

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 26th, 2008 – January 1st, 2009**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

*** * * Be Safe and Enjoy the Holiday Season ! ! * * ***

Willamette Valley/Metro- This would be a good week to remember to get your 2009 fishing and shellfish license before your next outing. With next years outlook for hatchery salmon so good, it may be wise to consider an additional hatchery harvest card.

Treacherous conditions kept effort at nearly nothing in the gorge and on the lower Willamette this week. Although continued poor weather will remain in the area, sturgeon fishing in the mainstem is likely to remain poor until early spring. Anglers are reminded to check new measurement regulations for sturgeon as we transition from a total length measurement to a fork length measurement. This should make recording more consistent as variations in total length caused hardships.

Water temperatures at Willamette Falls registered 35 degrees recently. Fishing will be very slow in water this cold. Steelhead bite better in warmer water and sturgeon will not be feeding actively.

The frigid waters of the Clackamas River have not been productive for winter steelhead recently. Action is likely to remain slow until air and water temperatures warm up.

Water level at the Sandy has been consistent and without much fluctuation. A few winters have been taken recently by hearty steelheaders but overall it has been slow. Strong east winds not only make fishing a hazard, it puts fish off of the bite. The next warming trend should improve success rates although fishing is likely to get much better by late January.

When the rain comes and snowmelt begins, it's likely the North Santiam will become a torrent.

Trout stocking has been delayed this week buy ice and snow. Look for eight-to-15 pound brood trout to be planted in valley lakes and ponds the week of December 29th, weather permitting.

Northwest – What few steelheaders that ventured out into the relatively mild conditions on the north coast found fair success for steelhead on district streams. Smaller coastal tributaries remained too low for good action but the Wilson put out a few steelhead early in the week. A mix of broodstock and early returning fish were reported with plugs taking a fair share of the bites.

Depending on how fast the massive amount of snow melts from the coast range, steelheaders may continue to see fair results when the temperatures rise. Low water levels should keep fish in the lower portions of the areas rivers and the Wilson is likely to remain a top bet. The best action is likely to take place downriver of Mills Bridge with a few fish scattered in the upper reaches accessible only by bank. The Nestucca is a close second with a few fish returning to Three Rivers as well.

Big minus tides were likely to offer up good sturgeon opportunities in Tillamook and Nehalem Bay but few anglers took advantage of them due to inclement weather. Cold air can have an especially chilling effect on exposed anglers in the estuary.

Overnight tides were favorable for holiday crab however and catches were good on Tillamook Bay. The best catches should be near the estuary entrance but rough ocean conditions will make for hazardous conditions for smaller craft. Make sure all of your safety equipment is up to date as this is the time of year when most fatalities take place.

Southwest – Another rough offshore weekend is forecast for the central and southern Oregon coast. When the ocean settles down, it holds the promise of excellent bottom fishing and decent crabbing.

Southwest Oregon got hit by rains rather than snow and as a consequence, many rivers swelled in height and flow. While most river levels are currently falling, a few continue to rise with the combination of rain and melting snow.

The Umpqua was flowing at over 15,000 cfs and approaching the 10 foot level at mid-week. While it was unfishable, it is expected to drop and fresh winter steelhead should be available through the mainstem and into the North Umpqua.

Coos River steelheaders picked up some fresh winters with the waters on the rise over the weekend. Fishing is expected to improve as the river levels drop after Christmas.

Rogue steelheaders who had been scoring a few bright winters even in low water last week, can shift out of stealth mode now that the water is no longer crystal clear. The river level is falling this week and it should fish well in the coming weekend.

As of Monday this week, the Elk was approaching the six foot level and exhibiting good color although no reports have come in. Chinook should still be available but the season typically winds down by this time of year.

The Chetco flow increased to nearly 10,000 cfs and 6.4 feet at Brookings overnight on December 21st. It has been dropping since and plunkers have scored fresh steelhead. The river was in good shape for fishing at mid-week. Be sure to avoid spawning salmon.

Eastern – Freezing weather has all fisheries shut down. Steelhead fishing in the John Day area was fair at best prior to the Arctic blast.

SW Washington – Like many other NW rivers, area streams have experienced little effort in the recent weather. The Cowlitz remains one of the better options but still remains fair at best.

The Washougal River has an impassable ice blockage that may remain in place until the weekend.

Some Washington steelhead jack counts are quite impressive; another signal that better fishing is likely in the coming years.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Inclement weather has left us nearly nothing to report on. That is, other than the setting of the 2009 sturgeon seasons for the lower Columbia River. Washington and Oregon managers “duked-it-out” on a conference call the other day with Washington managers weary of the recent years of high harvest in the Willamette River. Finally, with the strong urging of Oregon’s Steve Williams, the two states settled on a season very similar to the previous years management scheme. The press release is pasted here:

NEWS RELEASE

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

Contact: Chris Kern (971) 673-6031

Rick Swart (971) 673-6038

Fax: (503) 947-6009

Internet: www.dfw.state.or.us

For Immediate Release December 18, 2008

Oregon, Washington adopt 2009 sturgeon, smelt fishing rules

CLACKAMAS, Ore. – Fishery managers from Oregon and Washington today adopted new regulations for white sturgeon fishing in the Columbia River and its tributaries throughout 2009.

