

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 9th – February 15th, 2007**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Movement of winter steelhead over Willamette Falls has stalled as the water level and temperature continue to fall. Movement will resume if warming rains develop. Sturgeon fishing is slow in the chilly water. Multnomah Channel has produced shakers and the occasional keeper. Plunkers at Meldrum Bar are taking a few steelhead daily on Spin 'n' Glos.

Sturgeon fishing on the Columbia remain poor, river wide.

Sufficient precipitation this week will improve fishing prospects in all valley rivers.

Clackamas steelheaders are struggling in skinny, cold water conditions. While the occasional fish has been taken at the mouth of Eagle Creek, rain will improve the fishing here.

Steelhead are being caught on the Sandy, though not many, by stealthy anglers using light tackle bobber and jig rigs. The weekend was fair to good.

Bait is working best on the North Santiam although numbers are low at this time of year.

The Pacific Northwest Sportsmen's Show runs February 7th through 11th at the Portland Expo Center. Be prepared to pay \$8 parking this year in addition to the \$9 admission.

Northwest – Bank anglers are making up the bulk of the effort on larger north coast streams. The Wilson, Trask and Nestucca Rivers are very low and clear but steelhead are present in good numbers. Anglers versed in low water tactics are targeting pocket water with drift gear and deep holes with bobbers and jigs.

The mainstem Nehalem also has fair numbers of fish present. Plugs presented well ahead of the boat are taking fish but fish are skittish. Flyfishers are making the most of the low water, working broken surfaced waters at the heads of the deeper holes.

Area rivers are forecasted to rise this week although not significantly. This will stimulate the larger systems, particularly the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers that have broodstock programs allowing anglers to take home late-run hatchery fish. Smaller streams will likely remain too low to float.

Fresh off a minus tide series Tillamook sturgeon anglers didn't score impressive results over the weekend. Most anglers are working the Bay City slot or west channel. Bay crabbing remains poor as well as Netarts success.

The Siletz River has been a bust lately. A forecasted bump in the river level may stimulate wild and broodstock action that is typically underway by this time of year. It's too early to give up on this coastal favorite.

Scheduled for planting with hatchery trout are Alder Lake, Buck Lake, Carter Lake, Cleawox Lake, Dune Lake, Elbow Lake, Erhart Lake, Georgia Lake, Lost Lake in Lane County, Munsel Lake, North Georgia Lake, Perkins Lake and Thissel Pond.

The time is nearing for jigging fresh bait. Look for herring to arrive at Yaquina Bay in the next couple of

weeks. Crabbing has been spotty but a few limits have come from the upper bay.

Crabbing at Waldport has been poor although **pro guide Bill Kremers (541-754-6411)** believes this will be the weekend to get to the Alsea for steelhead.

Southwest – Low and clear last week, South coast river conditions have declined over the last week of dry weather. Showers and periods of rain are in the forecast. Anglers hope it's enough to make a difference.

The Siuslaw has been getting tough to navigate in a drift boat according to **Pro guide Jeff Jackson (541-268-6944)**.

The combination of dry weather and soft tides would usually indicate a good time for crabbing but it remains slow even with optimum conditions.

Anglers caught fair to good numbers of winter steelhead on the mainstem Umpqua over the weekend. John Weed and his son Michael of Portland landed 5 wild and 1 hatchery fish in the Glide area. The largest was estimated at 13 pounds. The water temperature is less than 40 degrees, making drifted bait the top choice.

While steelheading slowed in low water on the Chetco, anglers continued to take a few chrome fish. Once the weather patterns return to the seasonal norm, this productive river will be a worthwhile destination.

Large rockfish and limits of ling cod hit the decks of charter and recreational boats launching out of Brookings recently. With streams and rivers out of their prime, anglers were thankful for calm seas and fine offshore action.

Eastern – Lake Billy Chinook is producing some Bull Trout according to **pro guide Rick Arnold (541-480-1570)**.

Fly fishing on the Fall River has been fair recently and is expected to improve over the next few weeks.

The ice is coning off the Grande Ronde this week and fishing has been good for late, colorful summer steelhead although **Pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688)** reports statistics indicate an average of one to six hours invested per fish.

