

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 30<sup>th</sup> – February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** Although effort remains non-existent in the Columbia River Gorge for sturgeon, anglers fishing the Portland to Longview stretch are taking a few keepers. Small concentrations of fish are present likely due to the history of a smelt run to this section of river in the past. Fresh smelt should produce the best results but this key bait is hard to find.

Water temperature at Willamette Falls dropped to about 40 degrees with the visibility up to nearly two feet. Winter steelhead are crossing daily in modest numbers with the low water temperatures discouraging fish migration. Sturgeon fishing has slowed.

Steelheading has been slow on the Clackamas but it has produced a few very large fish. If the water temperature would improve, so would the fishing.

The occasional winter steelhead has been taken on the Sandy and while it's slow, there are certainly fishable numbers available now. The influence of the cold east winds has kept fish lethargic but the current warming trend should stimulate the bite.

**Pro guide Brandon Glass (503-260-8285)** reports that while slow on the Sandy, he's been able to put one to four winter steelhead in the boat on each trip.

Catch-and-release fishing for native winters is slow on the North Santiam as there are few fish in the system.

Sheridan Pond, E. E. Wilson Pond, Junction City Pond, Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake are scheduled to be planted with trout.

**Northwest –** Steelheaders struggled on most district streams this week as flows dropped and fish were scattered after the last high water event. The lower stretches of north coast streams will offer up the best opportunities if the dry weather persists.

Plugs become an effective method for steelhead in the lower flows but mediocre tides and the fact it's still early for the bulk of the run to return to the north coast make this weekends prospects fair at best. The Wilson and Nestucca remain the best bets for a chance at a hatchery fish.

Rivers that receive plants of the early returning strain of steelhead will start to see spent steelhead attempting to return to the ocean. While these "kelts" are aggressive biters, they don't make great tablefare but some anglers choose to smoke them instead. These fish were planted to be harvested but you should still utilize what you take.

Sturgeon effort has slowed on Tillamook Bay with better tides coming back the following weekend.

Bottomfishers working dinner reef posted poor results but ocean crabbing was fair for high quality keepers despite a strong commercial effort just outside of Tillamook Bay. Seas are forecast to be big over the weekend making ocean fishing a poor option.

Offshore anglers posted great results for lingcod and seabass. Female lingcod are now laden with eggs and anglers should consider releasing them if not hooked lethally.

Crabbing inside most coastal estuaries is slow and will likely continue to be in the coming weeks.

**Southwest –** Fishing has been slow at most central and southwest coastal streams and rivers with low and clear water conditions limiting success. Long range weather forecasts indicate a dry week ahead.

Jetty and rock fishing has been rewarding at various locations. The rockfish bite has been good but lingcod have yet to show in shallow water.

**Pro guide Bill Kremers (541 754 6411)** reports catching steelhead on the Alsea recently but they were all wild. He also took a trip out of Depoe Bay with great results for lingcod and rockfish.

**Pro guide Jeff Jackson (541-268-6944)** reports slow steelheading on the Siuslaw but predicts things will turn around with rain.

The Umpqua has offered fair fishing at times but the vast majority of steelhead banked have been wild with only a couple of hatchery fish reported. The 17th annual Umpqua Fishery Enhancement Derby is January 30 and 31st this year and will include a dinner and auction. For information, call 503-672-0757.

South coast rainfall has improved the winter steelhead fishery on the Rogue. Good bites have occurred periodically which has allowed steelheaders to sort hatchery fish from the natives landed. Steelhead are in the Grants Pass stretch in fishable numbers now.

As of Monday this week, the half-inch of rain that fell in the Elk River area was insufficient to affect low, clear conditions.

Offshore boaters have taken advantage of calm seas recently to enjoy excellent fishing for rockfish and lingcod along with good ocean crabbing out of the Port of Brookings. Surf fishers on the area beaches have continued to realize good catches. The Chetco is too low and clear to fish.

**Eastern –** Trout fishing has been slow to fair on the lower Deschutes, most productive on warmer days. The river is closed in the Warm Springs, Trout Creek and South Junction areas.

