

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 22nd – February 28th, 2008**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro - Columbia River salmon regulations become more complicated in the coming weeks so check state agency websites before venturing out. The lower river from Buoy 10 to the west power lines on Hayden Island will close on February 25th and not reopen until March 24th.

Rumors of spring chinook landings on the lower Willamette have been floating around for weeks, but the first confirmed springer was landed at Sellwood over the weekend. The ODFW recently decided on a one hatchery fish bag limit for springers this season on the lower Willamette but it is open seven days a week.

A few steelhead, including the occasional large hatchery fish, have been taken by trollers seeking chinook.

Keeper sturgeon catches during the last retention period fell off sharply compared to the past few weeks.

Clackamas steelheaders have been doing well on a variety of baits and lures. The water has been a little high but is exhibiting fine color with good numbers of fish available.

Sandy anglers are still being plagued by areas of billowing sand and a slowing steelhead bite. Native fish are beginning to dominate the catch in the lower river although some quality broodstock fish are still available.

Pro guide Brandon Glass (503-260-8285) reports the Sandy has been dropping in the past few days and so has the bite. The Cedar Creek fishery has also been hit or miss.

Numbers of native winter steelhead are down on the North Santiam, where cold, clear water is further hampering the catch-and-release fishery here. Willamette Falls passage has been extremely poor.

Legal and larger rainbows are scheduled to be stocked this week at Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake.

Northwest – Although Tillamook area streams remain perfect in color, the fishing has slowed significantly in the lower flows. The Wilson remained the most productive late last week but slow fishing was reported on the Nestucca which is uncharacteristic for this time of year. **Pro guide Jim Stevenson (503-881-5289)** reported, "Finally some fish!!! Fished the Nestucca and did good drifting eggs and corkies and saw others caught. Fished the Wilson and saw several caught; we hooked several landing and losing fish, more like steelheading is suppose to be. Water was high but beautiful deep green- perfect for the eggs.

The weather forecast is calling for little precipitation which means low flows again for weekend anglers. Steelheaders should switch to low water tactics such as bobber and jigs. Fresh fish will be concentrated in deeper pools in the lower reaches although a poor tide series will likely keep fish at bay until another rain freshet swells the rivers again.

The mainstem Nehalem could be a good option as it should finally be running clear by the weekend, barring any significant rainfall.

Weekend sturgeon chasers in Tillamook Bay enjoyed optimum conditions and fair fishing. The south channel produced the best results although few keepers were taken given the fact pressure has been light due to inclement weather all season.

Soft tides and a predicted east wind could allow for safe ocean conditions for anglers in search of bottomfish over the weekend. Always check the latest marine weather at: <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/>. Ocean sport crabbing should be much more productive than north coast estuaries.

The Siletz was subject to heavy boat traffic over the past weekend despite very slow fishing. Most boats floated from the town of Siletz to Morgan Park, only taking a rare steelhead.

Boats launching out of Newport crossed the bar in calm seas Sunday and Monday this week to enjoy decent fishing for rockfish and ling cod. Crabbing was worthwhile in Yaquina Bay over the past weekend.

According to counts updated on February 14th, over 1,300 steelhead have entered the Alsea hatchery facility this season.

Siuslaw anglers continued to score steelhead over the weekend amidst heavy boat traffic. The majority of fish available are dark or have spawned and are returning to the ocean.

Pro Guide Jeff Jackson (541-268-6944) reports that fishing is still very good on the Siuslaw from Whittaker to Linslaw.

Big Creek Reservoirs numbers 1 and 2 and Olalla Creek Reservoir are scheduled to be planted with hatchery trout this week.

Southwest – Steelheaders have been rewarded this week on the South Umpqua where action has been decent although wild fish are in the majority now.

Rogue River levels have dropped about a foot at Agness over the past week, but snowmelt has contributed to stable flows around 7,000 cfs. Steelheading has been fair to good on the lower river. The Grants Pass stretch has been spotty and seems to be producing mostly smaller steelhead when anglers have been able to hook up.

With the Chetco just over 2,200 cfs at Brookings, fishing has been slow to fair. It remains to be seen if precipitation this week will be sufficient to get this river fishing well again. When the flow hits the 4,000 cfs range and dropping, fishing on the Chetco will again be good.

Trout stocking in the Southwest Zone will resume the week of February 25th.

Eastern – Trout fishing remained slow to fair on the Deschutes over the past sunny weekend. Hatches were more evident than rises. Nymphing slower water seemed to turn the trick for fly fishers.

Warmer temperatures are allowing streams like the John Day River to flow ice-free again. Summer steelhead are still available and providing some opportunity for bank and boat anglers.

Pro guide Steve Fleming (1-888-624-9424) reports the John Day River has cleaned the ice

and the North Fork is flowing clear. Steelheading has been slow but there are a few around.

