

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 29th – March 6th, 2008**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- The Columbia River below Bonneville Dam is now closed until mid-March for salmon and steelhead. Sturgeon effort has been light and catches have been low.

Chilly nighttime temperatures have kept the water readings at Willamette Falls hovering around 42 degrees. Downstream temperatures are a couple of degrees higher. Winter steelhead counts through February 15th showed no indication of improvement. Summer steelhead will be counted starting March 1st. Trollers targeting springers are common around Sellwood but the run has yet to show.

Effort for sturgeon has picked up and catches have been fair to good for shakers, hit and miss for larger fish. On Thursday, the Portland Harbor fished well for keepers. Smelt, squid and herring have been effective recently.

Pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327) reports having good luck in the St. Johns area last Thursday through Saturday.

Steelheading on the Clackamas has been very slow in low, clear water. It's mostly a wild fish show although a few summer steelhead have started to show. Anglers have scored a few on Eagle Creek at first light.

Sandy steelheaders had a slow weekend despite good numbers of fish in the system. Summer steelhead have also been landed here recently.

Steelheaders on the Santiam system are hooking fish with much of the action on the lower North and South Forks. Fishing is better here than counts at Willamette Falls would indicate.

Boat anglers have a definite advantage on the McKenzie River as bank access is limited, but trout fishing here has been fair to good. The river is closed above Blue River.

Alton Baker Canal, Cottage Grove Pond, Cottage Grove Reservoir, E. E. Wilson Pond, Junction City Pond and St Louis Pond are scheduled to be planted with trout this week. Henry Hagg Lake will receive 9,000 trout in anticipation of the March 1st opener.

Northwest – The beginning of March is the traditional late season start for wild winter steelhead on the north coast. With the recent additions of broodstock programs on the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers, a consumptive fishery now exists for those interested in a chance at a hatchery fish. Several hatchery fish exceeding 20 pounds have now been taken on the Wilson River.

The Nehalem River has finally come into prime shape but fished poorly last weekend. March is prime time on this river as well and with the good return of early stock on most coastal systems, many are anticipating better fishing ahead.

Low, clear water conditions are currently impeding success on these systems but a predicted weather front on Friday could improve conditions somewhat for post-weekend anglers. Rivers are

forecast to rise less than one foot however reports **pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808)**.

Smaller baits and jigs under bobbers are most effective in the slower flows but plugs can also produce results for the first boat working prime drifts in the lower stretches of these watersheds. Steelhead will hold in the deeper, slower holes in low water conditions.

Weekend sturgeon fishers were disappointed on Tillamook Bay. Keepers have seemed to disappear although most would testify to a mediocre season so far. Crabbing in Tillamook Bay also produced poor results despite the high effort witnessed on Saturday.

Guide great **Bill Kremers** that frequently gives us reports from the Alsea and does great advocate work on behalf of the Association of NW Steelheaders is recovering from some health issues. He is on the mend we're happy to report but wish him well by dropping him a quick email at: bkremers@comcast.net. Emails are better than calls unless you're close to him as a speedy recovery is key to getting him back on the water!

A calm sea greeted saltwater anglers on Sunday thru Tuesday but near port bottomfishing and crabbing was poor. The few crab taken were in prime condition however. It was a rare opportunity to take advantage of ocean fisheries but predicted weather fronts will once again close north coast bay exits for sportfishers.

A fair minus tide series may give clam diggers a late afternoon opportunity along Clatsop Beaches and north coast estuaries. Surf height often dictates success.

Southwest – Despite high water levels due to snowmelt, the Umpqua system has been productive for steelhead over the past week. Fish are averaging 10 pounds or better. As the river drops into the weekend, expect to release wild fish which are in the majority now.

The Rogue River at Agness dipped below the five-foot level on Sunday, February 24th, but was on the rise from melting snow early this week. Steelheading has been worthwhile on the lower Rogue and should hold up well into the month of March. Steelheading in the Grants Pass stretch has been slow.

Snowmelt has continued to maintain the Chetco at fishable levels over the past week with flows averaging in the mid-2,500 cfs range. A 50 pound chinook was landed during a steelhead derby over the past weekend. While the peak of the run has passed and fishing has been slow, winter steelhead will continue to be taken for the next few weeks.

Limits of striped and pinkfin surfperch are being taken on the south coast. Bottom fishing offshore is also providing limits of fish on those rare winter days when a safe bar crossing is possible.

Scheduled to be stocked are Lost Creek Reservoir, Wizard Falls and Willow Lake.

Eastern – Despite brief mid-day Blue-Winged-Olive hatches, trout fishing on the Deschutes near Maupin was poor over the past weekend.

