

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 15<sup>th</sup> – February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2008**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** Sturgeon fishing improved over the last Thursday through Sunday retention period. While some anglers caught only shakers, others took several keeper-sized fish. Smelt and sand shrimp were top baits. Fishery managers this week will determine the fate of the Willamette spring chinook fishery. It is likely to be a 7-day per week fishery despite a poor run forecast for returning hatchery fish.

Steelhead were taken on the lower Clackamas over the weekend. Drift boaters should be aware of a downed tree below the boat ramp at Barton Park.

Fishing has been slow to fair on the Sandy River. Bank fishers have taken a few at Oxbow Park. Cedar Creek is in good shape but fishing poorly.

The McKenzie is fishable this week and while there hasn't been much dry fly action yet, nymphing has been effective.

On the trout planting schedule this week are E. E. Wilson, Mt Hood College Pond, West Salish Pond and Alton Baker Canal.

Henry Hagg Lake will open on March 1st.

**Northwest –** Most coastal rivers were too high for productive fishing last week. Smaller streams were in ideal shape at mid-week with the Nehalem, Necanicum and Kilchis in prime shape on Tuesday. The North Fork Nehalem hatchery reported a significant slow-down in hatchery returns although some keepers will be coming back into early March.

The reprieve in precipitation, coupled with a warming trend will have very positive impacts for steelheaders this weekend. Larger rivers like the Wilson, Trask and Nestucca should be fishing very well into the weekend with motivated broodstock and wild fish available on all systems. The Wilson and Nestucca however offer the best chances for hatchery keepers with bait producing the best in higher flows and jigs or plugs producing best in lower, clearer water.

It will be a good weekend to collect broodstock steelhead on the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers. Collection is critical to sustain the program so please sign up by calling the ODF&W office at (503) 842-2741.

Fair sturgeon tides over the weekend will give anglers some decent opportunities in the early afternoon. Unfortunately, crabbing is poor making the effort a single strategy. A high swell will likely keep boats from targeting bottomfish on the ocean over the weekend.

Clam diggers may want to take advantage of good tides targeting bay clams on Tillamook and razor clams along Clatsop Beaches. Call the shellfish hotline at 1-800-448-2474 for updated information.

Crabbing out of Newport and Waldport has been poor, but prospects may turn around with dry weather. Steelheading has been slow to fair up on the North Fork Alsea.

Siuslaw steelheaders took fish over the past weekend. The best bet for this weekend will be the drift from Whittaker to Wildcat or Wildcat to Linslaw. Some quality broodstock steelhead are showing up at the fish trap on Whittaker Creek.

**Pro guide Jeff Jackson (541-268-6944)** reports the Siuslaw at Whittaker is dropping and clearing and should be in good shape this weekend.

Alder Lake, Buck Lake, Carter Lake, Cleawox Lake, Dune Lake, Elbow Lake, Georgia Lake, Lost Lake (Lane County), Munsel Lake, North Georgia Lake, Perkins Lake, Siltcoos Lagoon and Thissel Pond are scheduled to be stocked with trout this week.

**Southwest** – A break in precipitation this week will have most of the south coast river fishing well. Rain last week brought good numbers of fresh steelhead into coastal tributaries but catches this week will be a combination of hatchery, wild and spawned-out fish returning to the ocean.

Surf perch fishing has been decent off southwest coastal beaches.

Umpqua anglers had a good weekend with about half the steelhead landed of hatchery origin. The South Umpqua has been a top producer.

Coquille steelheaders had a good weekend, particularly on the South, with catches yielding about 30% native fish with the remainder destined for the barbecue.

The Millicoma River continued to put out good numbers of steelhead over the past weekend, providing several anglers with bag limits.

Elk River steelheaders are taking fish this week but with no rain in the forecast, it is likely to be low by the coming weekend.

The lower Rogue came into shape late last week and has been delivering steelhead since then. Plug pullers have had the advantage recently.

The Chetco has been fairly stable at roughly 3,400 cfs at Brookings for several days. There are good numbers of steelhead in this river and the fishing has reflected it.

**Dave Pitts, Field Editor for Salmon Trout and Steelhead** reports from the Chetco River that drift boaters are finally seeing lower flows to connect on steelhead.