SW Washington – Smelt was the targeted species over the weekend on the Cowlitz River. Dippers had mixed results with some limits taken near Rocky Point. Males made up the bulk of the catch indicating the females are soon to follow. River conditions point to another productive weekend for dippers with a maximum of 10 pounds per person allowed.

Steelhead effort is decreasing on most area streams although the Lewis River is still putting out a few steelhead. Native fish are making up the bulk of the catch but hatchery fish will still return through mid-March. **Pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)** reports, "Floated the Washougal today. Got another whopper! Big fat buck probably close to 18 or so, would have been a little bigger if he was new. We were 1 for 3, lost another big one out of the same hole that was mid teens for sure. What a week for big fish!"

Columbia River Fishing Report – Well, the seasons are set and you may very well know how that fishery is going to shape up by now. Here are the preliminaries and the reason I say this is because although this is how the seasons are modeled, it doesn't mean this is how they are actually going to come to fruition. It's a dynamic situation as we are governed by ESA impacts to listed Snake River wild chinook stocks. It may close sooner, it may close later- depending on how good of catch rates we witness in our fishery. Anyway, this is how it is shaping up:

The mainstem Columbia River is open to spring chinook retention from Buoy 10 to the I-5 Bridge through Feb. 24, but will close for salmon, steelhead, and shad Feb. 25 through March 23 before new regulations for this year's fishery take effect. New seasons, approved Feb. 15 by the Columbia River Compact, are as follows:

- **Buoy 10 to the west power lines on Hayden Island:** Salmon fishing will be open seven days per week from March 24 to April 4 with a daily limit of one hatchery adult chinook salmon.
- **West power lines on Hayden Island to Bonneville Dam:** Salmon fishing will be open from March 16 through April 30, with a daily limit of one hatchery adult chinook salmon. Beginning March 24, the sport fishery will be closed for all species from one hour after official sunset Mondays to one hour before official sunrise Wednesdays.
- **Bonneville Dam to McNary Dam:** Salmon fishing will be open seven days per week from March 16 through May 10 with a daily limit of two hatchery adult chinook salmon. Bank fishing only from Bonneville Dam upstream to the Tower Island power lines located about six miles below The Dalles Dam.

Anticipating a strong run of spring chinook to the upper Columbia River but weak returns to the Willamette, fishery managers agreed to direct most of the salmon fishery above the confluence of the two rivers near Portland. The mainstem Columbia River will be open for adipose fin-clipped steelhead and shad during days open for adipose fin-clipped spring chinook.

Although sport anglers didn't get all that they wanted, we should all be thankful for this season given the stock constraints that we have on Willamette stocks. Special thanks goes to the NW Sportfishing Industry Association and the NW Guides and Anglers Association for their extended efforts along with the Association of NW Steelheaders, Coastal Conservation Association and SW Washington Anglers. It was an organized effort that paid dividends to sport anglers in the end. Job well done!

And just what is going on with our early return of salmon on the mainstem? With water

temperatures still a bit cold and the peak run timing still several weeks away, there isn't a lot one can expect from this fishery so early in the season. There are rumors however of light catches in the mainstem below the Longview Bridge including a springer weighed in at 18-pounds. Three spring chinook were reported landed in the February 12 – 13 gillnet opener averaging 17.7 pounds each.

Sturgeon fishing remains in the tank despite a small showing of smelt into the lower Cowlitz River. Weekend checking showed two legal white sturgeon kept, plus 53 sublegal sturgeon released for 47 boats.

The Guide's Forecast – With a looming salmon closure for the mainstem, salmon fishing won't be an option. It'll be several more weeks until any segment of the mainstem re-opens for salmon but be prepared for when it does.

With sturgeon fishing still in the doldrums, don't waste your time if you value it on this fishery. Catch rates are actually better in the Bonneville and The Dalles Pools but far from what we'd term as good. Save your smelt for better times or head to the Willamette for better options.

This would be the weekend to seek your Cowlitz River smelt so go get your fill on Saturday. Check out the SW Washington information towards the end of this newsletter.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Winter steelhead counts at Willamette Falls were hoped to accelerate mid-February but daily numbers have remained in the single and double digit range, bringing the total as of February 15th to only 480. While steelhead crossing Willamette Falls at this time of year are wild, low counts means slow catch-and-release fishing in the Santiam system where cold, clear water is further hampering the catch-and-release fishery here. Willamette Falls passage has been extremely poor. Reliable sources indicate a few springers have been landed since the initial report over the past weekend. The springer season has begun, but it's early yet for reliable results. A few steelhead, including the occasional large hatchery fish, have been taken by trollers seeking Chinook. Despite supposedly spotty results for keeper-sized sturgeon in the lower Willamette, several anglers have gotten into keeper-sized sturgeon.

Fly anglers had a good weekend on the McKenzie River, with wet patterns productive early and trout responding to a Blue-Winged Olive imitations during the afternoon hatch.

We have reported the problems license holders have experienced with 2008 documents which have included fading or even turning solid black. This has been attributed to contact with plastic (such as those handy, wallet-sized holders we've all used for years or from lamination. An announcement on February 20th indicated that the new-style, Tyvek (think extra-tough paper) holders are now available, but only at ODFW offices which issue licenses.