Trollers working The Dalles Pool are averaging about a fish per boat but almost all the fish are wild and must be released unharmed.

Lake Billy Chinook is producing bull trout as well as kokanee to trollers using downriggers.

**SW Washington –** The Cowlitz River remains turbid from a slide upriver. Blue Creek closes to hatchery steelhead and cutthroat trout beginning February 1<sup>st</sup>.

The Kalama and East Fork Lewis are the best bets for area steelheaders but neither is producing great results. These fisheries should improve in the coming weeks however, especially with the warming temperatures.

Smelt were confirmed in the Lewis River but sport dipping is only open on the Cowlitz on Saturdays from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

**Columbia River Fishing Report –** It's still winter doldrums on the mainstem Columbia where sportanglers anxiously await what seasons will be handed down from the Washington and Oregon

Fish and Wildlife Commissions. The latest move is really no move at all. Washington Commissioners decided to hold fast on their recommendation of a 65/35 split in favor of sportanglers creating an impasse in the joint-state management of the mainstem fishery. Where this goes is anyone's guess but there are rumors flying around that if an agreement isn't hashed out, Oregon residents will have to fish the Oregon side and Washington residents will have to fish the Washington side. How weird would that be? What's even more profound is how silly is this process? Are we in kindergarten here?

One former fishery manager has a real solution to this issue and it will be going in front of the Oregon legislature this session. Jim Martin is stumping the Safe 4 Salmon campaign as he, along with a few other very qualified biologists crafted the concept in recent months and it's really gaining ground with our policy makers in Salem. To learn more about the Safe 4 Salmon campaign, go here: [http://www.nsiafishing.org/safe\\_for\\_salmon.htm](http://www.nsiafishing.org/safe_for_salmon.htm) only your donations give this initiative life! Please consider a donation TODAY!

There is some sturgeon activity taking place in the Portland to Longview stretch of the Columbia but only 2 keepers were reported for 33 boats fishing that stretch along with 20 shakers. Most of the sturgeon effort is taking place just upstream from the mouth of the Willamette in the Portland Harbor. The water temperature is slightly warmer in the Willamette versus the Columbia. **Pro guide Dan Ponciano (360-607-8511)** contributed a great report, check it out in the Willamette section of this newsletter.

The ODF&W report continues to post some good catches of steelhead (mostly wild) in The Dalles Pool for boats likely working plugs. Although we don't have definitive information on this fishery, like the John Day fishery, anglers likely troll plugs in the reservoir near the river mouths of nearby tributaries. Whatever the technique, one adipose fin-clipped steelhead kept, plus five unclipped steelhead released for five boats is a noteworthy catch.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Here's what to expect from the Columbia River this week:

Poor sturgeon fishing,  
No agreement on a spring chinook fishery,  
No salmon catch,  
No show for smelt as the return of the cold water likely sent them back to sea.

How does that grab ya? Oh yeah, the crabbing has slowed significantly in the estuary as well.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – As of January 28th, the Willamette water temperature at the Falls was down to 39 degrees. Temperatures in the high 30s will have a negative impact on all fishing. Boat pressure on the lower Willamette has been heavy in recent weeks with anglers trying for sturgeon.

The lower Willamette is the place to be for winter sturgeon. **Pro guide Dan Ponciano (360-607-8511)** reported a short but fruitful effort for sturgeon on his birthday (1/23). He started off at the Toyota Hole (Columbia at the Willamette mouth) marking lots of fish on the screen but not getting them to bite in the frigid waters of the Columbia. He took off up the Willamette to the Portland Harbor and sat down on a good bunch of biters before the tide changed. His group of 3 landed 35 fish between 9:00 and 12:30 with 5 of the 35 in the keeper range. They harvested 2 of them and released an oversize sturgeon as well. FRESH smelt was the key for these guys and Dan stated he likely out-fished nearby boats 3:1. Dan tipped that when the water temperature is colder than 40 degrees, you'll need "super-baits" to entice sturgeon. The smelt he had was fresh caught from the night before. Fresh clearly makes a significant difference.