Lake Selmac is scheduled to receive hatchery trout this week.

**Eastern** – Trout fishing is fair but improving on the Deschutes near Maupin. Water levels and clarity are good but with hatches sparse, nymphing has been most effective.

The Dalles Pool is still producing good catches of steelhead for boat anglers. This fishery should produce even better as temperatures warm this week.

**Pro guide Steve Fleming (1-888-624-9424)** reports that while the John Day River was frozen up in lots of places last week with the warmer days and nights it is breaking up much faster than anticipated.

**SW Washington** – Most area streams are slow for steelhead but anglers working the Kalama still have an opportunity for late run hatchery steelhead. Wild fish will begin to show in better numbers on some district streams.

Smelt are likely to make a show in the Cowlitz River on the Saturday sport opener. Water temperatures have finally topped 40 degrees and commercial catches in the mainstem jumped last week indicating a pilot run is en route. Check regulations prior to dipping on Saturday as the bi-state fishery managers will be looking at the run status during Friday's compact hearing.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – Although water temperatures are rising on the mainstem Columbia, it is not improving the sturgeon bite much. In the weekend creel check, the big news was a couple of keepers taken in the Portland to Longview stretch along with 27 shakers released for 19 boats. This trend is likely to continue as sturgeon have discovered they can't rely on the smelt run to sustain them through the winter months. Sturgeon have concentrated in the lower Willamette and in coastal estuaries as well. The commercial catch of sturgeon has ramped up in the last 2 openers and 2 spring chinook were reported landed downstream of Longview.

Smelt is the really big news however. Commercial catches were significant this week and with warmer water temperatures, they should be on the increase in both the mainstem and the Cowlitz River itself. From the WDF&W website:

**Conditions:**

Warming water conditions have the smelt moving back upstream in the Columbia River. WDFW survey crews observed about 30-35 harbor seals in the Columbia River near Oak Point, situated about 13 miles downstream from the mouth of the Cowlitz River, on Tuesday, February 12th. The flow at Castle Rock is 15,500 CFS (greater than the 80-year mean of 12,500 CFS for February 13th). The water temperature in the lower Columbia River has increased to 43°F (Tenasilahé Is.) and the Cowlitz River is back to 43°F. Smelt prefer water of at least 40°F or warmer. Cowlitz River is slightly turbid as of noon February 13th.

**Catches**

**Columbia River,  
Commercial:**

3,411 lbs landed Monday, February 11th (greater than the cumulative number to date). The catch was a mixture of sizes and sex, all very green (unspawned).  
6,255 lbs cumulative landings since late-December (preliminary numbers).

**Cowlitz River,  
Sport:**

WDFW test dipping on Wednesday, February 13th, produced 15 smelt in 12 dips (up to 3 fish per dip) at Gerhart Landing. There was a mix of sizes. No smelt were caught at other locations further upstream.

**Commercial:**

No commercial landings reported for Sunday, February 12th.  
0 lbs cumulative since January 2nd.

**Sport Seasons/Regulations,**

**Tributaries** - Sport dipping is only allowed on the Cowlitz River, from 6 AM to 10 PM Saturdays through March 31st. The daily limit is 10 lbs per person per day. This is equivocal to ¼ of a 5 gallon bucket.

**Mainstem Columbia River** - daily limit is 25 lbs per person per day and the fishery is open 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

**Commercial Seasons:**

**Columbia River** – 9 hour periods Mondays and Thursdays.

**Cowlitz River** – 6 hour periods Sunday and Wednesday nights.

**The Guide's Forecast** – It'll be another sleeper weekend on the mainstem Columbia but if anglers have a favorite spot for sturgeon, the chances for a keeper are on the increase with the warming trend that is going on now. The most productive stretch will be from Portland to Longview with smelt (especially if you have fresh) as bait. Sand shrimp should be a fair second-choice bait.

Fishery managers will decide by Friday what sport regulations will look like on the mainstem Columbia River. We'll be updating our readers next week but we're hopeful that there will be some opportunity downstream of the I-5 Bridge for sport anglers. There will NOT be a gillnet season downstream of the I-5 Bridge!