The rules, which take effect on Jan. 1, set new harvest guidelines, season dates and implement a new method of measuring sturgeon that may be retained.

In the estuary sturgeon fishery, located from the mouth of the Columbia to approximately 40 miles upstream to the Wauna power lines, anglers will be allowed to keep a total of 15,500 white sturgeon for 2009. The season dates adopted for this fishery are Jan. 1-April 30, May 9-June 28 and July 2-5, or until the harvest limit is achieved. Managers will meet sometime in June to review the fishery. Retention of legal-sized sturgeon will be allowed seven days a week during these dates.

From the Wauna power lines upstream to Bonneville Dam, anglers will be allowed to keep 11,300 white sturgeon in 2009. This guideline includes the lower Willamette River upstream to Willamette Falls as well as the Multnomah Channel and all adjacent Washington tributaries. The season dates adopted for this fishery are Jan. 1-July 31 and Oct. 1-Dec. 31, or until the harvest limit is achieved. Retention of legal-sized sturgeon will be allowed three days a week – Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

The bag limit for white sturgeon is one fish per day and a maximum of five fish for the year, as outlined in the 2009 Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations. Retention of green sturgeon is prohibited.

Earlier this year, the Fish and Wildlife Commissions from the two states adopted changes to techniques for measuring sturgeon.

Effective Jan. 1, sturgeon will be measured from the tip of the nose to the fork in the tail, rather than from the nose to the tip of the tail. The new method of measuring sturgeon is the same one used by fish biologists and scientists and is considered more precise.

The new slot limits are a simple conversion of the old method. Based on decades of research, scientists concluded that the fork length measure is 90 percent of the total length measure for the average white sturgeon, and these slots were based on that conversion. The new technique does not mean anglers will be allowed keep smaller or larger fish than before, only that the method of measuring “keepers” has changed. A detailed explanation of the new measurement technique is available on ODFW’s Web site at the following URL:

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

The new slot limits for sturgeon retention are as follows:

- **38 to 54 inches fork length downstream of The Dalles dam, including tributaries, coastal bays and estuaries, except:**
- **41 to 54 inches fork length beginning May 9 in the Columbia River below the Wauna power lines.**
- **43 to 54 inches fork length upstream of The Dalles dam to the Oregon Washington border.**

The goal of this change was to make measurements more accurate, not to change the size of fish kept. Anglers will find that the vast majority of fish that measured 60 inches under the old method will measure 54 inches with the new technique, and so on, down to the minimum size. These changes also apply to commercial sturgeon fisheries.

As in past years, anglers in the estuary fishery need to be aware that the length limit will change as the season progresses. From Jan. 1 through April 30, the 38- 54-inch fork limit will apply. This size corresponds to the old 42-60-inch limit. From May 9 and beyond, the fork length for sturgeon retention will be 41-54 inches, which corresponds to the old 45-60-inch limit. The midseason change in size limit was begun a few years ago to help extend the fishing season during the spring and summer months.

In the reservoirs between Bonneville dam and McNary dam, sturgeon fishing will be open to retention seven days a week until harvest quotas are met. Harvest guidelines for these areas are currently unchanged from 2008, although they may be modified in February after Oregon and Washington officials and tribal fishery managers have met to review recent stock assessment information.

Columbia River sturgeon harvest guidelines are based on recent population estimates, escapement needs and harvest allocations agreements. The states will review the progress of sturgeon fisheries in June to see if any season modifications are needed.

In addition to sturgeon seasons, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife also established a recreational smelt fishery in the Cowlitz River to occur on Saturdays from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. Jan. 1–March 31. Restricted commercial smelt fisheries were also set for the mainstem Columbia and Cowlitz rivers, and eight mainstem commercial white sturgeon openers of 18-24 hours each were set to occur in January and February.

Additional information may also be found on ODFW's Web site at www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/OSCRP/CRM/index.asp.

###

Washington assured Oregon that they'd be keeping an eye on Willamette harvest in the upcoming year and eluded to future restrictions on this fishery if future harvest remains high. One change the lower river will experience is a brief closure after June 28th to assess where the recreational catch is and hopefully allow for a July 4th weekend sturgeon opportunity.

And that's about all we can talk about this week for the Columbia River fisheries. Effort was next to nil over the last week given the inclement weather the region has been experiencing. Cold water conditions are likely to keep sturgeon off the bite for many more days.