Pro guide Steve Fleming (1-888-624-9424) reports that warm weather is hastening snow melt and keeping the mid-20-degree water of the John Day high and muddy. It will be a while before this one fishes.

Grand Ronde steelheaders have experienced fair fishing recently with the number of hours per fish landed varying with angler expertise.

SW Washington – Recreational smelt dipping tapered dramatically on the last Saturday opener. It appears the peak has come and gone indicating another poor return for this prized sturgeon bait.

The North Fork of the Lewis River is the most likely place to intercept a steelhead in the district. The Cowlitz is another option but late returns are minimal.

Pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327) reports catching a couple of steelhead on the Lewis this week with the larger pushing 20 pounds.

Columbia River Fishing Report – With salmon and steelhead fishing closed downstream of Bonneville Dam there is little to write about besides sturgeon fishing. We'll update you on fishery re-openers as they draw near.

Sturgeon fishers don't have much to write home about either. Like in years past, mainstem fisheries are not performing this time of year and most die-hard sturgeon anglers are seeking keepers in the Portland Harbor and lower Willamette. A rare keeper was taken in the Portland to Longview stretch and in the Bonneville Pool. Shaker action in The Dalles Pool was quite good for the few anglers participating and walleye are starting to turn on, albeit in low numbers, in The Dalles and Bonneville Pools.

The Guide's Forecast – Columbia River anglers don't have much to look forward to until the mid-March re-opener for salmon and steelhead. We'll go into more details in next weeks edition.

Sturgeon anglers may want to maintain focus in the Willamette but if you are set on the Columbia, the water adjacent to the mouth of the Willamette may offer the best chance at a keeper. Success rates are actually higher for keepers in The Dalles and Bonneville Pools, but not by much. Fresh smelt will dominate but that will again be in short supply as the Cowlitz returns dwindle.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Sturgeon reports are a little more challenging to obtain this week with the Joe's tournament this Saturday. From what we can glean from sturgeon anglers willing to share, there has been an improvement in catches over the last retention period. Trollers around the Sellwood Bridge have managed to land a only couple of fish over the past week, some of which were surely steelhead as the 'first springer' prize being offered at Fred's Marina on Multnomah Channel has gone unclaimed.

Pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327) reports, "I fished the Willamette last week- Thurs., Fri., and Sat., in the lower Willamette-St. Johns area. We limited with nice keepers on Thursday, it was really good. Friday and Saturday was much tougher, not many keepers were taken these days. We fished smelt. Will be there Thursday and Friday this week."



While fishing on the North Santiam is better than one might expect given the dismal counts at the Falls, it's still been a disappointing year for native winter steelhead numbers. All one can hope for at this late date (from a fishing if not biological standpoint) is that the summers make a strong showing.

The Guide's Forecast – With the moon on the wane, sturgeon fishing in the lower Willamette is expected to pick up, but anglers looking to compete in the derby (or those hedging bets for a keeper or two), bait selection should definitely include smelt. Additions to one's arsenal might include squid, herring sand shrimp and, to cover all the bases, nightcrawlers. Include any scents in which you have confidence. While the St. Johns Bridge is a popular spot, other areas worth a try include Portland Harbor and the Toyota Dock in particular, Ross Island and upriver near Meldrum Bar.

Try the 'learn the River trip this Saturday, March 1st with local experts. Boats will be unloaded at 9 AM at Green's Bridge with launch at 11 AM. The drift to Buena Vista should conclude by 3 PM and there should be opportunities to fish a little on the way. Lucky anglers may encounter one of the fresh summer steelhead which have been turning up in catches recently. This is considered an easy drift.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Numbers of steelhead available to anglers on the Clackamas are really good. Getting the darned things to take bait or lure has been challenging. Small, dark lures have been effective at times over the past week but until the water gets a little color, count on fishing here to require patience, stealth and tenacity. Anglers will be fishing steelhead which are holding rather than moving until the river conditions change. Rain will also encourage hatchery steelhead which are holding in the Willamette below the mouth of the Clack to migrate upriver.

Action for steelhead on the Sandy River has slowed over the past week. Best results have come to boaters working the river below Dabney Park. All hatchery steelhead on the Sandy (or other rivers where wild fish are in abundance) should be retained regardless of condition in order to keep them out of the native gene pool. Traffic alert: More than a dozen drift boats will be floating the Sandy River on Saturday, March 1st. The boaters are members of the Northwest steelheaders and are working with the ODFW to capture wild steelhead for the broodstock program.