North and South Santiam Rivers remain higher than normal. With just over 500 fish over Willamette Falls, there aren't enough fish in these systems to tempt anglers.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Finding fresh smelt can be a challenge, but it's obviously the 'tipping point' for results in the lower Willamette. Some fish markets have them. Another possibility is the guides themselves depending on how abundant their supply is. Sure, fresh smelt aren't cheap, but it is always less expensive to just go buy fish but not nearly so much fun. Plunking for steelhead is unlikely to be productive with low water temps discouraging fish movement.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – The cold, very clear waters of the Clackamas have been slow to put out any steelhead. A few are being caught here and there and this situation won't improve until the water warms up a few degrees. Rainfall would certainly have a positive effect on conditions on the Clack. Fishing on Eagle Creek has been slow to fair due to low, clear water conditions.

Sandy water levels have dropped and the water has cleared. This, in addition to low temperatures has the best catches coming from Dodge Park and the mouth of Cedar Creek although only about one in ten anglers are taking home a steelhead. While this is traditionally the time of year when larger steelhead are caught, most have been smaller recently but a few limits have been landed. Bait is outfishing lures although steelhead have also been hitting jigs. Expect the bite to move downriver if the water temperature further drops. The best is yet to come as February and March offer the best winter steelheading of the year on the Sandy.

**Pro guide Brandon Glass (503-260-8285) reports,** "Well the Sandy river has been little slow, but there's a few around. Cedar creek has slowed along with the Dodge to Oxbow drift. I have heard of a few from Oxbow down, but the water is at 32 degrees and the fish are moving very slowly. The lower end has had some action with plenty of powerboats and a few bankies. We need some water and a bit warmer temps!!!! I've been putting 1 to 4 a trip in the lower end and a few others that just can't stay on the hook.

**Northwest Trout** - Brook trout brood stock weighing 3/4 to 2 pounds were released this week at Junction City, West Salish and EE Wilson ponds. Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake have been planted with legal-sized and larger rainbows this week. In addition, Devil's Lake in Lincoln City has been producing good catches of larger holdover trout to trollers.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – After hordes of anglers hit the north coast streams last weekend, effort has dropped off when success rates were not as good as most had hoped for. There have been instances of good catches in the last several days however but it's pretty much a first come, first serve situation on these area rivers.

The Wilson and Nestucca remain the area favorites, most likely due to the wild broodstock programs that exist there. As February moves on, action for these quality fish should improve but anglers are once again in a waiting pattern for better water conditions to recreate on. Recent precipitation in the coast range fell mostly as snow, allowing for a slow melt-off with little fluctuation in river levels.

Most of the fish in these systems now will be depositing their eggs this week or will have already done so over the last several days. These fish become more aggressive on their way back out to sea but make for poor tablefare. It is a good time however to introduce a new steelheader to the sport as they can still learn something from the experience.

Smaller streams like the North Fork Nehalem and Kilchis are low and clear, making for challenging conditions for most steelheaders.

**Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** reported poor success on the mainstem Nehalem on Friday having a good portion of the river to himself. Plugs and sidedrifted techniques produced no results and he heard of no other action despite good water conditions.

Tides for sturgeon aren't that great either. Effort waned with the poor tides although there are likely still some quality fish in the system.

I headed out to big blue for some rockfish on Monday, only to be disappointed by no-bites on dinner reef. Colder water tends to drive the fish deeper and the 100 foot reef that we fished on out of Garibaldi was clearly devoid of fish. The crabbing was only a bit better as we scored 11 quality keepers for 6 pots with a 2.5 hour soak. There was one softshell in the batch.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Conditions aren't likely to improve for steelheaders in the area. There is no significant precipitation in the forecast and snowmelt is likely going to be slow and keep rivers cold. The Wilson will likely remain one of the better bets despite clearing water conditions but fish low in the system to expect any results.

Anglers versed in the water below Sollie Smith Bridge on the Wilson stand a fair chance at fish and mainstem Nehalem boaters may also find limited action. The Nestucca is also a fair bet from Three Rivers to Cloverdale but keep in mind that the bulk of the run is going to return later in February and March.