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – Winter steelhead counts at Willamette Falls had not been updated (at this writing late Thursday afternoon) since February 7th when daily numbers remained single digits. This is unfortunate as we were looking for counts to improve this week. As it stands, whether or not the upstream run is a bust is unknown. The majority of these fish are headed for the Santiam system to entertain catch and release anglers.

Winter counts at the Falls have nothing to do with steelhead targeted by Meldrum Bar plunkers or those entering the Clackamas. Steelhead caught in the lower Willamette are primarily of hatchery origin while those crossing the Falls are all wild. Counts are indicative of how well steelhead are moving, however.

The 2008 sturgeon regulations were released this week, allowing for the retention of sturgeon on Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday through July 31 and again from October 1st through the end of the year or fulfillment of the 2008 catch quota. The bag limit will remain one sturgeon 42 to 60 inches per angler per day.

Much of the water in the North Santiam remains at temperatures below the 40-degree mark. Steelheading is slow and these scattered fish are light biters when they can be tempted. The greatest concentration of steelhead will be found from Stayton to Jefferson.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Plunkers have seen an improvement in steelhead catches off Meldrum Bar and with water conditions in the lower Willamette improving, there's reason for optimism for the coming weekend. Sturgeon anglers are expected to do well this week as better numbers of keeper-sized fish have been in catches recently. As always, take a variety of baits and stay on the move to find pods of larger biters.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – Patient anglers putting in their time on the Clackamas are catching the occasional steelhead. Jigs and spinners have been effective this week. When the water warms a couple of degrees, the bite will improve. Steelheading is expected to be good this coming weekend. The tree that had been a hazard to boaters below Barton was cleared on Wednesday this week. The stretch below Carver is getting the most angler attention at this stage of the run. Eagle Creek has produced steelhead for anglers using bobber and jig rigs. 800 winter steelhead had returned to the hatchery facility as of February 12th.

The Sandy has been slow this week with the water level a little high but the color has been good. Sand is once again billowing on the lower river. There are good numbers of winter steelhead in the system and while catches had been less than spectacular over the weekend, anglers this week have been experiencing improving results with increasing water temperatures. Snowmelt has raised the water level and put a little color in it, but it was still quite fishable mid-week.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – Between storm systems and a warming trend that has melted much of the low elevation snow coastal rivers did not fish all of last week. That comforted guides as many were at the sportsman show.

High flows and inclement weather kept most fishers off all rivers and estuaries. Most recently, smaller streams began to fish but these days in early February are often “dog-days” as we are between good runs of early hatchery steelhead and the mother load of wild fish due back to our rivers anytime soon. The Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem and Three Rivers were in good shape on Tuesday and Wednesday but effort was low for these systems. These rivers get early returning hatchery fish and are likely choked with spawned out fish heading back to the ocean. They are not good tablefare.

Given last weeks conditions, we’ll reserve our forecast for the appropriate section.....below.

**The Guide’s Forecast** – It’s shaping up to be a great week and weekend for steelheaders on the north coast. Although many river systems will see spawned out steelhead headed west, river conditions will be ideal on most of the larger, better producing steelhead streams on the weekend. Starting in order of productivity:

1) The upper Trask should fish well on Thursday and Friday. Wild fish will make up the bulk of the catch here and fishing should be good for driftfishers. As flows drop by the weekend, productivity will drop and the drift becomes more hazardous. This stretch should only be drifted by folks that have previous experience doing this run.

The upper Wilson should also begin fishing well on these days (Thursday and Friday). Bank anglers will have the advantage here as this section is not floatable with a boat.

The Kilchis should also be an option on Friday but by then, the water should be getting pretty clear and recent reports have not been all that encouraging here.

Also for experienced boaters, the upper Nestucca from Blaine downstream should be a good bet for both wild and broodstock steelhead. There may be a rare spawned out early run hatchery fish in these systems as well.

2) The lower Trask and the entire Wilson River should begin fishing by Friday and fish well into the weekend. As flows drop, anglers will want to focus efforts lower in the systems. The drift from Vanderzanden’s to Sollie Smith should fish very well with a mix of both wild and broodstock steelhead available.

The entire Nestucca River should be a good option over the weekend. Like the Wilson, the lower the flows, the farther downstream anglers should concentrate their efforts for steelhead. By Sunday, the stretch between 1<sup>st</sup> Bridge and Three Rivers should be the best bet.

