

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **March 13<sup>th</sup> – March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** Salmon anglers are taking a strong interest in the early showing of spring chinook on the mainstem Columbia River. Although the numbers are not that impressive, a good showing is underway and judging from their characteristics, they are "black-faced" Columbia River bound fish indicating the run should indeed be strong. Willamette bound fish are termed "snow-bellies" for the obvious white underside they exhibit.

Trolled green label herring fished next to the bottom between the I-205 Bridge and the I-5 Bridge are taking consistent results reports **pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)**. Catch statistics only indicate a fish for every 2 dozen boats but action appears to be good for this early in the season.

Sturgeon fishing remains slow throughout the Columbia mainstem but some keepers are being taken close to the mouth of the Willamette River. The Willamette is the clear place to target sturgeon if you are seeking keepers.

Willamette water temperature is up to 43 and holding over the past week or so. Winter and summer steelhead are passing in modest number. The first springer of the season was counted March 7th. In the lower river, sturgeon fishing is fair and chinook fishing has yet to heat up. Springer fishing will be allowed only on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays starting March 15th.

**Pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)** reports catching two springers on March 10<sup>th</sup>, one of which scaled at 29 pounds.

Sunny weather this week will kick off a decent March Brown hatch on the McKenzie and will provide fly anglers with decent fishing for trout.

There are fair numbers of mostly wild steelhead in the North Santiam River. With dry weather this week, it should be quite fishable.

While steelhead are being taken daily on the Clackamas, overall it's slow. There just aren't many fish in the river this year but that could change as a mix of summers and late winters are likely to enter in the coming weeks.

It seems like winter steelhead numbers are down on the Sandy River as well. Fishing has been very slow to fair here.

Scheduled for stocking are Mt Hood Pond, Alton Baker Canal, Cottage Grove Reservoir, Creswell Pond and Waverly Lake.

**Northwest –** Although steelheading remains mediocre at best, effort is still high for those pursuing quality steelhead on the north coast reports **pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)**. Driftboaters have been working the Wilson and Nestucca diligently but need to work hard to expect fair results states **pro guide Kent Anderson (503-550-6303)**. The recent cold snap also chilled the bite on most streams. The Wilson and Nestucca remain the most popular as hatchery steelhead are most prevalent on these rivers. The Alsea strain of steelhead have made a late surge but anglers

are after the wild broodstock fish that are more aggressive and tend to be larger in size.

With flows dropping, anglers will be more limited in the drifts they choose to float. The lower stretches of the Wilson and Nestucca will continue to offer anglers the best chance at a keeper while the Trask and mainstem Nehalem should be fair options into the weekend. Although bait will remain a fair choice, plugs become a good option in the dropping flows. Use metallic plugs in sunlit conditions while black/white or red/white will work good under cloudy conditions.

Effort for sturgeon dropped off when the frigid weather hit the coast earlier this week but catches had been on the increase in the prime tides last week. Softer tides this week will slow prospects but crabbing should be a fair option even though catches have been light as of late.

Anglers are anxious to get offshore in pursuit of ling cod and rockfish and the weather is forecasted to be calm only through tomorrow. Weekend winds will likely make ocean conditions intolerable.

Cape Mears Lake, Coffenbury Lake, Hebo Lake, Lake Lytle, Lost Lake (Clatsop County), Spring Lake, Town Lake and Vernonia Pond are scheduled for trout planting this week.

**Southwest** – Many south coast rivers are low this week and while there are some exceptions, dry weather will create tough fishing conditions at some locations.

The Umpqua has been in good condition through most of the wet and dry periods. The South Umpqua has continued to be productive for winter steelhead. North Umpqua steelhead are on the move and providing good catch and release fishing for these natives. It's too early to target spring chinook here.

Several spring chinook have been taken from the lower Rogue over the past week, the majority of which have been fin-clopped. This is a blessing as steelheading has been slow. As of Tuesday this week, the Rogue had dropped two feet at Agness since it crested on March 4th.

Chetco flows dropped below 2,000 cfs Tuesday this week which means it won't be fishing well this week. The first of April usually marks the end of the winter steelhead season here. A sign of the curtain starting to fall on this run is the appearance of a run of smaller winters known locally as 'bluebacks' which typically arrive in this river near the end of the winter steelhead season.