North Coast Fishing Report – With consistently poor water conditions, anglers are struggling to find steelhead in what many consider the peak of the season for wild winter steelhead. Early indications point to a potentially productive season but we have to have the water conditions to get it underway.

The river with the best conditions is the mainstem Nehalem but recent reports indicate fishing has been very slow. Driftboats working the Beaver slide to Roy Creek fared poorly last weekend although reports of fair fishing higher in the watershed are now coming in. This is really the first time all season this river has fished but high water conditions often send fish higher into the watershed to take advantage of the habitat at higher elevations.

The north coast staples; the Wilson, Nestucca and Trask Rivers are producing only a few fish with a mix of broodstock and wild fish in the catch. With low waters, most anglers are concentrating their effort in the lower reaches of these rivers. It's still first come first serve as the first boats down the river effectively cover the best water rooting out the early biters and not leaving much behind. Such is the life for low water fisheries.

Pro guide Jesse Zalonis (503-392-5808) offers up this report, "The Nestucca is fishing fair. There is a mix of fresh hatchery fish, wild fish, and run backs. The river is getting low and clear, and a stealthy approach will help the catch rate. The mid to lower river will be the best, with shots of fresh fish every day. People are catching them on everything from worms and jigs to small drift gear, and small plugs. One thing we have seen over the last several days is a bunch of divers and bait. Please try not to use that approach this time of year! We have seen several dead fish around, and every one we have checked, has its gills torn. They have all been wild fish. Those are the one's we want to see spawn, so please be careful with the fish."

The smaller streams are even less of an option. The Necanicum, Kilchis and North Fork Nehalem all receive late returns of wild fish but fish will not be entering the system until river flows return to higher levels. Can you believe we're hoping for more rain?

With steelheading on the blink, some anglers are looking west for recreational activity. Tillamook Bay does have some sturgeon in it but nobody is sure just exactly where. Effort has been running high with the nicer weather but success rates have not been impressive. Anglers have been in the middle and west channels but one angler reported only catching a small green sturgeon and hearing of another small green sturgeon from another boat.

On Sunday, I took advantage of the calm seas and headed west in search of a tasty ling cod or sea bass to compliment my sure limit of rock hard Dungeness crab. Well, reality set in and even though we were fishing effectively and crabbing 5 pots north of the north jetty (practically all by ourselves as well) with prime crab bait, our grand total for about 3 hours was one released (13 inch) ling cod and 5 nice crab. What a disappointment! There was little other boat traffic in the calm seas. Crabbing inside the bay was even slower!

The Guide's Forecast – With only a moderate increase in river levels through the weekend and a poor tide series also following, prospects for steelhead and sturgeon are not promising. The only thing steelheaders do have to bank on is the fact fishing has been so slow for so long that the fish are due to come in! With such a prolonged period of dry weather, even the small bump in river levels may show good results.

Regardless of which larger river you may pick to drift (or in some cases, drag) your boat down this weekend, you'll want to stick to the lower drifts as that is where the larger concentrations of fish will be. The Trask will likely have mostly wild fish while the Nestucca and Wilson Rivers

should have a mix of broodstock and wild steelhead available.

Whatever system you intend to recreate in, don't come with high hopes of great fishing. We'll need a good deluge in order to really jump start this spring steelhead season.

Sturgeon anglers don't have a lot to look forward to until mid-week. Another good minus tide series will be underway with the first real opportunity for catching keepers on Sunday or Monday. The days of grand-slaming the crab and sturgeon may be a thing of the past. Crabbing effort remains somewhat high for as poor as the results are. That's not likely to change.

Ocean goers won't be excited about the forecast. Large swells and big wind waves are in the future. It really won't be an option.

It's quite clear by now that severe beach erosion has taken its toll on our razor clam populations this year. Is anything going right? Unless you have a favorite hot spot, it may not be worth much effort.

Central & South Coast Reports – Offshore forecasts for the weekend are not friendly for recreational boaters. We were surprised by calm seas and gentle wind Sunday, Monday and Tuesday this week despite predictions to the contrary, so those with the urge to cross coastal bars would be wise to check last-minute conditions.

Crabbing has been poor in Yaquina and Alsea Bays, fair offshore when conditions have allows safe ocean access. Mild tides this weekend will occur early and late in the day which may appeal to those who enjoy crabbing during low traffic hours and at night

According to the latest counts as of February 26th, over 1,420 winter steelhead have entered the traps at the Alsea hatchery facility. Water levels here are expected to rise slightly into Saturday this week. Fishing has been slow to fair in low water.