The Guide's Forecast – Trollers are taking a few (emphasis 'few') Chinook on the lower Willamette near Sellwood. While this may not be a hot fishery this early in the season, catching a springer does require being on the water. Besides, no matter how much the lawn requires that first mowing, fishing is always a preferable activity. With lower Willamette water temperature approaching 45 degrees and the Columbia barely breaking the 40-degree-mark, sturgeon anglers have reason for optimism this week.

A few keeper sturgeon have come from Oregon City while the popular St. Johns area has been slow. A better bet might be Ross Island Bridge or St. Johns if recent catches are any indication.

Scented smelt has been the best producer but it's always a good idea to hedge bets with a variety: squid, sand shrimp anchovies and herring, for instance.

Catches on the North Santiam, both winters and a few hatchery summer fish, would indicate that a greater number of steelhead actually crossed at Willamette Falls (possibly during high water without using the ladder). It will be easier to tell if that's the case when the water here warms a few degrees and catch rates improve.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Winter steelheading is reported as fair to good this week at the Sandy River although experienced anglers and guides are fairing best.

Pro guide Brandon Glass (503-260-8285) reports, "Well the Sandy has been dropping in the past few days and so has the bite. When the water was up at 10 foot and higher we were doing very well hooking up to 10 fish each trip. The lower end of the river is starting to see lots of natives and fewer brood-stock fish now. The upper river has been hit or miss for most with a few people floating from Dodge down and getting some good numbers. The Cedar Creek fishery has also been hit or miss for most, but I have heard of people catching Natives up to the mouth of the Salmon river."

Steelheading has been fair to good on the Clackamas recently but the water has become very clear this week, making for tough conditions. Unless showers this week add some color to the water, early morning anglers will have the edge now that the weather has warmed up. Downsize baits or drift a jig under a bobber for the best chance of a hookup.

Speaking of jigs, for those who are beginning tiers or would like to learn, Larry Sydow will be giving a free jig-tying seminar Saturday, February 23rd at Fishermen's Marine in Oregon City at 7 PM.

North Coast Fishing Report – Although most anglers are reporting fair-at-best fishing on most north coast streams, the fish that are coming out of these area rivers are of high quality. Steelhead in the high teens and even breaking the 20-pound mark are coming from these still green waters in the Tillamook district. The flows are low which are challenging anglers in their own right.

The larger systems like the Wilson, Trask, Nestucca and finally coming on line, the mainstem Nehalem remain the best options when flows get low like they are. Many of the smaller streams and the upper reaches of the aforementioned rivers are too low to drift and effectively fish from a boat. The fish present in the systems have been fished over several times and therefore, are less likely to bite.

Most recently, anglers are reporting poor results on the Wilson, Trask and Nestucca Rivers at mid-week. Although only fair fishing took place when the rivers first came on-line, there were a few days where good fishermen posted 3 to 5 fish per day- that was late last week. There are a few more spawned-out steelhead showing in the catch along with a mix of fresh wild and broodstock fish- especially on the Wilson River. The Nestucca has proven to be somewhat quiet in recent weeks.

Smaller streams like the Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem are running very clear and low now, making them poor options for avid steelheaders.

Sturgeon fishermen were out in force over the weekend with fair catches reported in Tillamook

Bay. We fished on Friday in chamber of commerce weather and a very favorable tide. Our tide's tally was 3 shakers with 2 other good opportunities but nothing to show for the days effort. Keepers were reported in the west channel and there were a fair number of boats fishing over there during the weekend. Sand shrimp took all of our fish.

The Guide's Forecast – With river levels forecasted to remain at low levels, steelheaders will be challenged to find good fishing conditions on many north coast streams. Couple this with the fact we'll be on a poor tide series and prospects don't look all that good for anglers. This may give folks the chance to experiment by trying out tidewater stretches are fish are most likely to concentrate there waiting out the next rain freshet.

With a forecast like this, it make smaller streams even less likely to produce good results. Leave these systems alone until we get that next rain freshet to draw them upriver.

To top it all off, the weak tide series doesn't give sturgeon chasers much of a chance for keepers in Tillamook Bay. Low slack tides are in the early morning or early evening not giving much of a chance to anglers.

Although seas look to be a bit big over the weekend, there is a chance that anglers and crabbers will be able to get out over the bar late in the weekend. Be sure to check the local bar conditions and weather forecast before venturing out. Coast Guard Station Tillamook Bay can be reached at (503) 322-3234. If it is possible to get out, lingcod, Seabass and some quality crab can all be had offshore in the Tillamook County area waters.

Central & South Coast Reports – Offshore forecasts for the coming weekend look too rough for recreational boaters to cross into the ocean, but that was the case a week ago as well. Last weekend, however, conditions moderated and seas laid down, allowing easy bar crossings at many ports.