**Eastern – Pro guide Steve Fleming (1-888-624-9424)** reports that the John Day has started producing smallmouth.

Although few in number, smallmouth bass are beginning to bite on the John Day River. This early in the season, anglers can't expect big numbers until the water warms but some of the largest fish of the season will be taken from now until late April.

Blue-Winged Olives and a few caddis are hatching on the lower Deschutes, offering some dry fly opportunities to anglers targeting reddsides.

While the population of steelhead in the Grande Ronde is good right now, the water temperature is hovering around the mid-30s which can make the fish lethargic.

**SW Washington** – Only a few anglers are pursuing steelhead in district rivers. The East Fork of the Lewis and Kalama are really the only options as the Cowlitz and mainstem Lewis remain muddy due to mudslides upstream.

Several district streams close to the pursuit of steelhead this Sunday so check local regulations

before heading out.

Smelt dippers noticed a downturn in success although commercial catches in the mainstem were still happening in early March. The bulk of the run has spawned and catches will be minimal until the closure.

Salmon anglers checked by WDF&W on the mainstem Columbia reported one chinook every 24.6 rods. The bulk of the fish were identified as upriver bound chinook and not Willamette strain.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – Effort is ramping up for the spring chinook run on the lower Columbia River. Although clearly not in peak season, anxious anglers are looking to maximize angler days before we go to a days-per-week closure on the mainstem Columbia. The last day for the 7-day per week fishery is Sunday, March 15<sup>th</sup>. From there, it goes to a days/week fishery below the Hayden Island powerlines. The fishery above the Hayden Island powerlines remains open 7 days/week until March 22<sup>nd</sup>. For full regulation details and a map of exactly WHERE the Hayden Island Powerlines is, go to: [http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/reg\\_changes/columbia.asp](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/reg_changes/columbia.asp). And just to be safe, you may want to take a lawyer fishing with you this spring.

As for how the fishing is, well....it's picking up nicely! Catches are becoming more consistent although actual creel surveys conducted last week showed only 1 fish (accounts for both hatchery and wild fish) for every 24 boats. You clearly had to work for them but most anglers at least saw somebody catching fish last week. **Pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)** reports this: "3/10/09. Fished today. We were 2 for 3. We got a giant 29 pounder and another that was 10 pounds, we missed 1 other bite. There were a few others caught. The river was 39 degrees at its warmest point. Fish were caught on plug cut green label Herring fished right off the bottom." Brandon has run a few other trips recently and has scored strikes on almost every trip. With action this good this early, it's going to be a good season!

A dozen springers bypassed Bonneville Dam on March 9<sup>th</sup>. In these cold, sea-lion infested waters, that's a lot for this time of year.....maybe that sealion trapping is having a positive impact? Who'd a thought.

Some of the better fishing has been taking place in the I-5 to I-205 stretch. It's important to keep your baits on the bottom where flows are typically slower and fish congregate there, especially on outgoing tide. Davis Bar across from the mouth of the Willamette is another great place to target upriver bound chinook. Keep in mind the faster the flow, the closer to the bottom or the bank you want to be.

Sturgeon fishing remains poor on the mainstem although a few fish are coming from the Columbia adjacent to the mouth of the Willamette. Weekly creel checks however showed only shakers coming from the area. The Dalles and Bonneville Pools are putting out an occasional keeper with The Dalles Pool closing in on half of their attainable quota for this year. 2009 smelt would be a key bait if you target sturgeon but serious anglers will be focusing their efforts in the Willamette and Multnomah Channel.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Tides are beginning to weaken although run timing is on the side of anglers as we get later into March. There is some weather in the forecast which is predicted to raise river levels on many NW district rivers. Although it likely won't be a major motivating factor for Columbia River bound chinook, it could very likely muddy the Willamette River making fishing downstream of this major tributary less than attractive. It will be best to focus your efforts and learn the water above the I-5 Bridge. Nothing like the roar of a fighter jet on your trip!

Keep your baits on the bottom, especially during peak outgoing flows. Along those lines, don't hesitate to troll baits several cranks off of the bottom on incoming tides. The fish will be well distributed in the water column when the flows don't push them down. Green label herring are most likely to work best in the early season but when the water temperatures do warm up, fish will be more responsive to blue label herring as well. Also keep in mind that big fish oftentimes prefer larger baits but baitfish in the ocean this time of year are often smaller as the feed is a fraction of what it is in the summer time to fatten up these key baitfish.