3) The Nehalem River will be the last to clear but should hold some fish when it does come into shape. It has been severely impacted by the floods and may not fish at all prior to the next

forecasted weather system to come through. If it does fish, it will be Tuesday or Wednesday before it is likely to have the steelhead green that we all like so much. The upper stretches around Spruce Run Park may provide that tint early next week.

The Salmonberry River may be a good alternative to the mainstem Nehalem but winter storm damage may limit access to the river. These are almost exclusively native fish that you'll be experiencing in this system so take care not to harm.

Shifting away from the steelhead focus most of us will have on the mind this weekend, sturgeon will also be a viable option on Tillamook Bay. Good tides in the middle of the afternoon should afford keeper seekers some fair opportunity for fish. The last part of outgoing tide has proven itself to be the most productive with sand shrimp a top bait. The middle and west channels are the most likely to produce. Effort for sturgeon this season has not been high due to the inclement weather but we do know there is a mix of both keepers and shakers in the estuary. Some years, keepers dominate the catch while on other years, it's closer to a 50/50 mix. We should have more to report next week.

Although the large ocean swell is forecasted to subside by Sunday and Monday, it may still be a bit too big for a comfortable ride in search of ocean crab and bottomfish. One can only tell the day you want to go out but check the marine forecast by clicking here for updated information: <http://seaboard.ndbc.noaa.gov/data/Forecasts/FZUS56.KPQR.html>.

The ocean swell will also dictate razor clamming success along Clatsop Beaches on this tide series. It could be a productive dig although a commercial digger recently reported it's been a challenging season so far. The weather has really been a factor in digging success this winter. Bay clamming should be good.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – The forecast is for another rough weekend offshore. Winds will be moderate as will waves, but swells of 10 feet or higher are predicted with some sources even less optimistic.

**Pro guide Jeff Jackson (541-268-6944)** reports, "The Siuslaw at Whittaker is dropping and clearing and should be in good shape this weekend. Plenty of broodstock are showing up in the STEP fish trap on Whittaker. Best bet for this weekend would be the drift from Whittaker to Wildcat or Wildcat to Linslaw."

Dry weather has allowed the Umpqua system to clear up nicely this week. Steelheading has been consistent with results improving with warmer air temperatures. Wild steelhead are in the mix here and should be handled carefully for successful release.

Steelheading has been worthwhile on the Coquille River. The water level at Powers was 3.74 on February 14th and is forecast to drop no lower than 3.5 through the weekend. These are good levels for successful steelheading.

The Coos River is expected to fish well this coming weekend. Coos Bay has been productive for perch anglers.

Elk and Sixes rivers have fallen to levels too low and clear to provide decent steelheading this week.

Boaters side-drifting or pulling plugs on the lower Rogue have been scoring steelhead this week. Plunkers have been experiencing fair fishing. Anglers are hooking a few steelhead in the Grants

Pass stretch as the run progresses upriver. Steelheaders have seen an improvement in catches this week with water temperatures increasing. About 330 steelhead have crossed at Gold Ray Dam but fishing is slow on the upper Rogue.

Snowmelt maintained the Chetco at fishable flow this through Wednesday this week, but as of Thursday, February 14th, it was dropping and clearing. It's likely to be too low to fish well by the weekend.

**Dave Pitts, Field Editor for Salmon Trout and Steelhead** reports from the Chetco River, "Drift boaters are finally seeing lower flows to connect on steelhead. High flows and dirty water have been the norm over the past few months. Brookings based guides Dustin Russell and Joe Whaley throughout the season high water and low have found ways to connect their clients into fish a high percentage of the time even if that means heading to another river. As the week continues not much in the way of precipitation is in the forecast, fishing conditions will improve.

"I would look for clearing and dropping rivers throughout Southern Oregon improving for both plunkers and drift boaters. Many say if flows continue to drop, it will make catching tough, expect the steelhead bite to take off and get ready to duct off those plugs.

"Drift boat anglers should start high up in the system and move to the lower river as water conditions drop. Be sure to go smaller on your offerings and stay with pinks on the Chetco, puffballs, yarns and eggs. Several anglers from Northern Oregon dyed sand shrimp pink and connected on some dandy sized Steelhead at the North fork and the willow run."