Umpqua steelheaders continued to score over the past weekend, with the South Umpqua particularly productive. While some anglers have objected to the requirement requiring release of wild fish this year, it's a positive move that will ensure that native steelhead will survive to entertain out progeny and theirs. Steelhead are on the move as the North Umpqua water conditions improve. Catches have picked up and should continue to do so if precipitation this week doesn't raise and roil the river. Fish are averaging 10 pounds or better. Expect to release wild fish which are in the majority now as the river drops into the weekend.

Steelheading on the Coos River has slowed with the water too low and clear for best results. The Coquille has held up much better where steelhead catches on the mainstem and South Fork have remained fair but consistent.

Fishing has stalled on the Elk and Sixes with the water extremely low although the Sixes has continued to deliver the occasional steelhead. Rain this week would revive the action, but the peak of the winter steelhead run has passed this late in the season.

Surf perch fishing is heating up on the south coast with limits becoming common. Anglers here fish both ocean beaches and rocky areas, particularly at the mouth of tributaries, to take these fish which will bite readily for fishers who find a concentration of them. Bottom fishing offshore is also providing limits of fish on those rare winter days when safe bar crossing is possible.

The lower Rogue has been fait to good for bank and boat anglers. Steelheading is gradually

improving on the middle and upper rogue and it will continue to do so for the next six to eight weeks with the best of the season ahead. A movement is underway on the Rogue to allow anglers to clean catches on the river, allowing the fish parts and entrails to add nutrients which benefit future runs. This procedure is a desirable and logical alternative to transporting fish whole to clean at home or at the ramp where salmon and steelhead offal in trash cans at boat ramps causes a memorable stench. As much as riverside fish cleaning makes sense and is beneficial the river ecology, this procedure is currently illegal.

Steelhead averaging five to six pounds, referred to on southwest rivers as "blueback" (yes, the same term as that for sea run cutthroat trout on the north coast) are in abundance throughout the Chetco and are considered an indication the winter run is winding down. These harbingers of seasonal transition do, indeed, exhibit an iridescent, blue sparkle on their upper quadrants. Smaller plugs or bait (including nightcrawlers) are effective in hooking these smaller, scrappy steelhead.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Metolius fly casters who caught the massive Blue-Winged-Olive hatch over the weekend did fairly well on this river for a mix of rainbows and whitefish. The first Chinook planting took place here on February 25th. It is hoped this effort will result in a salmon return in the future.

Pro guide Steve Fleming (1-888-624-9424) reports, "The John Day River Basin has been set for flooding with the snow pack we received the last of January and first of February, but low temperatures have shrunk the snow down and just gradually raised the river. That is all changing now, there is still lots of low area snow on the North slopes at 3000 ' elevation on up, and with projected night time temperatures in the low 30's and day time temperatures in the mid 50's that snow will melt and run off into the river. These projected temperatures are the same for Long Creek on the North Fork of the John Day River, Dayville on the South Fork, and the Spray-Service Creek -Fossil-Condon area on the main. You can see it in the river flows each day, it goes up during the day (warm weather), and comes down a little each night (cooler weather), but is higher than the day before. The river is *off-color* now and will remain so for about a week. Thanks goodness there is no rain in the forecast. I went out last Friday, and didn't boat a fish. The water was 35 degrees, 8-9 clarity (1 is clear), and only warmed up one degree during a clear sun shinning day. We got a couple of smallmouth bumps, but no steelhead pickups. Yuk! The John Day is not pretty today, and will only get higher and dirtier for the next week."

Northwest Trout – The popular Henry Hagg Lake which opens for the season on Saturday, March 1st. According to the weekly trout stocking schedule, it is to receive 9,000 trout this week. But according to the ODFW website, Hagg Lake will receive over 300 broodstock rainbow trout in addition to 21,000 legal sized rainbow in preparation for the March 1st opener. If accurate, that should make for a decent outing. While this planting is similar to that conducted in 2007, this year there is no opening day derby.

St. Louis Ponds also open on March 1st. Pond #1 was stocked with 500 broodstock brook trout and Pond #3 was stocked with 500 broodstock brookies and 1,000 legal sized rainbow trout.

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:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com

Michael Teague: Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com

Random Links

Detailed Hagg Lake information from Washington County:

http://www.co.washington.or.us/deptmts/sup_serv/fac_mgt/parks/hagglake.htm#brochure

Freshwater fish poster from the ODFW:

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/docs/Fish_ID_Poster.pdf

Weekly Quote – Hydropsyché – "The water-consciousness collapses and superimposes time, telescopes our personal histories into a simultaneous present – and time, in the ordinary sense, stops." - Ted Leeson

GOOD LUCK!