Although Bonneville is an option this time of year, it will get better the last week of March. Competition for the better spots shouldn't be too intense and you may not even have to get up at the crack of midnight to get a spot this time of year! Keep in mind that fish are crossing Bonneville Dam right now.

Don't put too much faith in sturgeon catches on the mainstem Columbia. And don't plan on catching much at all if you don't have 2009 smelt available to you. It's mostly a shaker show here and likely will be for the next several weeks until water temperatures get closer to the mid-40 degree range.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – Willamette flow down to 16,700 water temp pushing into the mid-40s as of Wednesday this week. Over 15,000 winter steelhead have been counted at the Falls but fewer than 100 summers. Average spring Chinook catches are numbering in the single digits daily. Sturgeon fishing is somewhat better but the derby last week depleted numbers so it remains to be seen how anglers do this week.

**Pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)** reports on a trip Tuesday this week, "Fished today. We were 2 for 3. We got a giant 29 pounder and another that was 10 pounds, we missed 1 other bite. There were a few others caught. The river was 39 degrees at its warmest point. Fish were caught on plug cut green label Herring fished right off the bottom.

"Arnie and Don with a nice pair of Columbia River Springers. Arnie's fish weighed 29 pounds!"



McKenzie fly fishers have experienced fair to good results this week with warmer weather.

With numbers of steelhead improving, so have catches on the Santiam system.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Fresh smelt has been the top bait for sturgeon but frozen smelt, sand shrimp and squid are also getting bit. Try trolling herring or wrapped Kwikfish around Oregon City or Sellwood Bridge for a chance at an early springer.

Fishing the North Santiam will remain a catch and release show for winters until the number of winter steelhead is sufficient to create a hatchery steelhead fishery. The North Santiam has experienced several low returns of summers for several years so let's hope for an improvement this season. This was once a solid and worthwhile summer steelhead destination.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – Steelheading is fair on the Clackamas but pressure is up now that the first spring Chinook has been landed here. Springer fishing will pick up into April. The river is dropping and fishing should improve now that the water temperature has reached 40 degrees. With the water low and clear on Eagle Creek, fishing is slow.

Steelhead catch rates have improved along with water conditions on the Sandy but this has also encouraged a greater number of anglers to hit the river. Over 120 steelhead have returned to the hatchery facility on Cedar Creek.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – Steelheaders on the north coast are finding mixed results as is to be expected in these water conditions for this time of year. Effort on the big 2 (Wilson and Nestucca Rivers) remains high but only a few boats are scoring consistent results. **Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** reported fair success on Wednesday as he went 4 for 5 from Mills Bridge to Sollie Smith on the Wilson River. He reported the river is getting quite clear with the lack of precipitation right now. He looked at the Trask River prior to fishing the Wilson and it looked skinnier than the Wilson did he mentioned. Over the weekend, **pro guide Kent Anderson (503-550-6303)** fished the Trask River having up to 9 opportunities one day from Cedar Creek to the Highway 101 Bridge mostly drifting bait. Most recently, Kent's been fishing the Nestucca River with limited success in his boat and the other anglers that he is in constant contact with. It's clear by now that the 2009 wild and broodstock run is not likely to be as good as we had originally thought it would. The season should be well underway now with more consistent fishing than we're experiencing right now.

With rivers clearing, the Nehalem will once again become an option for boaters and bank anglers alike. Keep in mind however that almost all of the steelhead returning to this river system are native in origin and must be released unharmed. Rivers are forecasted to rise once again however but look for that information in The Guide's Forecast (next section).

With the exception of the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers, native steelhead will dominate the catches of other NW district streams. Don't plan on taking home any prized steelhead on these other rivers.

Sturgeon fishing effort has certainly slowed but those few persistent anglers were taking a few fish early on in this tide series. The south channel of Tillamook Bay has been the better producing ditch for sturgeon but fish should be well distributed throughout the estuary. There clearly aren't a lot of fish present but they should be there in fishable numbers.