**Central and Eastern Oregon – Pro guide Steve Fleming (1-888-624-9424)** sent this report, "This John Day River Report is much better than last week. The river was frozen up in lots of places, but with the warmer days and nights it is breaking up much faster than anticipated. The water is a little off color at the Cottonwood Bridge, but still very fishable, and the last pods of summer steelhead will be coming through at this time. There are still some icy spots, and the Service Creek gage is still iced up, but the river running through Mt. Vernon is fishable, and so are lots of sections on the North Fork. There are lots of Bald Eagles in both these sections, and one was seen eating a steelhead last week near Dayville. This weeks weather will take the ice out, and with little rain in the forecast should keep the river fishable, and only rising slightly (200 CFS). So you bank fishermen get after them, and you boaters pick your sections carefully."

**Northwest Trout** – In the Northwest Zone, Alder Lake, Buck Lake, Carter Lake, Cleawox Lake, Dune Lake, Elbow Lake, Georgia Lake, Lost Lake (Lane County), Munsel Lake, North Georgia Lake, Perkins Lake, Siltcoos Lagoon and Thissel Pond are scheduled to be stocked with trout this week. On the trout planting schedule in the Willamette Zone this week are E. E. Wilson, Mt Hood College Pond, West Salish Pond and Alton Baker Canal. Henry Hagg Lake will open on March 1st.

### **Washington fishing reports:**

**From the WDF&W Weekender Report February 6<sup>th</sup> – February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

#### **North Puget Sound**

Fishing continues to be spotty for anglers casting for hatchery **steelhead** in several of the region's rivers and streams. However, salmon anglers have found decent fishing for **blackmouth** in a few marine areas of Puget Sound.

"From what I've heard, it sounds like Marine Area 7 and the northern portion of Marine Area 9 are the best places to fish for **blackmouth**," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "A number of anglers in those two areas have done really well in the last few days."

Selective fisheries for hatchery blackmouth – resident chinook – continue into April in marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands) and 9 (Admiralty inlet), as well as 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay) and 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner). Anglers fishing in those areas can keep two hatchery blackmouth as part of their two-salmon daily limit. They must, however, release wild chinook, which have an intact adipose fin, and are required to use single-point barbless hooks.

Thiesfeld reminds anglers that the waters from Foulweather Bluff to Olele Point in Marine Area 9 remain closed to salmon fishing.

In the rivers, **steelhead** fishing has been slow, said Steve Foley, another WDFW fish biologist. "I did hear that some anglers fishing the Green River did pretty well the first couple days of February, but then it dropped off again," he said.

Foley said anglers on the Green River are finding a mix of hatchery and wild steelhead, and that is likely the same for anglers on most of the region's other rivers. "This is the time of year we start to see a transition from hatchery to wild steelhead," he said. Wild steelhead, bearing an intact adipose fin, must be released in all area waters.

Anglers have through Feb. 15 to fish for hatchery steelhead on the lower portion of the Green River, from the 1st Ave. South Bridge to the South 277th Bridge in Auburn. The upper reach – from the South 277th Bridge in Auburn to the Tacoma Headworks Dam – remains open through the end of February.

Foley notes that other rivers in the region, including the Snoqualmie, Snohomish and the Skykomish, also remain open through Feb. 29. Other rules and regulations for freshwater and saltwater fisheries can be found at WDFW's fishing regulation website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

Elsewhere, a stretch of the Cascade River that closed in January has re-opened. The river is once again open from the mouth upstream to Rockport-Cascade Road. Low steelhead returns prompted WDFW to close that portion of the Cascade River for a couple of weeks to ensure enough fish made it back to the Marblemount Hatchery to meet spawning goals.

"Additional changes to fisheries in the basin also are likely this spring to protect wild steelhead," said Bob Leland, WDFW's steelhead program manager. WDFW will continue to monitor returns of wild steelhead, which are listed for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act, to determine the timing of any emergency closures.

### **South Sound/Olympic Peninsula**

Razor clams, blackmouth and steelhead could all be on the menu in the coming days — as long as rainy, blustery weather doesn't get in the way.

Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager, said he is advising everyone planning to participate in the late-evening **razor-clam** dig Feb. 6-9 to bring warm, waterproof clothes and a lantern. "The digs are scheduled to take place after sunset and there's always the possibility of rain," Ayres said. "We're hoping for good conditions, but it's always best to be prepared."

Twin Harbors Beach will open Feb. 6-9, while Long Beach will open for digging Feb. 8 and 9 only. As in previous openings this season, no digging will be allowed at any beach before noon.

Ayres recommends that diggers hit the beach at least an hour before low tide for best results.

Evening low tides during the digs are at 6:15 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 6 (+0.1 ft.), 6:52 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 7 (0.0 ft.), 7:27 p.m. Friday, Feb. 8 (+0.1 ft.), and 8:02 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 9 (+0.4 ft.)

Diggers may take no more than 15 razor clams and must keep the first 15 they dig, regardless of size or condition. 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.

A license is required for anyone age 15 or older. Any 2007 Washington state annual shellfish/seaweed license or combination license is still valid. Another option is a razor-clam only license available in annual or three-day only versions. Descriptions of the various licensing options are available on the WDFW website at <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov>.

Variable weather has also made for a challenging **steelhead** season from the northern Olympic Peninsula to the Grays Harbor area. On the Olympic Peninsula, the results were mixed as anglers took advantage of some clear weather to get out during Superbowl weekend. A creel check on the upper Hoh credited 33 anglers with 22 wild **steelhead** (all released) and nine hatchery fish, although catch rates were still low below Oxbow Campground, where 67 anglers caught four wild (all released) and one hatchery fish.

The Bogachiel produced its best numbers so far, with 22 anglers catching five wild steelhead (four released) and three hatchery fish. Although effort was low, seven anglers on the Calawah caught 12 wild steelhead and kept six. The Sol Duc on the other hand, slowed down a bit from previous weeks, yielding about one fish per angler. Of the 26 fish caught, 17 were wild. Of those, 10 were released.

"The cold weather is good for anglers on the Hoh, especially in the early morning when the water's clear and there's a couple feet of visibility," said David Low, WDFW fish biologist. "On the other hand, when the water's low and clear on the Sol Duc, it's hard to catch a fish — if you can see them, they can see you."

With wild fish now making their push upriver, Low reminds anglers that retention of wild steelhead is currently limited to one fish per year on the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Goodman, Hoh, Hoko, Pysht, Quillayute, Quinault or Sol Duc rivers. Elsewhere, they must be released. Retention rules for wild steelhead are outlined on page 33 of the *Fishing in Washington* rule pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>).

Farther south on the popular Wynoochee River in Grays Harbor, the fishing has been fairly consistent despite the variable weather, said Larry Phillips WDFW fish biologist.

"The most successful anglers are picking and choosing their days, paying attention to water flow and conditions," he said. Low hatchery returns this year haven't helped either, Phillips said. "But with the push of wild steelhead coming in the weeks ahead, anglers should have more success on area rivers."

Phillips reminds anglers that the Chehalis River continues to run high and muddy from flooding,

making it difficult to fish.

Meanwhile, those looking to catch some **blackmouth salmon** will have four more marine areas to fish starting Feb. 16, with seasons scheduled to run through April 10. Fishing is non-selective in those waters, including marine areas 5 (Sekiu), 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 11 (Tacoma-Vashon) and 12 (Hood Canal).

"People really enjoy this opportunity to catch some blackmouth," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "So far, catches in the north sound have been good, which suggests that these new openings will be productive as well."

The daily limit is one salmon, regardless of species. Chinook must measure at least 22 inches. There is no size limit for other species of salmon.

Anglers can kick off the season in competitive style by entering the Discovery Bay Salmon Derby, which takes place President's Day Weekend near Sequim. The derby is the oldest running derby in the state and features \$10,000 in prizes. The derby starts at daylight Feb. 16. The award ceremony will begin at 2:00 pm on Monday, at the Gardiner Boat Ramp.

Derby participants should note that selective fishing rules will be in effect, requiring that all wild salmon be released. Only fish with a clipped adipose fin may be submitted for this year's derby. For more details, call 360-797-7711 or visit <http://www.discobaysalmonderby.com>.