Alsea levels at tidewater are forecast to increase from a low of 4.5 Friday evening to 6.8 by the morning of Saturday, February 23rd. If this is accurate, the main river may be out of shape for the weekend, but the North Fork should recover quickly during a break in precipitation. The lower Alsea is predicted to start dropping Saturday afternoon and may fish with dry weather in the long-range weather forecast for early next week.

Pro Guide Jeff Jackson (541-268-6944) reports, "Fishing is still very good on the Siuslaw from Whittaker to Linslaw. Water levels have been dropping and water still has some color, so the fish aren't as spooky as some other places. All methods are producing well. Some dark fish are mixed in with the bright fish."

Fishing was good on the Umpqua during the tournament held over the past weekend. Scores of steelhead were landed with many of the wild fish going to the broodstock program. Action continues to hold up on the South Umpqua for a mix of wild and hatchery steelhead.

As with most south coast rivers, the Coos is low and clear. Anglers hope that rain this week will improve conditions. The Millacoma has produced a few steelhead, many of which have been natives, to stealthy anglers.

Steelheading on the Coquille has been good this season when water conditions have been cooperative. Steelheaders on the North and South Fork have had some rewarding days.

Lower Rogue River flow and levels have been increasing gradually over the past five days due to

snowmelt upstream. Prospects for winter steelhead on the lower Rogue look good for the coming weekend. While prospects are for slow to fair fishing on the Grants Pass stretch, with over 500 winter steelhead having crossed at Gold Ray Dam. anglers on the upper Rogue and lower Applegate are experiencing improved catches.

Steelheading has been fair on the Chetco with melting snow upstream maintaining flows at 2,200 to 2,400 cfs all week long. Steelhead which have spawned and are returning to the ocean will be common in catches now. These fish are aggressive although undesirable for table fare and can be recognized by their long, skinny profile, earning them the nickname "snakes." It remains to be seen if precipitation this week will be sufficient to get this river fishing well again. When the flow hits the 4,000 cfs range and dropping, fishing on the Chetco is at its best. While the peak of the winter run has passed, steelheading will remain worthwhile for weeks to come. The same steelhead called half-pounders on the Rogue are often referred to as blue backs on the Chetco. The latter is the same term used for sea-run cutthroat on northwest rivers. Local naming conventions can often be confusing, a good reason to use proper naming convention in referring to fish species. Either of these are fish averaging six pounds or so. Steelhead have continued to enter the Chetco as evidenced by seals chasing and chewing on them in the Brookings boat basin. Fish early or late in the day with smaller baits and lures for the best chance of success in lower levels.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Lower Deschutes trout fishers are seeing occasional, albeit brief, hatches of may flies but are experiencing success deep-drifting nymphs otherwise. The Deschutes is open for trout above the northern border of Warm Springs.

With the river continuing to drop and clear on the John Day, anglers are picking up a few of the last late summer steelhead. When the water warms sufficiently, a world-class smallmouth fishery will be available to anglers.

Pro guide Steve Fleming (1-888-624-9424) reports, "The John Day River has cleaned the ice out and is flowing a little over 1000 CFS at Service Creek on February 17th. The North Fork is flowing very clean and around 38 degrees, has lots of fishermen and a few boats today, but nobody says they are catching any, yet. The South Fork and the John Day flowing through Mount Vernon is also clean and looks good for fishing. A few fish are being hooked in the Clarno area, and the water has 2 1/2' visibility. Fishing copper and orange striped steelie type lures was working the best when covered with Anchovy Smelly Jelly. The Cottonwood Bridge has a little more water and a little less visibility, but they are hooking a few fish at Rock Creek (river mile 20). The tail end of the summer run is going through there now and for the next couple of weeks. The secret seems to be to cover lots of water by casting lures across the river covered with Smelly Jelly Anchovy and taking three steps down river as you retrieve. Then do the same thing again. Steelhead don't like being backed up. Walk back up and change lures and go back down the river bank again. If you're not sure what lures to use, check out the Mepp's See Best Lures, and follow their color recommendations for temperature, water color, and light conditions. Good exercise, and effective."

Snow remains on the banks of the Willowa River, but anglers dressed appropriately have been taking some gorgeous fish on bobber and jig combos.

Northwest Trout – In the Willamette Valley, legal and larger rainbows are scheduled to be stocked this week at Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake. Big Creek Reservoirs numbers 1 and 2 and Olalla Creek Reservoir are scheduled to be planted with hatchery in the Northwest Zone.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report **February 20th – March 4th, 2008**

North Puget Sound

Time is running out for anglers casting for **steelhead**, as a number of the region's rivers and streams close to sport fishing at the end of February. Meanwhile, the **blackmouth** season is going strong out on Puget Sound, where anglers continue to hook some nice salmon.

"The San Juan Islands seem to be the best bet for **blackmouth**," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "Fishing has been pretty good around the islands for the past several weeks, and I expect that to continue as we move into March."