Although the weekend tides aren't epic by any means, the morning tides are significant enough to expect good results in the nooks and crannies of Tillamook Bay. Sand shrimp will take fish and anglers will want to work the last 3 hours of outgoing tide and the first hour of incoming.

The ocean forecast isn't calling for big wind waves on some days but the swell will likely keep most uncomfortable for a foray to the bottomfishing grounds. On the north coast, the best options are quite distant from port so it may be best to keep to shore if you plan on recreating on any large body of water this weekend.

Crabbing remains very spotty in Tillamook and Netarts Bays. The ocean is the best option but there are a lot of commercial pots to contend with there also. The best baits will catch the biggest numbers.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – Ocean conditions don't look promising for an offshore trip this weekend. Too bad, as boats out of Depoe Bay have been scoring limits of rockfish and lingcod and bringing in some Dungeness.

**Pro guide Bill Kremers (541 754 6411)** reports, "In looking at the river forecast, the Alsea and Siletz rivers should be in perfect shape this coming weekend. On my last trip on the Alsea we landed three native steelhead between eight and fourteen pounds. All were caught on blue and silver K-11 Kwikfish with a 3 inch pink Gulp worm. Also fished out of Depoe the other day. Once again great fishing, especially for lingcod as we quickly limited out. Then we switched to light tackle for several rock cod, even pulled out a few crab to finish the day. The weekend ocean forecast is calling for increasing swells, so if you can get out it you might want to take some sea sick meds."

Don Leach and his friend Pete from east Texas with a string of rock cod and ling cod caught out of

Depoe Bay on 23 Jan:



For shore-bound anglers, this is one of the best times of year in Oregon for rock and jetty fishing. In addition to rockfish, greenling, cabezon, perch and lingcod are available as they move into the shallows in January and February to spawn. For this reason, consider releasing the hens.

While the Alsea is very low and clear, a few winter steelhead have been taken at the North Fork.

**Pro guide Jeff Jackson (541-268-6944)** reports, "Things are slow on the Siuslaw and Lake Creek. Cold, low water means the steelhead aren't moving very much. There are some fish around, but they are sluggish. Some rain will really help the fishing."

Crabbing has been worthwhile in Winchester Bay and the Umpqua estuary. Water conditions on the Umpqua are probably best of any southwest river but steelhead catches have tapered off here as well. Results are fair in the mainstem and North Umpqua, slow to fair in the South with small baits hooking the most fish. Plunkers are taking a few in the Elkton stretch. Steelheaders on the North Umpqua have hit sporadic hot streaks during which multiple fish have been landed.

While ocean crabbing has slowed a little, crabbing in most bays and estuaries has remained fair at best. One exception is Coos Bay where even those dropping nets and traps from docks are doing pretty well although the majority of catches are red rock crab. The Coos and Coquille rivers are low and neither is fishing well for winter steelhead.

The brief respite that Rogue River anglers experienced earlier this week is just a memory with water levels falling below the four-foot level once again at Agness. The better prospects are in the Grants Pass stretch but even there, hooking a steelhead is a long shot. Light leaders are necessary with best results coming at first light. Small baits have yielded the best results although it may be wise to just wait until the next round of rain with the river forecast to continue dropping through the weekend. Wild steelhead 24 inches or better may be kept below the Hog Creek Boat Ramp with the Rogue opening to native retention below Cole's River Hatchery on February 1st. About 75% of the steelhead present are unclipped.

Elk and Sixes rivers are too low to fish and with no rain in the forecast, won't be productive for some time to come.

The water level of the Chetco River has continued to drop. At around 700 cfs (it fishes best at 2,000 to 4,000 cfs), it has little to offer to steelheaders.

### **Press release from the Coast Guard:**

Office of Public Affairs

U.S. Coast Guard Thirteenth District \*News\*Release

Date: Jan. 21, 2009

Contact:\*Petty Officer Josh Hanneman

541-469-3885

Coast Guard warns boaters of Chetco River, Ore., shoaling

SEATTLE\*; The Coast Guard\*is informing mariners transiting the mouth of the Chetco River near Brookings,\*Ore., of significant shoaling due to this season's storm activity.