Smelt often think about making an appearance about this time of year but cold weather here will also likely keep them at sea. It's possible on the next warming trend, that we could see a pilot run of smelt return to the mainstem. It's best not to keep you hopes up too high as this species

is now a candidate for listing and soon, may not be a legal bait to use in pursuit of sturgeon. Be prepared.

The Guide's Forecast – This would be one of those weeks that you take the time to prepare for some good spring chinook opportunity in the Columbia River in April. The first thing you should do is write your legislator (both state senator and state representative) and complain about the dirty dealings of the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission when allocating away the valued spring chinook this season. How ironic would it be that we have the 3rd largest return on record yet we get less meaningful opportunity to pursue them? Our only hope is to get enough buzz going around that the Governor's office gets an earful as to what's been going on. Then, check last weeks edition of The Guide's Forecast and click onto the Safe For Salmon campaign to make change!

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Cold water in the lower Willamette has stalled winter steelhead migration. If winters aren't crossing at the Falls, chances are the hatchery fish are not moving aggressively up the Clackamas. Sturgeon fishing slowed over the past week's Thursday through Sunday retention period.

Cold weather, snow and ice has negatively effected the ability to travel and any number of outdoor activities over the past week. So it is with the planting of eight to 15 pound brood trout in Willamette valley lakes and ponds, a common ODFW task in late December and scheduled weekly this year. Trucks unable to plant those jumbo trout this week will deliver a double load during the week of December 29th and weekly thereafter weather permitting.

The Guide's Forecast –Water in the mid-30 degree range as is the case with the lower Willamette this week will slow the metabolism of any species of fish. Steelhead will be lethargic and slow to bite. Be sure to tempt them with a bit of prawn or sand shrimp on lures. Sturgeon that bite at tall will do so very lightly. Use sensitive rode and hold onto them rather than using a rod rest to avoid missing bites.

Look for rain and melting snow to blow out the Santiam system in the coming week.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – A few winter steelhead are in the Clackamas system but between the meager numbers and cold water slowing the bite, expect slow fishing until the water temperature rises by a few degrees and more winters enter. While Eagle Creek is low and clear at this writing, a few steelhead have been caught here this week.

Parks and boat ramps at Barton and Carver were closed recently because of snow and ice. Check with the Clackamas County Parks and Recreation District at 503-742-4348 for the latest update.

when the freezing level is low the Sandy River is clear as a rule. While this is currently the case, the water is also very cold which has stalled the bite. As the weather warms, expect the sandy to rise and color up but steelheading will improve with warmer water temperatures and as a greater number of winter steelhead enter in January.

North Coast Fishing Report – A closed Highway 6 and unsafe driving conditions have kept north coast rivers sparsely populated. There were a few anglers that "broke-through" on Tuesday however and scored results in the cooler (but relatively mild) conditions. A mix of early returning Alsea stock hatchery fish coupled with some already quality broodstock fish are beginning to

show in fair numbers on the Wilson River. The Wilson is getting the most attention, likely due to its proximity to Portland but it is clearly sporting a good steelhead stocking program. How do you think the genetics are programmed for the broodstock program when all the fish we collect come from "biting stock"? Compare that against a stock of fish (Alsea strain), that successfully made it back to the hatchery to spawn because they didn't bite anyone's offerings.....doesn't take a rocket scientist.

All of the coastal rivers are low but the smaller tributaries like the Necanicum, Big Creek, Gnat Creek, North Fork Nehalem, Kilchis and Three Rivers are really low. This makes for snaggy conditions and timid fish; not the most conducive conditions for harvesting. There are fish available in many of these streams but higher flows will dramatically improve success rates. As for now, driftboat folks are catching fish using plugs while bank anglers are finding success with bobbers and jigs.

The Nestucca is the other early season hopeful but recently, it hasn't been producing the success that some of the other systems have. Regardless what your favorite system is, they are all in dire need of a rise in river levels.

Good tides this week afforded motivated anglers some opportunity to pursue sturgeon in Tillamook and Nehalem Bays. Nothing cuts through an angler than a crisp east wind however and we saw very few people in pursuit of sturgeon on the open water.

Crabbing would normally be a popular activity this time of year, in time for a holiday appetizer. Crabbing is good on Tillamook Bay right now with Netarts, Nehalem and the Nestucca estuaries also fair options.

The Guide's Forecast – Anxious anglers are awaiting warmer conditions that are forecasted to swell rivers just after the holiday. Temperatures will be the driver on how high these rivers get in the coming days. Models suggest that only a moderate rise is likely and that could spell good things for north coast anglers. Watch river levels closely from our home page: www.TheGuidesForecast.com and target your favorite stream on the drop. For the north coast, when the Wilson gauge reads between 4 and 5.5 foot, it's at a good level and so is the Nestucca. The Trask fishes good between 7 and 8 foot and the smaller tributaries (Kilchis, North Fork Nehalem, Necanicum) fish well when the Wilson is running around 7 foot.