### **Southwest Washington:**

With warmer weather in the forecast, anglers may finally get a break from the deep freeze that has slowed fisheries around the region in recent weeks. The question is whether rain and rising temperatures will push area rivers too far in the other direction, said Joe Hymer, WDFW fish biologist.

"Most rivers have been running low and cold, but a thaw could result in too much of a good thing," Hymer said. "We have a big snowpack this year, which could swamp area rivers if it melts too quickly."

Late-run **winter steelhead** are now returning to the Cowlitz and Kalama hatcheries, but fishing has remained slow during nearly three weeks of frigid temperatures. A creel check conducted Feb. 2-3 on the Cowlitz River tallied seven boat anglers with one hatchery steelhead; two bank anglers had no catch. Fishing was also slow in the Kalama River, which also has a significant return of late-run fish.

"If conditions are right, that fishery could heat up in the next few weeks," Hymer said. "That run usually peaks in late February."

During the last week of January, Tacoma Power employees recovered 207 adult **coho salmon** and nine **winter-run steelhead** at the Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery separator. Thirty-one adult coho and two winter-run steelhead were released into Lake Scanewa at the Day Use Site and five adult coho were released into the Tilton River at Gust Backstrom Park in Morton.

Meanwhile, creel checkers observed no catch in the fisheries for **sturgeon** or **smelt** during the first weekend in February. With water temperatures hovering around 39 degrees, those fisheries probably won't improve until the rivers warm up a bit, Hymer said.

Smelt dipping is allowed from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. each Saturday through March 29 on the Cowlitz River and daily on the lower Columbia River. For weekly updates see the WDFW website at

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/smelt/index.htm>. For sturgeon seasons, which vary by area, see the *Fishing in Washington* rules pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>).

Unlike those species, **razor clams** don't mind a little cold weather. As recently announced by WDFW, Long Beach will open for late-evening digs Feb. 8-9 and Twin Harbors will open for evening digs Feb. 6-9. All other beaches will remain closed to digging.

As with previous digs this season, digging will be allowed only during the hours between noon and midnight. Evening low tides during the digs are at 6:15 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 6 (+0.1 ft.), 6:52 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 7 (0.0 ft.), 7:27 p.m. Friday, Feb. 8 (+0.1 ft.) and 8:02 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 9 (+0.4 ft.). The digs were approved after marine toxin tests showed the clams were safe to eat.

Diggers may 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.

### **Eastern Washington:**

The recent deep freeze has left ice relatively solid at most winter or year-round fishing lakes, providing opportunities for ice-fishing. Forecasted warmer weather could change those conditions quickly, so anglers are advised to be cautious and check out ice-fishing safety tips at [http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regions/reg1/ice\\_fishing.htm](http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regions/reg1/ice_fishing.htm).

A recent creel check at Fourth of July Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line found that anglers have been catching **rainbow trout** through the ice at the far south end of the lake. Fishing was slow in other parts of the lake, however. Anglers are reminded that Fourth of July Lake has a five-trout daily catch limit, only two of which may be over 14 inches, the most common size.

Hog Canyon Lake, in southwest Spokane County, is under the same catch regulation, although it has many more rainbows under 14 inches, said WDFW enforcement officer Curt Wood. The challenge at Hog Canyon is getting to the lake. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) gate near the shoreline had to be closed and locked because people were getting vehicles stuck in the heavy snow cover there, Wood explained, so anglers must make a long walk in from the upper parking lot.

One lake that rarely ices up completely is Rock Lake in Whitman County. Open water fishing for rainbow and **brown trout** at the year-round lake is good for those willing to brave cold and windy conditions, either from a carefully-maneuvered boat or from shore.

Fishing at Lake Roosevelt has been slow on net-pen reared rainbows, at least in part because there were simply fewer of them released last year. Anglers who catch the occasional **kokanee** in the big reservoir need to watch for tagged wild fish, which cannot be retained until a study is completed. From Feb. 1 through March 21, harvest of wild kokanee salmon (non-adipose fin clipped) with an external red plastic spaghetti tag adjacent to the dorsal fin is prohibited throughout Lake Roosevelt, including Hawk Creek and the San Poil, Spokane and Kettle arms. Research scientists from WDFW, the Spokane Tribe, the Colville Confederated Tribes and Eastern Washington University are conducting a three-year biotelemetry study on habitat use and behavior of wild kokanee. Researchers are anesthetizing fish captured for tagging, and under Federal Drug Administration (FDA) rules they cannot be consumed for a period of time.