The shoal has formed seaward of the southern jetty and into the navigable channel. Depths have been recorded at eight to nine feet at low tide. This area has been observed to be extremely dangerous due to shallow water which causes breaking surf at times.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – The lower Deschutes is rewarding fly fishers who are throwing nymphs for large rainbows in frigid conditions.

### **Washington fishing reports:**

#### **From the WDF&W Weekender Report January 21<sup>st</sup> – February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009**

#### **North Puget Sound**

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

"Marine Area 8-1 continues to be the hot spot for **blackmouth** ," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "Anglers in that area have been doing well throughout January. Hopefully, that will continue into next month."

According to creel checks in Marine Area 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 81 anglers were checked with 27 chinook at the Camano Island ramp Jan. 17, while 84 anglers took home 24 chinook the following day.

Anglers in Marine Area 8-1, as well as 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner), 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.

Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet), which opened Jan. 16, got off to a slow start, Thiesfeld said. "But some anglers seem to be doing well at Possession Bar in the southern portion of the marine area," he said. Those fishing for blackmouth - resident chinook - in Marine Area 9 also can keep two hatchery chinook as part of their two-salmon daily limit.

Farther south, the salmon fishery in Marine Area 10 is winding down. Anglers fishing that area, which is open through Jan. 31, have had some success in the northern portion, said Thiesfeld.

Meanwhile, some anglers are anxiously awaiting the Feb. 1 salmon-fishing opener in Marine Area 7 (San Juan Islands), Thiesfeld said. "In the last few years, the San Juans have been the site of one of the more reliable blackmouth fisheries in Puget Sound," he said. "Hopefully, we will see that trend continue this year."

Thiesfeld reminds anglers that - unlike in previous years - selective gear rules apply through April 15 in the Marine Area 7 blackmouth fishery. Anglers fishing that area will be allowed to keep two hatchery chinook as part of their two-salmon daily limit.

In the freshwater, hatchery **steelhead** fishing has been a mixed bag. The catch has been fair in some rivers, including the upper Skykomish. However, several other rivers in the region remain dirty and are unfishable at times.

Hatchery steelhead returns to a few of the region's rivers have been low enough to prompt the department to close some areas. Unscheduled closures in the region include:

- A portion of the North Fork Stillaguamish River, downstream from the Whitehorse Bridge approximately four river miles to the French Creek confluence, is closed to sportfishing through Jan. 31.
- The Cascade River, from the Rockport-Cascade Road downstream to the river's mouth, is closed through Jan. 31.
- A portion of the North Fork Nooksack River, 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, is closed through Jan. 31.

The early closures are necessary to ensure egg-take goals are met for hatchery winter steelhead in the three rivers. 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**

**Fishing:** Clear skies have boosted the number of steelhead anglers on area rivers, but few fish are biting. But blackmouth fisheries will open soon in several areas of Puget Sound and a razor clam dig is tentatively scheduled in February.

While many anglers took advantage of recent sunny weather to cast a line, the fishing's been frustrating for north coast river anglers. Creel checks conducted during the Jan. 17-18 weekend showed 87 anglers on the Bogachiel River with six wild **steelhead** (three were released) and three hatchery fish. Sixty-seven anglers fishing the Sol Duc caught 10 wild steelhead (nine released) and five hatchery fish. Catch rates were almost nil on the Hoh River, where 90 anglers caught two wild steelhead (one released).

"The weather's been good and the rivers are finally starting to drop, but overall success this season has been low," said Mike Gross WDFW fish biologist. "Hopefully the fishing will pick up after we make the transition from hatchery to wild steelhead."

Gross said the Sol Duc River has been the most fishable and may prove the best bet for north coast anglers in the coming days.

Anglers may retain one wild steelhead per year from one of 10 Olympic Peninsula rivers, which include the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Hoko, Pysht, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc. Elsewhere, all wild steelhead-identifiable by an intact adipose fin-must be released.