SW Washington – Most area streams are low, cold and clear. Anglers are being challenged at SW Washington streams are in a transition from hatchery to wild and broodstock steelhead. Look to the Lewis River for better steelheading later this month.

Although the Cowlitz and mainstem Columbia are on a warming trend, temperatures are still too low to expect any numbers of smelt for recreational dippers. The season remains open on Saturday's only.

Soapbox Update - Stop the decimation of steelhead, salmon and sturgeon by voracious pinnipeds. Now is the time to speak up regarding the control of seal and sea lion predation by lethal means: <http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/Marine-Mammals/Seals-and-Sea-Lions/States-MMPA-Request.cfm>

Columbia River Fishing Report – The Columbia River, in all its mighty, is not putting out significant catches of anything right now. Salmon and steelhead effort is light and catches are poor which is no surprise and the winter sturgeon fishery is non-existent anymore. With smelt runs poor recently,

sturgeon have found alternative winter food-sources in other bodies of water. The good news is the fishing will get better.

There are some sturgeon anglers working the Portland to Longview stretch and catching some keepers. Two were caught by 50 boats in the weekend check with another 44 shakers tallied. Water temperatures are still cold for active movement of smelt so things could pick up assuming the warming trend continues.

The Dalles Pool is putting out some good catches of steelhead as of late. Weekly checking showed one hatchery steelhead kept, plus one wild released for five bank rods; and six hatchery steelhead kept, plus seven wild ones released for three boats. I honestly can't tell you if these are hatchery winter steelhead passing Bonneville to mid-Columbia tributaries or late returning summer fish?

The Guide's Forecast – Don't look to the Columbia for any great action- salmon or steelhead at this time. Water conditions are improving for early returning salmon and sturgeon catches will be scattered. If the warming trend continues, motivated anglers may want to try Clifton Channel, Jim Crow Sands or the St. Helens area for an early Willamette bound springer. Chances are improving and the Multnomah Channel may also be a fair early season favorite.

Walleye anglers are beginning to pick up some fair catches of fish in The Dalles and Bonneville Pools and catches should continue to improve as fish move into the pre-spawn stage where they become more aggressive. As temperatures rise, so should the action.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Steelhead have all but stopped crossing Willamette Falls with flows dwindling and the water temperature down to 38 degrees. Movement will resume if warming rains develop. Even a slight improvement in river levels will trigger fish movement and moving steelhead are far easier to catch than those which are just holding. Sturgeon fishing has been slow in the chilly water.

While some steelheaders have done well in upper stretches of coastal rivers, those fish have been in the water a while. Conventional wisdom is to fish low in low water, in this case, just above tidewater. Biological clocks are driving steelhead to enter even in less-than-optimum conditions and this is the logical place to intercept them.

At one time, anglers could expect to catch only wild steelhead at this time of year, but rivers with broodstock programs offer fin-clipped steelies which may be retained even into March. Among these are the Sandy and Clackamas in the Willamette Valley and the Wilson, Nestucca and Siletz on the coast.

Trout fishing has been slow on the McKenzie with the water in the high 30s.

The Guide's Forecast – Plunkers are taking a few keepers in the stretch above and below the St. John's stretch on the outgoing tide. Plunkers at Meldrum Bar are taking a few steelhead daily on Spin 'n' Glos. Year-to-date winter steelhead counts finally broke the 1,400 mark on February 5th. While daily numbers have been slow lately, the total is over three times that of this time last year. The flow has continued to drop but finally there's some hope with the water temperature which climbed to 40 degrees on Wednesday this week. Keeper sturgeon were being taken on the lower Willamette Thursday this week. The stretch above and below St. John's has been popular but don't hesitate to pull anchor if bites aren't forthcoming or sturgeon are running small. Smelt has been working recently but it's a good idea to keep a selection of baits on board.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – While the flood a few weeks ago created major

changes and ongoing problems with drifting sand on the Sandy River, there was little impact on the Clackamas in terms of changes in channels and familiar drifts.

Steelheaders are encouraged now that rain this week is warming the Clackamas water. It was about 37 degrees over the weekend but had warmed to 40 degrees at mid-day Thursday. Good numbers of fish are in the river but the bite is very slow in the chilly water. Jigs fished under a bobber have accounted for a few steelhead. Anglers should see some improvement by the weekend. Steelheading is fair and improving on the on the Sandy as numbers of fish continue to enter. Corkies and yarn, cured eggs and bobber and jigs are fooling fish here.