Through Feb. 29, anglers fishing Marine Area 7 (San Juan Islands) can keep two hatchery blackmouth - resident chinook - as part of their two-salmon daily limit. They must, however, use single-point hooks and release wild chinook, which have an intact adipose fin. Regulations change for the islands March 1, when anglers will have a daily limit of one chinook salmon.

Anglers participating in the recent Roche Harbor Salmon Derby took advantage of the good fishing. A total of 335 anglers landed 141 fish during the two-day derby. Randall Opel finished first with a 19-pound, 14-ounce fish he caught near Humphrey Head off of Lopez Island. The Arlington resident took home \$10,000, while Michael Bredeson of Everson pocketed \$5,000 for his second-place 16.12-pound salmon. Damon Peterson of Bellingham was awarded \$1,500 for his third-place fish, which weighed in at 15.4 pounds.

Up next for derby anglers in the region is the Anacortes Salmon Derby scheduled March 29-30 out of the Cap Sante Marina. Tickets for the event are \$50 per person, with proceeds going 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 \$10,000. For more information visit <http://www.anacortessalmonderby.com>.

In contrast to the San Juans, central Puget Sound has been slow for blackmouth, Thiesfeld said. "I haven't heard many reports from marine areas 8-2 and 9," he said. "From what I understand, there just hasn't been that much bait around."

Selective fisheries for hatchery blackmouth continue into April in marine areas 9 (Admiralty inlet), 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.

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

In the rivers, WDFW has modified regulations for recreational **steelhead** fisheries on the Cascade, Sauk and Skagit rivers and Fisher Slough. With low returns of steelhead expected this year to the Skagit River basin, those changes were needed to protect wild steelhead, said Bob Leland, WDFW's steelhead program manager.

Anglers fishing the Cascade, Sauk and Skagit rivers and Fisher Slough must now follow selective gear rules. The rules require anglers to use unscented artificial flies or lures with single-point barbless hooks and knotless nets. Those and other selective gear rules are listed on page 26 of WDFW's Fishing in Washington regulation pamphlet, which is available at

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>. There will be some exceptions, however, for the use of motorized vessels on the Skagit River.

On all three rivers and the slough, anglers have a daily limit of two hatchery steelhead. "These emergency changes allow anglers to continue to harvest hatchery fish, while reducing impacts to this spring's wild steelhead return," Leland said.

Puget Sound wild steelhead, which are identified by an intact adipose fin, were listed for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act last year. Anglers fishing the Cascade, Sauk and Skagit, as well as Fisher Slough must release any wild steelhead they intercept.

Leland notes that the Cascade and a portion of the Sauk remain open only through February. Several others rivers in the region also close at the end of the day on Feb. 29. For more information on the Skagit River basin emergency rule changes, as well as regulations for other rivers, visit WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

Blackmouth fishing is getting off to a slow start in parts of Puget Sound, but steelhead anglers are having some success on the northern peninsula. Rather eat clams? If so, be aware that a six-day dig is tentatively scheduled for early March.

While the fine weather enticed anglers out during President's Day weekend, the **blackmouth** weren't cooperating for many of those fishing in Hood Canal, said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "There was a lot of effort in the canal, but just a few boats were dialing it in," he said.

Lack of baitfish, such as herring and candlefish, was the likely reason for the poor showings. "Bait fish are critical," Thiesfeld said. "Wherever they go, the blackmouth will follow. On opening day, bait fish were scarce in central Hood Canal and so were blackmouth for most anglers. Hopefully, a bunch of bait fish will move in and then we'll see more salmon."

At Point Defiance (Marine Area 11), a creel check Feb. 16-17 showed 161 anglers caught 11 blackmouth, while the average was about one fish for every five anglers farther north in Marine Area 6. A creel check at John Wayne Marina showed 111 anglers caught 21 blackmouth while 339 anglers checked at Port Townsend Boat Haven caught 63 fish.

Meanwhile, sunny days and lots of anglers made the 32nd annual Discovery Bay Salmon Derby near Sequim a success during President's Day weekend. Approximately 130 salmon were submitted over three days, with the \$3,000 first prize going to John Goldingay of Driftwood Key, who reeled in a 19.4-pound salmon.

Next up is the 26th annual Geoduck Restaurant Salmon Derby, which takes place March 1-2 on northern Hood Canal. The derby is part of the 2008 Northwest Salmon Derby Series sponsored by the Northwest Marine Trade Association and offers a \$600 first prize. For more information, call the Geoduck Restaurant in Brinnon at (360) 796-4430.

The blackmouth season started Feb. 16 in marine areas 5, 6, 11 and 12 and runs through April 10. Fishing is non-selective and the daily limit is one salmon, regardless of species. Chinook must measure at least 22 inches. Marine Area 13 (south Puget Sound) will open March 1 through April 30.