There is no annual limit for hatchery steelhead, although daily limits apply. For more information on rules and regulations, anglers should check the *Fishing in Washington* rules pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>).

With recent sunny weather throughout the region, effort has been high on Grays Harbor rivers, but conditions have not been ideal, said Scott Barbour, WDFW fish biologist.

"There's been very little catch on the Wynoochee, where the water's still pretty dirty," Barbour said. Results have also been mixed on the Satsop River, Barbour said. "The river was producing some good fish in mid-January, but the numbers have dropped off in recent days."

Meanwhile, salmon anglers can look forward to the Feb. 14 opener of a non-selective **blackmouth** fishery in marine areas 5 (Sekiu), 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 11 (Tacoma-Vashon Island) and 12 (Hood Canal).

Anglers can kick off the season in competitive style by entering the Discovery Bay Salmon Derby, which takes place President's Day Weekend near Sequim. The derby is the oldest running derby in the state and features \$10,000 in prizes, with a \$5,000 first prize for the largest salmon. The derby starts at daylight Feb. 14. Details are available at [www.discobaysalmonderby.com](http://www.discobaysalmonderby.com)

Three evening **razor clam** digs are tentatively scheduled at Twin Harbors, Copalis and Mocrocks Feb. 6-8, while Long Beach is scheduled for two evening digs Feb. 7-8. Kalaloch Beach remains closed. Evening low tides during the dig are 3:55 p.m., Friday, Feb. 6 (-0.1 ft.), 4:50 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 7 (-0.4 ft.), 5:39 p.m., Sunday, Feb. 8 (-0.6 ft.)

## Southwest Washington

**Fishing:** Anglers are still picking up a few early-run hatchery steelhead on the Cowlitz River, but the action isn't expected to pick up markedly until February when the late-run fish move in. Smelt dippers netted a few fish Jan. 17 near Kelso, but had to work for their catch. Sturgeon fishing also remained slow throughout the lower Columbia River Basin in early January.

That being the case, **trout fishing** is probably the best bet for anglers intent on catching fish right now, said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist. "At this time of year, trout fishing is probably the best option for anglers who want something to show for their efforts," Hymer said. "Our hatchery crews are planting some nice fish in area lakes."

During the first two weeks of January, WDFW planted hundreds of broodstock rainbows weighing 5 to 8 pounds apiece in lakes throughout the region. Battleground Lake, Klineline Pond, Silver Lake, and Kidney Lake also were stocked with thousands of smaller rainbows, running two or three to the pound. Many of those lakes will get more fish in the weeks ahead.

Anglers who want to weigh their options can check the weekly planting reports on WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly/>.

Heart set on **dipping smelt** ? Successful dips near Kelso, together with favorable water temperatures and an influx of seals on the lower Columbia point to improving prospects in the weeks ahead. For updates, check the weekly smelt report on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/smelt/index.htm>.

The Cowlitz River is open to smelt dipping from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. each Saturday through March 28, with a daily catch limit of 10 pounds per person. All other tributaries to the Columbia River in Washington state are closed to smelt fishing until further notice.

Where there's smelt, there's often **sturgeon**, so a good showing of smelt could also improve prospects for sturgeon fishing in the lower Columbia River Basin. Fishing for white sturgeon was generally slow during the week ending Jan. 18, although boat anglers fishing the Dalles Pool took home nine legal-size fish for 36 rods that week.

Sturgeon anglers are reminded that a new method of measuring sturgeon for retention took effect statewide on New Year's Day. Under the new rules, sturgeon size limits are based on the measurement from the tip of the nose to the fork in the tail (rather than the tip of the tail).

"The new measurements for minimum and maximum sizes are simple conversions of the old method of measuring sturgeon," Hymer said. "They do not mean anglers can keep smaller fish, only that the method of measuring 'keepers' has changed."