Although weather was very tolerable late this week, a building ocean over the weekend will likely keep anglers from safely enjoying themselves targeting bottomfish this weekend. Safety first! Crabbing remains challenging but is showing some signs of improving.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Steelheaders have until Sunday to confidently target steelhead on the north Oregon Coast. A big weather front is predicted to hit the region taking rivers up to near flood stage if predictions come through (fat chance). By early next week, only the smaller streams will be an option, again, if the weather predictions actually come through. As stated in the previous section, the Wilson and Nestucca will be the only real hatchery fish options although a few, likely spent steelhead will still be coming down on the Kilchis, Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem and Three Rivers systems. It may be the middle of next week before the Nestucca and Wilson fish again but when they do clear, action should be good with most people rethinking their efforts towards spring chinook (hopefully).

As flows do come down into fishable shape, keep in mind that higher drifts will fish first and most productive as fish will make fast tracks under high water conditions. Bait is always the best option in higher flows but anglers can also strategically anchor up in high flows and likely intercept a motivated fish in a taylor or shallow slot. Plugs is likely the best method to employ in these higher flows and please only employ this technique in higher flows as the water drops, fish will become more concentrated in the more classic water and you'll just plug up quality water that everyone should have access to.

Not a great week for sturgeon fishing on the north coast. Tides are poor and so will the weather. If we get the influx of fresh water that is predicted, it'll shoot the crabbing option through the door. Don't bother crossing the bar, you'll regret it!

**Central & South Coast Reports** – It's hot one day and not the next, but on those hot days Yaquina Bay herring catches have been fast and furious.

Crab rings and traps are coming up with little or nothing of keeper size out of Newport or Waldport. Bay crabbing in general is very slow and ocean results have been little better with action slowing coast-wide as spring approaches. Alsea Steelheaders are experiencing slow fishing but a few are being taken. The Siuslaw is slightly better but still in the slow to fair category.

No spring Chinook catches have yet to be reported on the Umpqua but they're due any time although historically very few are caught in March. Plunkers on the mainstem have been challenged recently to hookup with any steelhead. Results on the North and South forks have been fair but rain is in the forecast for the coming weekend and that will set these up to a go-to destination as they drop in the coming weeks. While most of the steelhead in the North Umpqua will be wild, hatchery fish will be available on the South.

Low water has stalled winter steelheading on the Coquille. Steelheading on the Coos has been slow with a low return this season.

Spring Chinook season is officially underway on the lower Rogue. Since the first springer was landed on Wednesday March 4th, catches have been steady every day with a dozen being landed by mid-day on the following Saturday although daily catches have fallen to about half that. All the action thus far has been in the lower 10 miles of the Rogue. Winter steelhead are being taken in the Grants Pass stretch but low water levels have slowed catches. It would follow that the upper Rogue is very slow due to skinny water conditions. Over 2,100 steelhead have crossed over Gold Ray Dam.

The Elk and Sixes are too low to fish at this time but following the storm front due to move through this weekend, look to the upper stretches for wether steelhead success.

Water flow at the Chetco is dropping into the 1,500 cfs range. That's too skinny to offer decent fishing here for all but low-water specialists who continue to take steelhead. Rain this weekend will

push it out of shape but fishing should be good once the river drops back into shape. The winter steelhead season is winding down here so get 'em while you can. An offshore launch should be possible on Friday, March 13th, but once again the weekend wind and wave action are predicted to kick up. When conditions have permitted, boats fishing the nearshore ocean have scored limits of colorful rockfish: blacks, blues copper and more. Ling cod catches are also good and improving at this time of year.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – Fishing for reddsides has been fair and improving on the lower Deschutes with a few caddis hatching amidst the Blue Winged Olives.

Lake Billy Chinook is producing good catches of bull trout on the troll.

Steelheading has been quite good at the Grande Ronde River. Some anglers enduring bitter cold are catching several fish in a day.

**Pro guide Steve Fleming (1-888-624-9424)** reports from the John Day, "We caught our first smallmouth bass March 3, and ended up the day with 6 smallies. The largest was 18 1/2". I had a client on Saturday, March 7, catch two smallmouth bass: one 18 1/2", and the other 20 1/2" (see photo). Most of the smallmouth bass have been caught on a center pin float and fly system we have, and the others were caught on crankbaits. The days we do the best are the days the sun shines and warms the water. We have been having 39 to 41 degree water in the morning and the days the sun comes out it goes up three degrees, and we do the best. We haven't hooked a steelhead in a long time, but feel there is another pod coming through, soon."