Be very aware however that all of these systems, but particularly the smaller tributaries are likely to harbor blown down trees. It's not a good idea to float without a chainsaw this time of year and be prepared for the worst.

Evening tides are good for an overnight crab soak but be cautious of the late afternoon minus tides this weekend. They could produce fair catches of sturgeon but you don't want to be stuck on a sandbar or drifting out to sea in these weather conditions.

Central & South Coast Reports – The weather may finally be mellowing but not so ocean conditions which forecast includes winds 10 50 20 MPH and seas 12 to 15 feet. When offshore conditions moderate, large ling cod will be near shore or moving inshore in anticipation of spawning in January and February. Rockfishing should also be excellent and be sure to take crab traps for the ocean Dungeness fishery.

Steelheading has been slow on the Alsea despite the increase in water level earlier this week. As of Monday, only for winters had entered the trap at the hatchery. Following a spike in the level on December 21st to 7.74 feet at tidewater, the water has dropped about two feet and will

continue to do so into the weekend. It's forecast to dip below the five foot level on Friday (good for fishing) the rise again late on Saturday. Crabbing in Alsea Bay has been worthwhile with some crabbers taking limits recently.

The Siuslaw was running high and off color mid-week but should improve toward the coming weekend. It remains to be seen how additional rainfall and snowmelt effect prospects here.

With the mainstem Umpqua running 9,850 cfs at Elkton as of Wednesday this week, it will be a day or two until the river is fishable. There's a possibility that another round of rainfall will move in this weekend which will push levels back up. The South Umpqua should be productive for wither steelhead whenever the river level is on the drop. A few sturgeon were landed in Winchester Bay during the last minus tide series and when exchanges have been milder, crabbing has been good.

Despite a loss of smolts destined to be planted in the Coos system to disease in 2006 which was supposed to result in a poor return of winter steelhead this season, anglers have continued to land chrome fish even as recently as Monday this week with the river on the rise. Anglers here may expect most fish hooked to be wild. Crabbing has been good in Coos Bay although fewer limits were reported over the past week.

While the Coquille has produced some winter steelhead, rains has caused a rise in the level and the water is roiled. Fishing should be good once the water drops and clears.

Conditions on the lower Rogue are decent for steelheaders and fishing should remain good for several days to come. The recent freshet has encouraged fresh, bright winter steelhead to enter. Plunk if the water remains high, switch to drift lures or baits of sand shrimp when flows moderate. Angling has been slow on the Grants Pass stretch. Steelheaders on the upper Rogue are still picking up a few summers.

Boaters may apply for a chance to float the wild section of the Rogue River through January, 2009. There required permits are awarded by lottery for a chance to access this stretch of the river from May 15 through October 15. To obtain a lottery application, go to the BLM Rogue River website at [*http://www.blm.gov/or/resources/recreation/rogue/floatspace-lottery.php](http://www.blm.gov/or/resources/recreation/rogue/floatspace-lottery.php) or call 541-479-3735 Monday through Friday from 9 AM to 3 PM.

Good numbers of Chinook remain available on the Elk and Sixes rivers and now winter steelhead have started entering. These volatile systems react rapidly to precipitations and periods of dry weather.

Chetco flows remained high on Wednesday this week with the gauge at Brookings indicating 6,500 cfs. As this one fishes best at 4,000 cfs or less, and with the flow moderating, we still predict good results for the coming weekend. Good numbers of bright winters are entering with the higher water levels. Boaters launching out of the Port of Brookings when the ocean laid down over the past week did very well with rockfish and are seeing larger ling cod in catches as the spawning period approaches.

Central and Eastern Oregon – As the winter weather tapers off in Northwest Oregon, it will continue for at least several day on the east side. Plan your fishing trips accordingly. The Deschutes can fish well in the winter as can the Metolius but getting there safely is a major consideration. It was snowing heavily on the Deschutes during the day on Christmas eve.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report December 10th – January 6th 2008

North Puget Sound

Fishing at some of the region's rivers and streams has been decent as the winter **steelhead** run continues to pick up steam. On Puget Sound, the **blackmouth** fishery is under way, and the catch rate could increase as additional marine areas open for salmon.

"We've seen a drop in effort in the marine areas since the holiday season began," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "But those anglers who did get out on the water have found some fish in the last several days." Creel checks in the region show fair fishing for **blackmouth** - resident chinook - in Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton). At Shilshole Ramp, 26 anglers were checked with two chinook Dec. 5, while 48 anglers took home eight chinook the following day.

Those fishing Marine Area 10 can keep two hatchery chinook as part of their two-salmon daily limit. They must, however, release wild chinook, which have an intact adipose fin.