On the northern Olympic Peninsula, anglers took advantage of recent drier weather to try for **steelhead** on area rivers. During the President's Day weekend, a creel check showed 30 anglers

on the Bogachiel caught 12 wild steelhead (seven released) and two hatchery fish. On the Sol Duc, 53 anglers caught 26 steelhead, including 21 wild fish, two of which were released. Anglers on the lower Hoh caught 27 wild (15 released) and nine hatchery fish, while on the upper Hoh, 125 anglers averaged about one fish for every three rods.

"Mid-February offered good fishing with decent weather and dropping flows," said Mike Gross, WDFW fish biologist. "But now, some rivers have started to drop and become clear to the point that fish are holing up and becoming wary. Hopefully we'll get just enough rain for the rivers to get back in shape. When that happens, we'll see some fresh fish on the move."

With wild steelhead now in the majority, Gross 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>).

For those preferring **razor clams**, a six-day dig has been tentatively scheduled March 7-12. Twin Harbors will be open for digging on all six days, while Long Beach will open March 8-9 only, provided that marine toxin tests show the clams are safe to eat. The proposed six-day razor clam dig will open on evening tides March 7 and 8, then switch to morning tides March 9-12, said Dan Ayres, coastal shellfish manager.

Digs also may be scheduled on morning tides in April at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks and Copalis if enough clams are available for harvest, Ayres said. Kalaloch will remain closed throughout the 2008 season.

Clam digs on evening tides are allowed only during the hours between noon and midnight, while each morning dig must be completed by noon, Ayres said. He also reminded diggers to note the switch from standard to daylight time, which begins March 9.

As currently scheduled, opening dates and tides are:

- March 7, Friday, 6:21 p.m., +0.3: Twin Harbors only
- March 8, Saturday, 6:58 p.m., +0.5: Twin Harbors and Longbeach only
- March 9, Sunday, 8:28 **a.m.**, +0.3: Twin Harbors and Longbeach only
(switch to morning tides)
- March 10, Monday, 9:12 **a.m.**, 0.0: Twin Harbors only
- March 11, Tuesday, 9:59 **a.m.**, -0.1: Twin Harbors only
- March 12, Wednesday, 10:51 **a.m.**, 0.0: Twin Harbors only

Anglers looking ahead to **halibut** season might want to check out opening dates and other information on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/halibut/>. Seasons will open April 10 in most areas of Puget Sound, followed by additional openings in May on the coast and the western Strait of Juan de Fuca. This year, fishing off the coast of Westport (Marine Area 2) will be limited to two days a week (Sundays and Tuesdays) after the initial opening day on Thursday, May 1.

Southwest Washington:

Smelt dippers may get another chance to snatch a 10-pound limit from the Cowlitz River in the days ahead if the third Saturday in February was any indication. Those who worked at it and chose the right location caught good numbers of smelt Feb. 16 as far upriver as Kelso.

"Water temperatures, river flows, and visibility are favorable and we're still seeing a lot of seals and seabirds downstream to Skamokawa," said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist. "Those are all good signs for smelt dipping. If current conditions continue, dipping could be productive during the next few Saturdays."

Smelt dipping on the Cowlitz River is open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. each Saturday - and daily on the mainstem Columbia River - through March. All other Columbia tributaries remain closed. The 10-pound daily limit for the Cowlitz equates to about a quarter of a five-gallon bucket. The daily limit on the Columbia River is 25 pounds.

Weekly updates on fishing conditions are available on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/smelt/index.htm>. Hymer strongly recommends checking that website - and others maintained by anglers' organizations - before heading out.

"Smelt can be here today, gone tomorrow - especially in a year like this when weak returns are predicted," Hymer said. "But the best fishing is usually on the leading edge of the run, so this is a good time to dust off your dip net and watch the reports."

With water temperatures rising, other fisheries are also beginning to spring to life. During the week ending Feb. 17, seven boat anglers fishing The Dalles Pool caught nine legal-size **walleye**, while those fishing the Bonneville Pool were sampled with their first two keepers of the year. Fishing should be good as fish fatten up for the spawn, Hymer said.

Boat anglers fishing for **sturgeon** also caught a few legal-size fish - along with some sublegals - in the Bonneville Pool and The Dalles Pool that week after being frozen out for nearly a month. Few legal-sized catches were recorded below Bonneville Dam, but a survey team counted 111 boats fishing sturgeon in that area - a big increase over previous weeks. Most of the fish appear to be in the warmer Willamette River at the moment.

Anglers should note that the gated entrance to Lions Park - also known as Martin's Bar - on the Columbia River at Woodland is closed until late July or early August. The Army Corps of Engineers is depositing dredge spoils on an adjacent site and the regular entrance site has been closed as a public safety measure. The Port of Woodland has posted the directions to an alternative access site on the gate leading into Lions Park.

Meanwhile, **late-run winter steelhead** bound for the Cowlitz and Kalama hatcheries still appear to be in a holding pattern. Few of those fish had shown up at the hatcheries - or in the catch - through mid-February, although Hymer said there is still time for a good fishery. "There's still time for that fishery to break loose," he said. "We should start seeing some action pretty soon."