Catch the father and son **pro guides Jack and Brandon Glass**, also known as Team Hookup, at the Hillsboro GI Joes February 15th from 7 to 8 PM for a free winter steelhead seminar. Brandon's been doing very well on the Sandy. Join them to find out how to improve your own catches.

North Coast District Fishing Report – The North Coast bank angler has the advantage in these low and clear conditions. Fair catches are coming from the larger systems like the Wilson, Trask, Nestucca and Nehalem Rivers. The Nehalem, being the biggest in the district will offer some quality opportunities in stretches with good bank access. The best steelheading right now is taking place in those upper reaches that best suit the bank angler. The upper Wilson, Trask and Nestucca also have good numbers of fish present and anglers versed in low water tactics will excel in these conditions. Fresh fish are also still moving into the lower reaches but with the weaker tide series that we are currently on, there shouldn't be any high expectations. Driftboaters are having to drag their craft in many tailouts, which certainly takes away from the positive experience of a "float".

Smaller streams like the Necanicum and Nehalem are simply too low to offer a reasonable chance at good numbers of fish. There are still lots of spent hatchery fish in the system and the next show of measurable rain should produce great numbers of these fish (along with some fresh wild ones) on these north coast favorites.

Sturgeon anglers have been disappointed recently on Tillamook Bay. A good tide series brought about the effort last weekend but success rates were low in concentrated areas. The west channel and Bay City slots had plenty of pressure and crabs weren't a major issue. Success rates were not impressive.

The tree reported across the Kilchis River below the park has been partially cleared but boaters still need to exercise caution in this stretch.

Hookups have been rare on the Nestucca in poor conditions and Three Rivers has yet to turn on this season.

Crabbing has dropped off dramatically on most north coast estuaries recently. Tillamook and Netarts are particularly poor.

Although some guides are still witnessing consistent catches of Siletz River steelhead, action isn't what most would call typical for this time of year on this water body. Precipitation should have significant impacts if it ever comes.

The Guide's Forecast – Rain is in the forecast and should improve steelheading on most North Oregon Coast streams. They have been so dry for so long however that it will take much more precipitation than forecast to have any significant improvements. Larger systems will see the greatest benefit with the larger basins to capture more of the precious resource. Even the larger systems however are only forecasted to come up less than a foot so if they muddy, they won't be off-color for very long. The lower stretches will likely be the more productive areas with the minor increases in flow.

This isn't going to be the rain freshet we have all been hoping for.

Tides will not favor sturgeon fishers this weekend in Tillamook and Nehalem Bays. Softer tides will be good for crabbers- it's just too bad the crabbing isn't very good. The ocean forecast will have recreational craft "at-bay" all weekend.

Even surf perch anglers will not necessarily like the conditions they will be faced with over the weekend. Typically, in this weather pattern, seas can favor surf casters but the swell forecast will be borderline dangerous this weekend so anglers that do decide to fish, should exercise extreme caution.

Central & South Coast Reports – Crabbing in Yaquina Bay which was rather unpredictable over the weekend has further slowed this week.

Just over three feet at tidewater mid-day Thursday, February 8th, levels at the Alsea are forecast to crest at 5.4 bt 4 PM Saturday. Steelheading should be very good as the water drops.

Pro guide Bill Kremers (541-754-6411) writes, "It is looking this weekend will be the time to get back out on the Alsea. In the mean time, I did run a trip out of Depoe Bay for ling cod and rock cod. We had to some searching but we did land some nice fish. Biggest ling was about fifteen pounds to go along the with usual assortment of tasty cod. With rain in the forecast, the ocean will be a little rough this coming week."

Bill sent along this photo Jerod Sap with a limit of lings and a big Vermillion.



Offshore bottom fishing is rewarding out of central Oregon Ports with large rockfish and ling cod in the

mix. Ling cod will be in the shallows to spawn through February on the North coast, making them accessible from rocks and jetties. Soft plastics fished on jig heads are effective but anglers should be careful and skip days when the surf is high.