Beginning Jan. 1, options will increase for blackmouth fishing, when marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay) and 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) open for salmon. Anglers in those two marine areas will be allowed to keep two hatchery chinook as part of their two-salmon daily limit.

While out on the Sound, why not drop a **crab** pot? Sport **crabbing** is open in marine areas 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 9 (Admiralty Inlet), 10 and 12 (Hood Canal) seven days a week through Jan. 2. Crab fishing also is open seven days a week through Jan. 2 in marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu), and 13 (south Puget Sound).

Sport crabbing is closed in marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands), 8-1, 8-2 and 11 (Tacoma/Vashon Island).

The daily catch limit in Puget Sound is five Dungeness crab, males only, in hard-shell condition with a minimum carapace width of 6¼ inches. In addition, fishers may catch six red rock crab of either sex per day, provided those crab measure at least 5 inches across. Additional information is available on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/shelfish/crab/index.htm>.

In the freshwater, the winter **steelhead** fishery is under way throughout the region. The fishery usually peaks around Christmas, but already there have been reports of anglers hooking some bright steelhead in several rivers, including the Skykomish, Snoqualmie, Skagit and Cascade.

Brett Barkdull, WDFW fish biologist, said there have been decent numbers of steelhead in the Skagit and Cascade rivers, which are both running low and clear. "They're catching a few steelhead in the Skagit, and the Cascade has been very good at times," he said.

While most anglers have turned their attention to winter steelhead, some are still finding some **chum** salmon in the region's rivers. Barkdull reminds anglers that chum retention, however, is prohibited on the Skagit River.

Anglers should also be aware that a portion of the North Fork Nooksack River closes to sportfishing Dec. 15 until further notice. The river will be closed from the yellow post located at the upstream most corner of the hatchery grounds, approximately 1,000 feet upstream of the mouth of Kendall Creek, downstream to the Mosquito Lake Road Bridge.

For more information on the rules and regulations for all fisheries check WDFW's Fishing in Washington pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>).

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

From the coast to Puget Sound, anglers have several opportunities to add seafood to their holiday menu, including **razor clams, chum salmon, Dungeness crab** and **steelhead**.

Four evening razor clam digs are scheduled at Copalis and Mocrocks Dec. 11-14; Long Beach and Twin Harbors are scheduled for three evening digs Dec. 12-14. Digging will be restricted to the hours between noon and midnight.

Harvesters are allowed to take no more than 15 razor clams and must keep the first 15 they dig, regardless of size or condition. Each digger's clams must be kept in a separate container.

A license is required for anyone age 15 or older. Any 2008 annual shellfish/seaweed license or combination fishing license is still valid. Another option is a razor-clam only license available in annual or three-day only versions. Descriptions of the various licensing options are available on the WDFW website at <http://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov> . Opening dates and evening low tides are:

- Thursday, Dec. 11 (5:23 p.m. -1.1 ft.) Copalis, Mocrocks
- Friday, Dec. 12 (6:13 p.m. -1.5 ft.) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Saturday, Dec. 13 (7:02 p.m. -1.6 ft.) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Sunday, Dec. 14 (7:50 p.m. -1.4 ft.) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks

More digs are tentatively scheduled Jan. 8-11 and Feb. 6-8. Kalaloch Beach in Olympic National Park (ONP) will remain closed through the winter but may open in spring 2009 if the clam population grows to harvestable size.

If fresh salmon sounds good, Hal Michael, WDFW fish biologist, suggests fishing the Nisqually River where the late-run **chum salmon** season is starting to pick up. "When everything else slows down, the Nisqually chum run is still building," Michael said.

The Nisqually River remains open through Jan. 31, with a limit of six salmon, only two of which may be adults. Wild, unmarked chinook must be released. Minter Creek in Pierce/Kitsap counties also is open for chum fishing through Dec. 31, with a limit of four chum salmon per day.

Meanwhile, **winter steelhead** are showing up in Olympic Peninsula rivers, where a recent creel survey on the Bogachiel River showed 181 anglers catching 67 hatchery steelhead, while 69 anglers checked on the lower Hoh River caught 15 of the popular fish.

However, fishing conditions could be better, Michael said. "Right now it's taking some experience and skill to land a fish," Michael said. "The area needs some rain to bring more steelhead into the rivers."

Michael reminds anglers that wild steelhead-retention rules are now in effect on the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Hoko, Pysht, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc rivers. Anglers fishing those rivers may retain one wild steelhead per license year (Dec. 1 through April 30).

Anglers still have time to catch **hatchery coho** on several Grays Harbor streams where the Wishkah River is open through December and the Chehalis, Satsop, Wynoochee and Humptulips rivers are open through January. The Skokomish River in Mason County closes to all salmon fishing Dec. 15.

