hand, don't seem to mind the cold, even though they're classified as a "warm-water" fish. During a recent creel survey in The Dalles Pool, boat anglers averaged nearly a walleye apiece. "Right now, they're fattening up before spawning," Hymer said. "That takes precedence over the cold."

Gunning for **razor clams**? See the regional report for the South Sound/Olympic Peninsula for information about a dig tentatively scheduled in mid-February.

Eastern Washington:

Fishing: According to WDFW enforcement officer patrol reports and fish biologists' creel surveys, very few people have been fishing the Snake River for **steelhead**, due to recent extremely cold weather. The mainstem river has also been muddy, which usually slows the bite. Steelheading in the Snake River drainage was best on the Tucannon River where creel checks showed about 10 hours of effort per

steelhead caught. See the full report on stretches of the Snake River mainstem at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/snake/index.htm>.

WDFW enforcement officers recently patrolling the region's winter-only **rainbow trout** lakes reported sporadic catches through the ice. Officer Lenny Hahn of Spokane found some 20-inch-plus trout caught at Fourth of July Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line. "Some folks were nearly catching limits while others were only catching one or two," he said. On Jan. 21 Hahn recorded about five to six inches of ice at Fourth of July and eight to nine inches at Hog Canyon Lake in southwest Spokane County. Some Hog Canyon anglers were catching limits of smaller trout. Officer Don Weatherman of Colville reported anglers catching small rainbows through the ice at Williams Lake in Stevens County. Weatherman also checked anglers going after **burbot** or **ling cod** in Sullivan Lake in Pend Oreille County, although he noted the lake wasn't completely iced over and anglers should be cautious.

North Central Washington:

Fishing: WDFW Fish Biologist Art Viola of Cashmere reports **steelhead** fishing is very slow on the upper Columbia River near Wenatchee. "But ice fishing on Chelan County's Fish Lake is very good for **yellow perch** and **rainbow trout**," he said. "Barring a warm spell, the ice should remain safe."

Ice fishing in Okanogan County is also going strong, according to WDFW Fish Biologist Bob Jateff of Omak. Rat Lake near Brewster, Green Lake near Omak, Davis Lake near Winthrop, and Molson/Sidley lake near Oroville are all producing catches of **rainbow trout** in the 10 to 12-inch range. Jateff said ice fishing at Patterson Lake near Winthrop has been slow for **yellow perch**. "But I encourage anglers to fish as many areas of Patterson as possible," he said. "Once the perch are located, their schooling tendencies will increase catch rates. Small teardrop-shaped jigs tipped with maggots and/or a piece of worm are effective setups for perch."

Jateff also reports **steelhead** fishing on the upper Columbia River near Pateros has slowed considerably in the last few weeks with average catch rates of only one fish for every 12 hours of effort. Fishing for big **triploid rainbows** on Rufus Woods Lake - the Columbia River reservoir east of Bridgeport - continues to be very good. Jateff reports anglers catching 2-to-5-pound triploids, with an occasional 10-pounder. He notes new regulations on Rufus Woods allow anglers to retain two trout and two **kokanee** as part of the daily bag limit. Rufus Woods has good boat launching facilities and bank access for fishermen.

South Central Washington:

Fishing: WDFW Fish Biologist Paul Hoffarth of Pasco reports anglers harvested 81 Columbia River **steelhead** at Ringold as of Jan. 21. "So far in January we've interviewed 46 anglers with 133 pole hours with 11 steelhead," he said. "The average for the month is 12.1 hours per steelhead. Weather has been cold, effort has been light, and I'm pretty sure there is a connection." Hoffarth said 22 percent of the harvest in January is steelhead that were trapped at Ringold, transported, and released back in the river in the Tri-Cities to give anglers a second chance at the fish.

Reader Email

Got a question, story to tell or information to share? Shoot us an Email!

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com

Michael Teague: Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com

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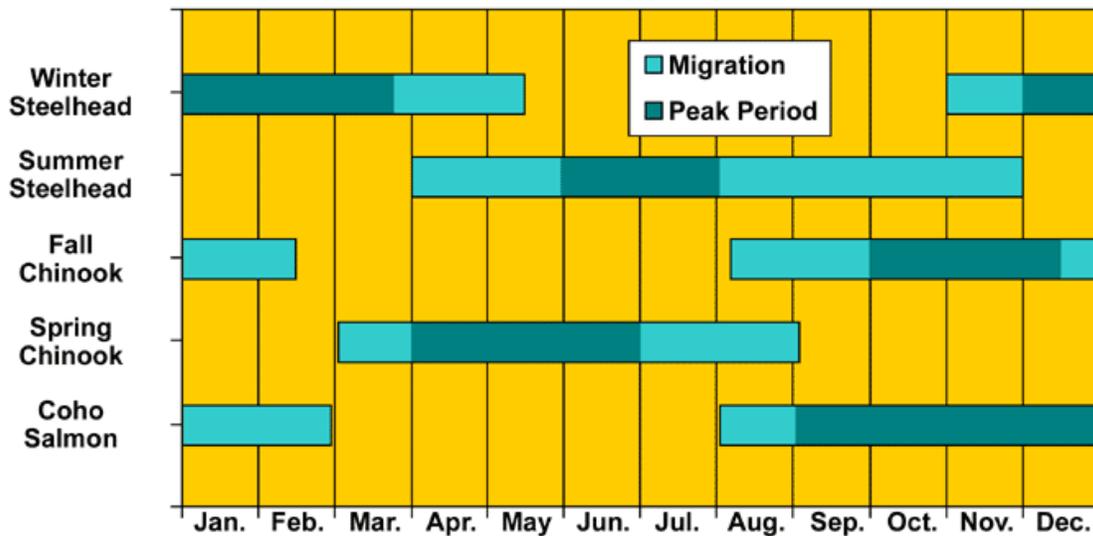
Just released this week, the ODFW 2007 Winter Steelhead Report:
<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/2007%20Winter%20Steelhead%20Forecast.pdf>

Volunteer to teach in the ODFW Aquatic and Anglers Education Program:
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Fish Migration on the Sandy River



Weekly Quote – "It is true that for most anglers, a good proportion of the charm of angling lies in the fact that it brings one into close contact with the many-voiced life of the waterside: with small, shy creatures not normally met in towns, with trees and flowers and a wonderful world of birds. But it is a certainty that one sees far more of the wild life of the waterside if one leaves one's rod behind." - Maurice Wiggin in The Passionate Angler

GOOD LUCK!