Pro guide Jeff Jackson (541-268-6944) adds this, "Everything here is pretty low and clear. Some sections of the Siuslaw and Lake Creek are getting pretty tough to drift in a boat."

Many fishing enthusiasts decided to chase steelies on Super Bowl Sunday rather than planting themselves in front of the tube. Results were mixed, but worthwhile for one angler who caught and released an 18-pound native on the mainstem Umpqua. This river has been one of the few on the South coast which has remained productive through the recent stretch of dry weather. The mainstem Umpqua has been a shining star on the South coast through dry conditions as it delivered steelhead often in the high teens when other rivers were virtually unfishable. Rain this week will kick the South Fork into gear although the mainstem will still be worthy of anglers' attention. Steelheading should be very good here.

Fresh winter steelhead will be entering the Elk and Sixes with rain this week and fishing is expected to be good. Water levels rise and fall rapidly on these small streams.

Showers started earlier this week on the South Coast and prospects following precipitation are good on the Coos and Coquille systems.

Side-drifters have continued to take steelhead in water conditions far less than optimal on the lower Rogue River. Anglers are hopeful rain this week will turn around the challenging low water situation by this weekend, with water temperatures up to 45 near Agness on February 8th. Tiny baits and diminutive plugs fished on light lines have been effective in marginal conditions below Grants Pass where steelhead are being taken daily. It's unfortunate and ironic that the extended stretch of dry weather would coincide with an early winter run this year. Low, cold water has halted the steelhead run on the upper Rogue with no fish crossing Gold Ray Dam recently.

Rain has started to have an effect on the Chetco where a freshet will provide anglers with good numbers of bright steelhead although the majority will be natives at this time of year. The Chetco is one of the Southern ocean tributaries where, along with the mainstem Umpqua and Rogue River below Hog Creek, one wild steelhead may be kept per day up to five per year. Bait will be a more productive than lures this weekend.

Bottom fishers out of the Port of Brookings took advantage of a flat ocean recently to score limits of rockfish and ling cod offshore. Both sports and charter boats have been doing well with many of the former releasing all red rockfish as canary, vermilion and yelloweye are illegal to keep. Making the distinction between those and other allowable scarlet-hued bottom fish such as the vermilion takes some expertise. The better numbers of ling cod came to anglers using bait in lieu of lures. As near-shore rock fishing for lings tapers off with spawning season winding down on the south coast, offshore catches will only improve.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688) reports, "We're still waiting for some of that Global Warming to arrive here in Northeast Oregon. In spite of the cold weather for the past 6 weeks the steelhead fishing remains consistently hot with weekly creel survey reports tallying catch rates between 1 hour and 6 hours steelhead fish caught in the Grande Ronde River. The majority of the effort during the winter is with bait, but savvy fly anglers are doing a commendable job of keeping pace.

"The weather has made a slight turn to warmer this week, but nights have remained cold enough, days

cool enough, and snow is scarce enough that the rivers remain unchanged from the previous many week and remain low and clear. Snow is in the forecast for later this week and then it's back to cool temperatures, little precipitation and great steelheading."

We also heard from **pro guide Rick Arnold (541-480-1570)** this week, who wrote, "Pretty much a broken record in Central Oregon this time of year. Got word from some friends that fished Lake Billy Chinook for bulls over the weekend. Some bigger fish have showed. (4) bulls over 10 Lb. for a group of five anglers. Fish are at the boundary line. Look for improving conditions over this month in the Crooked Arm before the Metolius Arm opens on March 1."

"I will be at the Portland Show working the Walker booth. If you are there, stop by and say Hi."

Ice fishing has been the only option on Big Lava, Hosmer and East Lake recently, but moderating weather may make that activity unsafe. Fishing will be great when the ice first clears.

Lake Billy Chinook has been very good to some trollers while others have blanked. When anglers score, bull trout have been fat and sassy.

Northwest Bass & Panfish - It's early in the year to see this section return to TGF, but it's for good reason. Having landed several walleye over 10 pounds in search of an elusive goal, Mike Heppner, a retired teacher and resident of Richland Washington, finally fulfilled his dream. On Monday, February 5th, Heppner broke the Washington State record by landing a jaw-dropping 19.3 pounder as certified by the WDFW. He fishes five or six days a week, although this catch, from below the mouth of the Snake River at Buoy 30, came after eight or nine straight days on the water. The giant fell to a Smile blade/nightcrawler combo in 34 feet of water. Congratulations, Mike!