During the second week of February, just 25 winter-run steelhead were recovered at the Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery along with 429 coho salmon adults. Tacoma Power employees released 103 coho adults and 18 winter-run steelhead into Lake Scanewa at the Day Use Site and 34 coho adults and four winter-run steelhead into the Tilton River at Gust Backstrom Park in Morton that week.

Did someone say **spring chinook**? Several springers, including an 18-pounder, have recently been reported caught by lower-Columbia anglers, signaling the start of the season ahead.

The mainstem Columbia River is open to spring chinook retention from Buoy 10 to the I-5 Bridge through Feb. 24, but will close for salmon, steelhead, and shad Feb. 25 through March 23 before new regulations for this year's fishery take effect. New seasons, approved Feb. 15 by the

Columbia River Compact, are as follows:

- **Buoy 10 to the west power lines on Hayden Island:** Salmon fishing will be open seven days per week from March 24 to April 4 with a daily limit of one hatchery adult chinook salmon.
- **West power lines on Hayden Island to Bonneville Dam:** Salmon fishing will be open from March 16 through April 30, with a daily limit of one hatchery adult chinook salmon. Beginning March 24, the sport fishery will be closed for all species from one hour after official sunset Mondays to one hour before official sunrise Wednesdays.
- **Bonneville Dam to McNary Dam:** Salmon fishing will be open seven days per week from March 16 through May 10 with a daily limit of two hatchery adult chinook salmon. Bank fishing only from Bonneville Dam upstream to the Tower Island power lines located about six miles below The Dalles Dam.

Anticipating a strong run of spring chinook to the upper Columbia River but weak returns to the Willamette, fishery managers agreed to direct most of the salmon fishery above the confluence of the two rivers near Portland. The mainstem Columbia River will be open for adipose fin-clipped steelhead and shad during days open for adipose fin-clipped spring chinook. In addition, the Cowlitz, Kalama, and Lewis rivers remain open and should provide good opportunities for hatchery spring chinook and hatchery steelhead in the weeks ahead.

Trout anglers are advised that Silver Lake near Castle Rock was planted with 2,790 catchable size rainbows Feb. 12, Kress Lake near Kalama got 1,514 Feb. 13 and Little Ash Lake near Stevenson got 801 Feb. 11.

Eastern Washington:

Fishing for **rainbow** and **brown trout** and **yellow perch** through the ice at Waitts Lake in southern Stevens County comes to an end Feb. 29. But as WDFW eastern region access manager Scott Young said, "When one lake closes, another opens." Just down the road from Waitts to the southeast, Deer Lake opens March 1, and it should provide excellent fishing for **lake trout** - if anglers can safely reach them.

"Most lakes in the region are still iced over but some may not necessarily be safe for ice fishing," said Chris Donley, WDFW district fish biologist. "Weather forecasts indicate more above-freezing days with below-freezing nights, and rain more likely than snow. Lake surfaces may be thawing and re-freezing, and fishing that opens March 1 may be delayed until there's more open water."

Other lakes in the area opening March 1 are Amber Lake in southwest Spokane County for catch-and-release of **rainbow** and **cutthroat trout**; Coffeepot Lake in Lincoln County for rainbows, **yellow perch** and **black crappie** under selective gear rules; and North Silver Lake in southwest Spokane County for rainbows under selective gear rules and a requirement to release adipose-fin-clipped fish.

In the south end of the region, seven impoundments off the Tucannon River in Columbia County will open to fishing March 1 for hatchery-stocked rainbows - Beaver, Big Four, Blue, Deer, Rainbow, Spring and Watson lakes. However, whether or not they will all be accessible or stocked by then will depend on the weather, said Dave Clark, WDFW Tucannon Hatchery specialist. As of Feb. 20, Clark said Watson, Beaver and Deer lakes were ice-free, but Rainbow, Blue and Spring lakes were half covered with ice. "Due to road restrictions we haven't been able to plant any of these lakes yet," he said.

But assuming the thaw continues, those lakes will likely receive their allocated "catchable-size" (about one-third pound) and "jumbo" (about one-half pound) trout before the opener. Rainbow is scheduled to receive 3,000 catchables and 100 jumbos, Spring gets 2,000 catchables and 100 jumbos, Watson 2,500 catchables and 100 jumbos, Blue 3,500 catchables and 100 jumbos, Beaver 500 catchables, and Deer 700 catchables. Clark reported Big Four Lake was completely iced over on Feb. 20 and probably would not receive its scheduled 3,000 catchables and 300 jumbos before March 1.

Fishhook Pond in Walla Walla County and Pampa Pond in Whitman County also open on March 1 for stocked rainbow fishing, but they could also still be icy.

If fishing action is delayed, anglers might want to enjoy the outdoors indoors at the first annual Great Western Sportfishing Show, Feb. 29-March 2, at the Spokane Convention Center. This new show features continuous seminars on warmwater fish, fly fishing, fly tying and salmon/trout/steelhead fishing, plus a casting pool, virtual reality fishing, WDFW information, and lots of fishing goods and services vendors. For more information call (509) 697-8208 or see <http://www.greatwesternsportfishingshow.com>.