### **North Central Washington:**

Bob Jateff, WDFW fish biologist from Omak, reported that winter ice fishing opportunities in Okanogan County have improved considerably due to colder temperatures.

"For **rainbow trout** the best lakes to try are Rat, Big and Little Green, and Davis, while Patterson Lake is good for **yellow perch**," Jateff said. "Powerbait for trout and a small jig tipped with a worm for perch are successful methods for ice fishing."

Other reports indicate that ice fishing for perch has also been good at Fish Lake in Chelan County, Jateff said.

The Northwest Ice Fishing Festival will be held Feb. 16 at Sidley Lake near Molson. Sponsored by the Oroville Chamber of Commerce and Molson Grange, registration is 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Molson Grange Hall or at the office on the lake. The cost to enter is \$20 for adults, \$10 for kids 14 and under, with prizes awarded. For more information, contact Robin Stice at (509) 485-4002.

Jateff says **steelhead** fishing above Wells Dam on the upper Columbia River has been slow due to cold temperatures and icy conditions. "Expect success to improve as temperatures start to moderate during the month of February," he said. All steelhead with a floy or anchor tag attached must be released when caught above Wells Dam, including all tributaries.

From Jan. 31 through March 31 anglers can retain hatchery (adipose fin-clipped) steelhead with anchor or floy tags in the parts of the Columbia and Wenatchee rivers that are open to steelhead. The tags, which were attached for previous sampling operations, are no longer required for monitoring purposes in open areas below Wells Dam. For more information on this rule change, see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

Fishing at Rufus Woods Reservoir (behind Chief Joseph Dam) has also slowed in recent weeks, but anglers can still expect catches of **triploid rainbow trout** in the two-pound class on bait, lures, and flies, Jateff reported. "Shore access is limited to a few locations on Rufus Woods, but for boat anglers there is a well-developed launch site just upstream of Chief Joseph Dam maintained by the Army Corps of Engineers," he said.

Chris Anderson, WDFW enforcement captain, reminds anglers about the two-fish daily limit at Rufus Woods. "If you're fishing with bait you have to count the first two fish caught," Anderson said. "Because lots of folks are catching multiple fish using bait, we're seeing lots of fish mortality. We and tribal police have been writing numerous tickets for folks exceeding the daily bag limit, including tickets for four individuals from Spokane who had 47 trout in possession."

### **South Central Washington:**

Jim Cummins, WDFW fish biologist, said he has heard reports that **whitefish** fishing is good in the Yakima River. "From what I've heard, the fish are large, often running from 14 to 18 inches in length, with some even larger," Cummins said.

Cummins also noted that fly-fishers are after **rainbow trout** in the Yakima River. "But there's about four miles of the river from Roza Dam upstream that are frozen, and there's shoreline shelf-ice everywhere," Cummins said.

Cummins also recently observed good numbers of anglers fishing through the ice at year-round Myron Lake and winter-only North Elton Pond in Yakima County. "I'm not sure how they were doing, but both the lake and pond have been well-stocked with trout," he said.

Those that would rather stay indoors can head to the 18th annual Central Washington Sportsmen Show, which is scheduled for Feb. 15-17 at the Yakima SunDome. The show includes a WDFW

information booth and features daily fishing seminars, a fly casting pool, fly tying demonstrations, trout bobbing contests, an outdoor cooking camp, and vendors of fishing and hunting gear, guides and lodges. For show hours, admission prices and other details, see <http://www.shuylrproductions.com/index.php>.

### **Reader Email -**

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**

Get prepared for spring - How to make a Crawdad Trap:

<http://www.wut2c.com/Activities/Survival%20Trips/Food/Collection/Crayfish/crawdad%20trap.htm#triangles>

**Weekly Quote** – "A trout is vulnerable to the fisherman because he eats. That is the theme of our inquiry." - Vincent Marinaro

**GOOD LUCK!**