In Puget Sound, all salmon fishing closes on Dec. 31 in Marine Area 11 (Tacoma/Vashon) and Marine Area 12 (Hood Canal).

Michael strongly recommends that anglers check the 2008-09 Fishing in Washington pamphlet (wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm) for rules on area rivers before heading out.

Recreational **crab** fishers have a few more weeks to drop a pot or two, but should note that all Puget Sound marine areas close to crab fishing Jan. 2, 2009. Until then, crab fishing is open seven days a week in marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu), 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 9 (Admiralty Inlet), 10 (Seattle/Bremerton), 12 (Hood Canal), and 13 (south Puget Sound). Marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands), 8-1 and 8-2 (east of Whidbey Island), and 11 (Tacoma/Vashon Island) remain closed.

The daily catch limit in Puget Sound is five Dungeness crab, males only, in hard-shell condition with a minimum carapace width of 6¼ inches. In addition, fishers may catch six red rock crab of either sex per day, provided those crab measure at least 5 inches across. Additional information is available on the WDFW website at wdfw.wa.gov/fish/shellfish/crab/index.htm.

Rich Childers, WDFW shellfish policy coordinator, reminds crabbers to make sure they report their winter crab catch by sending their catch cards to the department or recording their information online between Jan. 2-15, 2009 (https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/wdfw/puget_sound_crab_catch.html).

"In order for us to make the best estimates, we need people to submit their reports, even if they didn't catch any crab," Childers said. He also reminds crabbers that beginning with the 2009 season, those who fail to submit their catch cards will face a \$10 fine when they apply for a license in 2010. "It's a good idea for people to get into the habit of reporting before the fine goes into effect," he said.

Southwest Washington

As **winter steelhead** runs continue to build in area rivers, WDFW will start planting lakes throughout the region with catchable-size and larger brood stock **rainbow trout** and excess hatchery steelhead that become available. Evening **razor clam** digs also are scheduled Dec. 11-14 at Copalis and Mocrocks and Dec. 12-14 at Long Beach and Twin Harbors. Digging will be restricted to the hours between noon and midnight.

Catch rates for **hatchery steelhead** were fairly low in the lower Columbia River Basin through the first week of December, but should improve after a good winter rain, said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist.

"We're getting a good early return to the hatcheries, but a lot of rivers are running low and clear," Hymer said. "Rain should improve fishing and help us determine whether this run is big or just early."

Through the first week of December, 743 winter steelhead had returned to the Cowlitz hatcheries, compared to 84 during the same period last year. Thirty-four boat anglers contacted in a creel survey that week caught five hatchery fish above the Interstate 5 Bridge, but 42 bank anglers accounted for just two fish. Sixteen anglers interviewed below the bridge had no catch.

During the first week of December, Tacoma Power employees transported 630 coho adults and six winter-run steelhead from the Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery to Lake Scanewa above Cowlitz Falls Dam. They also moved 106 coho adults, an adult fall chinook and six cutthroat trout into the

Tilton River at Gust Backstom Park in Morton, 367 coho adults into the upper Cowlitz River at the Skate Creek Bridge in Packwood and 221 sea-run cutthroat trout to the Interstate-5 boat launch.

Six bank anglers fishing Blue Creek caught and kept three summer-run steelhead, but catch rates were generally light on the Kalama River and the North Fork Lewis River. Returns to the Lewis River Hatchery were lagging slightly (408 compared to 489 last year), but about twice as many winter steelhead had returned to hatcheries on the Kalama and Washougal rivers through the first week of December as last year.

"It's still early in the run, but there's a chance of some good fishing once we get some rain," Hymer said. As always, anglers are reminded that any wild steelhead they intercept with an intact adipose fin must be released.

Hymer notes that the section of the North Fork Lewis River from Colvin Creek upstream to the powerlines below Merwin Dam will open for salmon and hatchery steelhead Dec. 16. However, all chinook must be released on the mainstem and North Fork Lewis through the end of the year.

For information on waters currently open to fishing for hatchery steelhead or salmon, see the Fishing in Washington rules pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>). It's also a good idea to call the Fishing Rule Hotline (360-696-6211) or check the WDFW website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>) for any updates.

Anglers might also want to check the WDFW website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly/index.htm>) for information on **weekly trout plants** that will get under way this month in lakes throughout the region. Some excess hatchery steelhead have already been planted in Kress Lake in Cowlitz County and Battleground Lake in Clark County, with more expected to follow. In addition, four lakes are scheduled to receive catchable-size rainbow trout from the Vancouver Hatchery this month: Lacamas (5,000), Icehouse (1,500), Battleground (3,000) and Kline Line (5,000).