North Central Washington:

Many Columbia Basin **rainbow trout** lakes open to fishing March 1 but persistent wintry conditions could delay angling action.

"Even with forecasts of rain and warmer daytime temperatures, there's a good chance most Columbia Basin lakes will still be iced up for the opener," said WDFW district fish biologist Jeff Korth of Moses Lake. "The problem is that the ice won't be thick enough for safe ice fishing, delaying angling action. But that just means there likely won't be an opening day crowd and fishing will start more gradually and last longer through the season."

Korth predicts Burke and Quincy lakes, on WDFW's Quincy Wildlife Area southwest of the town of Quincy in Grant County, will be among the best bets when fishing is available. Martha Lake near the town of George should also be productive, as will the Upper, Lower and West Caliche lakes. Dusty Lake, a selective gear rule fishery on the Quincy Wildlife Area, should also be good. Other small "walk-in" fisheries on the wildlife area that open March 1 are Cascade, Cliff, Crystal, Cup, Dot, George and Spring lakes.

Lenice and Nunnally lakes, on WDFW's Crab Creek Wildlife Area just east of Beverly in southwest Grant County, open under selective gear rules March 1, but won't receive triploid rainbow plants until April. Much smaller Merry Lake in the same area also opens March 1.

Lake Lenore north of the town of Soap Lake in Grant County opens for catch-and-release trout fishing March 1. By the nature of its location in a north-south canyon, Korth says Lenore will almost surely still be iced up for the opener this year. Two to four-pound **Lahontan cutthroat trout** will be caught and released there by April.

At the north end of the region, WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff of Omak reports **steelhead** fishing is starting to pick up on the upper Columbia River system. "Warmer temperatures are opening up areas that were previously frozen," he said, "including the Methow River, where selective gear rules are in effect." Jateff advises anglers to check the WDFW website frequently, because some steelheading areas could close on short notice.

Jateff also noted that **rainbow trout** ice fishing opportunities in Okanogan County continue to be good at Rat Lake near Brewster, Davis Lake near Winthrop, and Big and Little Green lakes

near Omak.

"Patterson Lake in Winthrop continues to provide fishing for **yellow perch**," Jateff said. "A small jig tipped with a worm and fished at various depths throughout the lake has been productive. Most fish are in the eight-inch range, with a few larger perch up to 11 inches. We encourage anglers to retain as many perch as possible, regardless of size."

Rufus Woods reservoir, on the Columbia River boundary between Okanogan and Douglas counties, continues to be the scene of very productive fishing for **triploid rainbow trout** from the local net pens. WDFW Enforcement Captain Chris Anderson notes the trout daily catch limit is two, and those fishing with bait for trout must quit fishing after two are either retained or caught-and-released, since bait-caught fish usually die. "Citations are being written to trout fishers who continue to cast worms and marshmallows, obviously for trout, when they've already caught two," he said. "But trout are so abundant now in the reservoir that **walleye** anglers are having trouble getting their gear down to their target without hooking a rainbow. Our officers must use discretion to determine intent, depending on fishing gear and methods."

South Central Washington:

Beginning Feb. 25 catchable-size **rainbow trout** from the region's fish hatcheries will be stocked in many of the area's year-round fishing waters depending on ice conditions, said Eric Anderson, WDFW fish biologist from Yakima.

"Most catchable-size trout weigh about one-third pound each," Anderson said. "We also stock larger 'jumbo' trout that run one-half to one pound each and some sterile triploids that weigh about one-and-a-half pounds."

Ponds and lakes in Yakima County that will be stocked with some of these earliest trout are Granger Pond, I-82 Ponds #4 and #6, Mud Lake, Rotary Lake, Sarge Hubbard Park Pond (juveniles only allowed), Tims Pond, and Yakima Sportsmen's Pond (juveniles only allowed).

In Kittitas County, North and South Fio Rito lakes, Mattoon Lake, McCabe Pond, Naneum Pond (juveniles only allowed), and Woodhouse Pond will be stocked. In Franklin County, anglers can go to Dalton Lake and Marmes Pond, and Columbia Park Pond (juveniles only allowed) in Benton County, will be stocked.

For all the catchable-size trout stocking planned throughout the region, see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/regions/reg3/index.htm>.

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

Astoria Fisher Poets: <http://www.clatsopcollege.com/fisherpoets/>

More on the commercial fisher poetry gathering
<http://www.fisherpoets.com/the poets.php>

Turtle swims from Indonesia to Oregon
<http://www6.comcast.net/news/articles/odd/2008/02/08/ODD.Amazing.Journey/>

Weekly Quote – "And if the angler catches the fish with difficulty, then there is no man merrier than he is in his spirits." - Dame Juliana Berners

GOOD LUCK!