Photo by WDFW.

Also of note to bass enthusiasts, a mount of the Oregon State record smallmouth bass taken by Nick Rubeo in 2005 will be on display. It's very likely the only way you or I will see what a smallie over eight pounds looks like.

Northwest Trout – Lakes in the Northwest Zone have been heavily planted this week. Receiving catchable (eight-to-10-inch trout are Alder Lake, Buck Lake, Carter Lake, Dune Lake, Erhart Lake, Georgia Lake, North Georgia Lake and Perkins Lake. Foot-long rainbows have been stocked at Elbow Lake, Lost Lake in Lane County, Munsel Lake and Thissel Pond. In addition, Cleawox Lake has been planted with 3,300 'trophy-sized' (16 inches or better). Good fishing.

Washington fishing reports:

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

North Puget Sound

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

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/reggs/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:

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:

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:

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

Reader Brian C. wrote this week with - what else? - fishing questions: "Hello there Mike,

"I'm wanting to know if the fishing would be good along the salmon river or three rivers if it rains for a couple of days. Or should I let it rain for a week before I go? I only ask because I would be going with a friend, and he won't be able to travel to far, or at least that's what he says! I would be open to any suggestions on someplace that's close, and somewhat good for bank fishing. And of course what would be the best way to catch them, whether it be plunking, baits or spinners. What should I use?? Anyway, I won't know for sure that I'm going until later on this afternoon when my friend gets off work. But I'd still like to know, just in case we do go.

"Thanks for your time, take care and I'll get back to you soon. "

To which co editor **Michael Teague** responded, "It's good to hear from you.

"IMHO, I wouldn't bother with the Salmon River at this time of year. It's got a decent Fall salmon run but little else in sufficient number to warrant a trip.

"Three Rivers has been a bust all season for reasons unknown. Certainly if it's going to break loose, rain would be the key but it's a crap shoot. It's easy enough to stop at the Hatchery Hole to see if there are any fish on the bank.

"That said (and without traveling much further than you'd like), I'd try the mouth of Three Rivers (go early if you're able; the easy access is often crowded). If you try this one and you're one of the first on the bank, you want the upstream position, but if there are a few guys shoulder-to-shoulder, let the man furthest downstream cast first. If you think it through, subsequent casts by each angler in succession will avoid tangles.

"The Nestucca absolutely holds hatchery fish since they've instituted a broodstock program that's been running a few years. I don't know if the access is still open but if it's still possible to drop a dollar in the farmer's can at the end of the same parking lot where you'd park to fish Three Rivers mouth, you can walk downstream to the High Bank Hole which should hold a few fish. I've also hooked a few steelhead upstream to Farmer's Creek. Turn right at the 'Y' in Hebo and head towards Tillamook. It's only a couple of miles upriver (above the Green Bridge but below First Bridge.

"Even with enough rain to get the steelhead moving, there should be plenty of spinner water (Disclaimer: Spinners are about all I use for steelies). You could also drift fish corky and yarn (or just yarn), but I'd do so with the addition of a small bait of salmon eggs or a sand shrimp tail. Use just enough wait to touch bottom occasionally, not tap-tap-tap-tap ... your 'feel' will much improved. **Pro guide Kent Anderson** taught me that trick.

"Hope helps, but I'll look forward to hearing your experiences in any event."

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

Write to the TGF staff:

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Random Links

Again this year thanks to Jennie Logsdin Martin of **ifish.net**, watch the Sportsmen's Show on your computer. Be sure to visit Jennie at Booth 1253

<http://198.145.36.10/>

Here's your Sportsmen's Show discount coupon:

<http://www.oloughlintradeshows.com/ots-shows-ss-pnw-coupon.php>

If you didn't get a copy of A Guide to Boating in Oregon at the ODFW Sportsman's Show booth, got Easy Angling Oregon for family fishing opportunities:

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/easy_angling/fishing_zones.asp

Weekly Quote – "The Lord has blessed us all today... It's just that he has been particularly good to me." - Norman Maclean, [A River Runs Through It](#)

GOOD LUCK!