Meanwhile, anglers are still catching legal-size **sturgeon** downstream from the Interstate 5 Bridge on the Cowlitz River. Sturgeon fishing has generally been slow on the Columbia River, but anglers should be aware of several new developments in that fishery. First, sturgeon fishing will reopen Jan. 1 from Bonneville Dam upriver to McNary Dam under a new annual quota. Also effective Jan. 1, statewide legal size measurements will be calculated from a sturgeon's snout to the fork in its tail, rather than total length.

Finally, Washington and Oregon are scheduled to set 2009 seasons for sturgeon and smelt fishing in the lower Columbia River at a meeting Dec. 18. Watch for news of that action on the WDFW website.

Eastern Washington

WDFW District Fish Biologist Chris Donley said there is "decent" fishing at Hog Canyon Lake in southwest Spokane County, with shore anglers averaging three rainbows each and boat anglers averaging limits of five fish, with multiple fish released.

Most of Hog Canyon's rainbow trout are nine- to 11-inchers from spring fry plants, with lots of 12- to 13-inchers that carried over from spring 2007 plants. "But don't let the length fool you because these are skinny fish," Donley said. "And there does not seem to be any in the two-year-plus class."

Hog Canyon is full of tench and bullheads competing with rainbows for food, Donley said. But it's the best available winter-only (Dec. 1-Mar. 31) fishery in the region.

Fourth of July Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line is much slower. Anglers checked during the opening week averaged less than half a fish each, and no one had more than two fish, Donley said. "There were very few rainbow in the 20-inch range at Fourth of July," Donley said. "Most fish averaged greater than 14 inches but were in poor condition. There were no **tiger trout** in the harvest despite our spring stocking of catchable-size fish."

Donley said if the Fourth of July fishery doesn't improve, a rehabilitation treatment may be necessary. Hatch and Williams lakes in Stevens County, also on the winter-only season, were treated this fall to rid them of competing species and will not be re-stocked with trout until spring.

The best trout fishing in the region continues to be found at year-round Sprague Lake. The 1,840-acre lake, which sprawls across the Lincoln-Adams county line along Interstate 90, was rehabilitated last year and re-stocked trout have grown well. WDFW enforcement officers who patrol the fishery regularly report lots of five-fish limits of 16- to 17-inch rainbows. Sprague anglers are reminded that only two of the five trout they retain can be over 20 inches.

Lake Roosevelt, the Columbia River reservoir formed by Grand Coulee Dam, is also open year-round and can produce nice rainbows through the winter. Currently, trollers are doing well from the 25-mile area up to the dam and shore anglers are catching fish from Ft. Spokane downstream.

WDFW district fish biologist Bill Baker of Colville says fishing for **burbot** on year-round Sullivan and Bead lakes in Pend Oreille County should be productive later in the winter as ice conditions develop.

Snake River **steelhead** fishing appears to have slowed considerably, especially in the upper stretches. Joe Bumgarner, WDFW fish biologist, said this year's fall chinook salmon run and unusually warm and dry fall weather may be factors. Of the river stretches last checked, the best catch rates were found from Lower Monumental to Little Goose dams. Steelheaders there spent an average of 14 hours per fish caught. See the latest creel summaries at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/snake/index.htm>.

Northcentral Washington

WDFW Chelan district fish biologist Art Viola reports that insufficient numbers of wild **steelhead** have entered the Wenatchee River to date to meet requirements of the NOAA Fisheries permit to open a fishing season this year. "Unfortunately it just doesn't look like we are going to be able to open a steelhead fishery on the Wenatchee this year," Viola said.

On the bright side, Viola reported steelhead angling has been good on the Columbia River from Rocky Reach Dam to Wells Dam. "We estimate that 1,397 anglers fished 5,759 hours and caught 445 steelhead during November," he said. "That's a catch rate of about 12½ hours per fish. Water temperatures are lowering but fishing should be good until later in December."

Elsewhere, WDFW Okanogan district fish biologist Bob Jateff reports steelhead fishing has slowed due to colder water temperatures, although a few fish are still being caught on the Methow and Similkameen rivers. "Anglers who are looking for a steelhead river with less pressure than the Methow should give the Okanogan a try from the mouth on up to the town of Oroville," Jateff said. "Access is more difficult on the Okanogan, but with a little bit of time and effort, anglers can fish spots that do not receive a great amount of pressure, even on the weekends."

Jateff says there are several shoreline access areas on the Okanogan River, from the mouth and upstream, including Monse Bridge, Chiliwist, Malott Bridge, several highway bridges in the towns of Omak and Okanogan, Janis Bridge just south of Tonasket, WDFW Driscoll Island Access and the Highway 97 Bridge in Oroville. Some of these areas are marked with WDFW public fishing signs, he says, and some need to be searched out. Jateff notes selective gear rules are in effect for the Okanogan River and no bait is allowed.