Sturgeon seasons and related regulations for 2009 are summarized below:

- **Mouth of the Columbia River to the Wauna power lines:** Retention of white sturgeon is open seven days per week through April; May 9 through June 28; and from July 2-5 or until the harvest guideline is reached. From Jan. 1 to April 30, the fork length of retained sturgeon must be a minimum of 38 inches and a maximum of 54 inches. From May 9 to June 28 and from July 2-5, the fork length of retained sturgeon must be a minimum of 41 inches and a maximum of 54 inches. Catch-and-release fishing is allowed May 1-8, June 29 to July 1, and July 6 to Dec. 31.
- **Wauna power lines to Bonneville Dam:** Retention of white sturgeon is open three days per week (Thursday through Saturday) through July 31, and Oct. 1 through Dec. 31. The fork length of retained sturgeon must be a minimum of 38 inches and a maximum of 54 inches. Catch-and-release fishing is allowed Aug. 1 through Sept. 30 and on days when retention is prohibited. All fishing for sturgeon will be closed from May through July in the sturgeon spawning sanctuary downriver from Bonneville Dam 5.5 miles to Navigation Marker 85.

- **Bonneville, The Dalles, and John Day pools:** Retention of white sturgeon is open seven days per week until individual catch guidelines are met in the Bonneville, The Dalles and John Day pools. In the Bonneville Pool, the fork length of retained sturgeon must be a minimum of 38 inches and a maximum of 54 inches. In The Dalles and John Day pools, the fork length of retained sturgeon must be a minimum of 43 inches and a maximum of 54 inches. Catch-and-release fishing is allowed after the guidelines are met in all three areas above Bonneville Dam. All fishing for sturgeon will be closed from May through July in spawning sanctuaries located below John Day Dam downstream 2.4 miles and from McNary Dam downstream 1.5 miles.

As for **winter steelhead**, Hymer said the early run came in at about half the size of last year's run. One bright spot was the Cowlitz River, where 1,800 fish returned compared to 850 last year. "We weren't sure whether this year's run was strong, or just early," Hymer said. "The escapement numbers indicated it was just early."

He remains hopeful that the late run to the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers, which usually peaks in February, will make a better showing. Fishing is already starting to pick up on the Kalama, where anglers have been averaging a few steelhead per boat. "There are still early hatchery winter fish being caught, but the wild fish are starting to show in the catch, with a couple of nice fish in the upper teens reported," said Chris Wagemann, another WDFW fish biologist. "The late hatchery or winter brood fish are contributing to the catch and should continue with the wild fish into April."

Hymer reminds anglers that all wild steelhead with an intact adipose fin must be released. That is also the case with **chinook salmon** on the Cowlitz, Kalama and Lewis rivers, although marked hatchery chinook may now be retained in those water, as described in the Fishing in Washington regulation pamphlet. "There aren't a lot of spring chinook around just yet, but reeling in a keeper hatchery fish could definitely brighten up someone's day," Hymer said.

## Eastern Washington

**Fishing:** Lake Roosevelt **walleye** fishing is picking up now with fish gathering to spawn near the mouth of the Spokane River above Seven Bays at the Lincoln-Stevens-Ferry county line. Open year-round, the big Columbia River reservoir off Grand Coulee Dam also continues to provide good fishing for both shore and boat anglers on big net-pen-reared **rainbow trout** and **kokanee**. Check water levels and boat launching conditions with the National Park Service at 1-800-824-4916.

A few other year-round fisheries are producing catches through the ice, most notably Sprague Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line and Eloika Lake in northern Spokane County. WDFW district fish biologist Chris Donley says Sprague's **rainbow trout** and Eloika's **yellow perch** keep drawing die-hard winter anglers.

Other year-round or winter-season fisheries in the region are still tough to get to or fish safely at this time, Donley says. Snow makes both access and ice safety questionable at Hog Canyon Lake in southwest Spokane County and Fourth of July Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line.

According to U.S. Coast Guard guidelines, no one should venture onto ice unless it's at least four inches thick, clear and solid. As much as nine inches may be needed to safely support snowmobiles or other vehicles. Such ice depths can form after at least a week of below freezing temperatures, day and night.