#### **Washington fishing reports:**

**From the WDF&W Weekender Report March 4 - 17, 2009**

#### **North Puget Sound**

Anglers are having a tough time finding hatchery steelhead in the Skagit and Sauk rivers, where the run is now mostly made up of wild fish. But warmer weather and calm conditions have made for good blackmouth fishing in some areas of Puget Sound.

Fishing continues to be decent for **blackmouth** - resident chinook - in Marine Area 7 (San Juan Islands), said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "It's not as hot as it was in early February, but fishing is still pretty good around the San Juan Islands, especially for those anglers who get out on the water on weekdays when effort is low," he said.

Recent creel samples show anglers have been hooking blackmouth throughout the San Juan Islands, but the best harvest numbers were seen at checks at Friday Harbor. For example, 15 anglers were checked with seven chinook Feb. 28 at the Friday Harbor Marina, while 10 anglers were checked with four chinook the following day.

Anglers fishing in Marine Area 7 (San Juan Islands) 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.

Thiesfeld said anglers also have hooked some blackmouth in Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet), but fisheries in marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay) and 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) continue to be slow. Anglers in those three areas also can keep two hatchery chinook as part of their two-salmon daily limit.

Meanwhile, casting for **steelhead** is still an option. Most rivers closed to steelhead fishing at the end of February, but the Skagit River and portions of the Sauk River remain open. "There have been a few hatchery steelhead caught on the Skagit River recently, but most anglers are catching and releasing wild fish," said Brett Barkdull, WDFW fish biologist.

Anglers fishing the Sauk River, from the mouth of the river to the Darrington Bridge, can keep two hatchery steelhead through April 30, while those fishing the Skagit River can keep two hatchery steelhead through March 15.

Most of the Skagit River will be closed to fishing after March 15. However, a portion of the Skagit - from the Dalles Bridge at Concrete to the Cascade River - will remain open to catch-and-release fishing from March 16 through April 30. Barkdull reminds steelheaders on the Skagit fishing from boats, sleds or any other floating device equipped with a gas or electric motor that it's illegal to fish while under power during the catch-and-release season that begins March 16.

For more information on the rules and regulations for the Skagit River, as well as other freshwater and saltwater fisheries, check WDFW's *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>).

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

Blackmouth fishing is going strong from Port Angeles to Hood Canal, while steelhead anglers on the northern peninsula are waiting for an influx of wild fish. On the coast, the lingcod season is set to open and a three-day razor clam dig is proposed later this month

The **blackmouth** bite is on in Hood Canal and the Strait of Juan de Fuca, where the average catch rate over the Feb. 28 weekend was one fish for every two anglers. "That's pretty darned good blackmouth fishing, considering some years when one in ten anglers gets a fish," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist.

The weekend creel check at Misery Point near Seabeck showed 27 anglers with 11 fish, while 111 anglers checked at Ediz Hook off Port Angeles caught 49 blackmouth.

Fishing was considerably slower farther south, where a creel check of 24 anglers between Point Defiance and the Narrows Bridge revealed one fish. "Marine Area 11 is definitely slow, but scattered reports from the March 1 opener near Olympia showed some success," Thiesfeld said.

Fisheries for blackmouth salmon will run through April 10 in marine areas 5 (Sekiu), 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 11 (Tacoma-Vashon) and 12 (Hood Canal), and April 30 in Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound). The daily limit is one fish per angler.

Dozens of **steelhead** anglers were fishing the Wynoochee River in Grays Harbor over the Feb. 28 weekend, but success was marginal, said David Low, WDFW fish biologist. The same was true for the Satsop, where anglers came up with virtually nothing. "We had an early run of hatchery fish, but overall the season's not been very productive," Low said. Record low flows this winter on the Olympic Peninsula combined with possibly lower run returns for the year may be contributing to the problem, he said.

Wild steelhead are beginning to replace hatchery fish in north coast rivers, but recent effort and catch dropped off due to rain and snow melt over the Feb, 28 weekend, said Randy Cooper, WDFW fish biologist. "Fishing conditions should improve with the river levels dropping and water visibility clearing," he said.