Anglers also need to be aware that bait is not allowed during whitefish seasons on the Methow and Similkameen rivers in areas that are also open to steelhead fishing. "Always check emergency steelhead rules on the website and the current sportfishing pamphlet for descriptions of areas that are now open for both species," Jateff said.

Several lakes in Okanogan County shifted to catch-and-keep **rainbow trout** fishing Dec. 1, including Green lakes near Omak, Rat Lake near Brewster and Davis Lake near Winthrop. All have a five-fish daily catch limit and bait is allowed.

Okanogan County's year-round Starzman Lake was treated this fall to rid it of competing species and will not be re-stocked with trout until spring.

WDFW regional fish program manager Jeff Korth reports that lots of **rainbow trout** running 10-to-12 inches were stocked this fall in several year-round waters on the Seep Lakes unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area. Canal, Windmill and Heart lakes, which lie south of Potholes Reservoir, are producing catches now and could continue to be good fisheries after safe ice cover develops.

"These lakes have lots of springs, so ice fishers need to be especially careful about thin spots," Korth said,

Korth also noted that Beda Lake, a year-round selective-gear fishery just south of Winchester Wasteway, was recently stocked with some catchable-size rainbows and should fish well until the ice comes. Beda Lake and several other year-round Grant County lakes south of Interstate 90 were recently re-opened after being closed earlier this year.

Other re-opened lakes are Brookies Lake and the Desert Wildlife Area chain of lakes, which includes Aztec, Desert, North Desert, Dune, Harris, Lizard, Meadowlark, Sedge, and Tern lakes. Moderate fishing opportunities are available on these lakes, which were not treated when adjacent ponds on the wildlife area were rehabilitated, under the permanent rules listed in the Sport Fishing Rules pamphlet.

Access to some waters south of Potholes Reservoir may be closed through Dec. 16 while the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works to restore Columbia National Wildlife Refuge land damaged by fires this summer. The closure covers lands west of Marsh Unit 1 and the Falcon Lakes, south of O'Sullivan Dam, east of Corral Lake and north of Upper Goose Lake in Management Unit 1. Access to some land north of Upper Goose Lake and around Corral Lake may also be affected. Access to Blythe, Chukar and Scaup lakes may be restricted during aerial herbicide spraying to control invasive cheatgrass and by aerial seeding to restore native vegetation. For up-to-date information on closures, call 509-546-8300.

Walleye fishing on Potholes Reservoir is "pretty darn good right now," according to WDFW Enforcement Captain Chris Anderson. "Lots of 22-inch and bigger fish are being taken around Mardon's Resort," he said.

[Southcentral Washington](#)

Paul Hoffarth, WDFW district fish biologist, reports **steelhead** fishing effort on the Columbia River near the Tri-Cities continues to decline as the weather grows colder. The most recently measured catch rate for bank anglers was an average of one steelhead for 14 hours of fishing. Boat anglers averaged one steelhead for 8.5 hours of angling.

The Columbia River Ringold area steelhead fishery is open from the Highway 395 Bridge at Pasco/Kennewick upstream to the wooden power line towers at the former Hanford town site. Anglers can retain any hatchery steelhead, identified by a clipped adipose fin, as part of their daily limit of two steelhead. All wild steelhead must be released.

Eric Anderson, WDFW Yakima district fish biologist, said more big broodstock **rainbow trout** from the Goldendale Fish Hatchery were recently stocked in several Yakima County lakes. Sarge Hubbard Pond, which is a juveniles only fishery in the city park of the same name, received 15 five-pound rainbow broodstock and 25 eight-pounders. Rotary Lake, near Yakima's Greenway Trail, received 44 five-pounders and 76 eight-pounders. Interstate-82 Pond #4 received 15 five-pounders and 25 eight-pounders.

The region's winter-only trout water, North Elton Pond alongside Interstate 82 near Selah in Yakima County, has lots of half-pound rainbows. Anderson reminds anglers the daily catch limit at North Elton is two trout.

Jim Cummins, WDFW fish biologist, said the catch-and-release section of the Yakima River is probably still producing a few rainbow trout for fly anglers, considering the relatively mild weather.

Cummins notes that winter **whitefish** action on the Yakima's 3,500-foot stretch below Roza Dam will likely pick up with more wintery weather. Whitefish are also fair game now on sections of the Naches and Klickitat rivers; check the fishing rules pamphlet for specific river stretch descriptions. Whitefish gear is restricted to one single-point hook with a maximum hook size of 3/16-inch from point to shank (hook size 14). Up to 15 whitefish can be retained daily. Most of the fish will run from 10 to 13 inches, found in winter groups in deep pools, and usually caught with maggots or small artificial flies or lures.

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

Historical photos by the U.S. Forest Service: <http://www.fs.fed.us/photovideo>

Weekly Quote – “Happy Christmas to all and to all a good night” – S. Claus

GOOD LUCK!