WDFW advises ice fishers to not fish alone; let others know where you are going and when you plan to return; keep fishing holes few and small (under eight inches diameter); disperse weight and fishing holes across ice; avoid ice fishing near streams, known springs, or otherwise potentially weak ice; and be prepared for weather conditions and emergencies. For more information on ice fishing safety see [http://wdfw.wa.gov/factshts/ice\\_fishing.htm](http://wdfw.wa.gov/factshts/ice_fishing.htm).

According to recent WDFW enforcement officer checks, Snake River **steelhead** fishing effort and catch rates have slowed significantly.

### **North Central Washington**

**Fishing:** Jim Brown, WDFW enforcement sergeant from Okanogan, reports some anglers continue to ignore catch limit rules at Rufus Woods Lake. This lake is the year-round Columbia River reservoir on the Okanogan-Douglas county line where big net-pen-reared and triploid **rainbow trout** are the star attraction. An emphasis patrol over the Jan. 17 weekend yielded 17 violations and citations, most for having more than the two-trout daily limit.

Ice fishing continues to be productive at several Okanogan County lakes. Rat Lake near Brewster, Davis Lake near Winthrop, and the Green lakes near Omak offer good fishing for **rainbow trout** in the 10 to 15-inch range. Patterson Lake near Winthrop has good fishing for **yellow perch** in the seven to nine-inch range. Anglers should be prepared for possible access problems at any of these lakes due to frequent snowstorms, and should be cautious about safe ice cover.

According to U.S. Coast Guard guidelines, no one should venture onto ice unless it's at least four inches thick, clear and solid. As much as nine inches may be needed to safely support snowmobiles or other vehicles. Such ice depths can form after at least a week of below freezing temperatures, day and night.

WDFW advises ice fishers to:

- Not fish alone.
- Let others know where you are going and when you plan to return.
- Keep fishing holes few and small (under eight inches diameter).
- Disperse weight and fishing holes across ice.
- Avoid ice fishing near streams, known springs, or otherwise potentially weak ice.
- Be prepared for weather conditions and emergencies.

For more information on ice fishing safety see [http://wdfw.wa.gov/factshts/ice\\_fishing.htm](http://wdfw.wa.gov/factshts/ice_fishing.htm).

### **Southcentral Washington**

**Fishing:** Paul Hoffarth, WDFW fish biologist from Pasco reports an estimated 147 **steelhead** have been caught and 125 retained through Jan. 18 in the Columbia River Ringold fishery near the Tri-Cities. Catch and harvest is picking up, he says. Bank anglers averaged one steelhead for five hours of fishing and boat anglers averaged one steelhead per eight hours of fishing.

Jim Cummins, WDFW fish biologist from Yakima, says **whitefish** anglers will find rivers in the best shape of the season so far because the ice or high flows that limited safe or productive fishing are now gone. "This might be the best time to get out and try fishing for whitefish, just remember to follow all the whitefish gear rules," he said. Anglers must use one single-pointed hook, maximum hook size 3/16-inch from point to shank (hook size 14). There is no minimum

size on whitefish, but the daily catch limit is 15.

"Lakes in the region, on the other hand, are not a good bet now because some are partly covered with thin ice," Cummins said. "There may be some opportunity for rainbow trout where there is open water, but in almost all cases the ice is very likely not safe for fishing through the ice."

#### **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](mailto:brees@pacifier.com)

Doug Rees: [doug@TheGuidesForecast.com](mailto:doug@TheGuidesForecast.com)

Michael Teague: [SailCat@SailCat.com](mailto:SailCat@SailCat.com)

#### **Random Links**

34th Annual Pacific Northwest Sportsmen's Show February 4th through 8th, discount coupon here: [http://otshows.com/PNWSS/pnwss\\_home.htm](http://otshows.com/PNWSS/pnwss_home.htm)

Shellfish safety closures: [http://oregon.gov/ODA/FSD/shellfish\\_status.shtml](http://oregon.gov/ODA/FSD/shellfish_status.shtml)

Bass anglers - Frostbite Open:

<http://www.emeraldclub.com/documents/FrostbiteOpen2009.pdf>

"Man can learn a lot from fishing. When the fish are biting, no problem in the world is big enough to be remembered." Oa Battista

**GOOD LUCK!**