On the Hoh River, a Feb. 27 to March 1 creel check showed that 124 anglers on the lower portion caught four hatchery and 29 wild steelhead adults (22 released) while 75 anglers were checked in the upper Hoh with one hatchery and six wild adult steelhead (all released). During the same time period, 28 anglers fishing the Sol Duc caught three hatchery and 11 wild (10 released) while 51 anglers on the Bogachiel caught seven hatchery and six wild steelhead adults (four released). Ten anglers were checked on the Calawah River with nine wild steelhead adults released. Anglers continue to catch a few hatchery and wild steelhead jacks, Cooper said.

Cooper reminds anglers that retention of wild steelhead is currently limited to one fish per year on 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 at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

As spring approaches, anglers can look forward to the opening of **lingcod** season, which gets under way March 14 in marine areas 1-3, south of Cape Alava. The minimum size for lingcod in these areas is 22 inches, with a daily limit of two fish per angler. In Marine Area 2 (Westport/Ocean Shores), recreational fishing for rockfish or lingcod is not allowed in waters deeper than 30 fathoms from March 15 through June 15. Additional information about the lingcod fishery and other bottom fish is available on the WDFW Fishing Hotline (360) 902-2500 or online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm/>.

Meanwhile in Thurston County, a catch-and-release **trout** fishery is now open on Munn Lake, where 1,000 one-pound rainbows were planted March 1. "We wanted to offer anglers another late-winter fishing opportunity," said Larry Phillips, WDFW fish biologist. Phillips reminds anglers to use single, barbless hooks and release all fish. Fish retention will be allowed when the lowland lake trout season starts on April 25.

An early spring, three-day **razor clam** dig has been tentatively scheduled on morning tides March 27-29, provided marine toxin tests show the clams are safe to eat. Two digs are also tentatively scheduled on morning tides April 10-12 and April 25-27.

Tentative opening dates and morning low tides in March are:

- Friday, March 27 (7:49 a.m. 0.0 ft.) Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
- Saturday, March 28 (8:29 a.m. -0.4 ft.) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Sunday, March 29 (9:12 a.m. -0.6 ft.) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks

## Southwest Washington

Anglers eager to catch **spring chinook salmon** are reeling in an increasing number of early arrivals in the lower Columbia River, while others are catching **sturgeon** upriver to The Dalles Pool. **Smelt** dipping is also still an option on the Cowlitz River from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. each Saturday through March 28.

Although the bulk of the spring chinook run isn't expected for several weeks, fishery managers counted 142 boats and 239 bank anglers downriver from the I-5 Bridge during the last day in February.

"This is shakedown time for the spring chinook fishery," said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist. "It's a good time to get your boat and gear in order and pick your spots before the crowds arrive. Catching fish is a bonus at this point in the fishery."

Hymer sees a high likelihood of both good fishing and large crowds this year, when nearly 300,000 upriver spring chinook are expected to return to the Columbia River. That would make this year's run the largest since 2001, and the third largest since 1977. An additional 37,000 springers are expected to return to the Willamette River, up from 27,000 last year. The first spring chinook of the season to cross Bonneville Dam was counted March 3.

Under initial seasons adopted by fishery managers from Washington and Oregon, anglers will be able to fish for spring chinook from the mouth of the Columbia River to Bonneville Dam through mid-to-late April. The fishery could extend beyond April, but late-season regulations have not been set because of differences between the fish and wildlife commissions of Washington and Oregon over how to allocate the catch.

In March and April, Columbia River anglers will be able to fish for spring chinook salmon at the following locations and times:

- **West power lines on Hayden Island downstream to Buoy 10:** Seven days per week from March 1-15. Beginning March 16 through April 18, fishing will be limited to three days per week, Thursdays through Saturdays.
- **West power lines on Hayden Island to Bonneville Dam:** Seven days per week from March 1-22. Beginning March 23 through April 22, fishing will be limited to four days per week, Wednesday through Saturday.
- **Bonneville Dam to McNary Dam:** Seven days per week from March 16 through April 30. The Washington and Oregon bank only fishery will also be open from Bonneville Dam upstream to the Tower Island power lines located about six miles below The Dalles Dam.

Wind River and Drano Lake will also open for spring chinook fishing March 16 under the same rules as last year (two marked hatchery salmon or steelhead, or one of each; minimum size for salmon is 12 inches).

Under a new rule approved by the Washington commission, anglers fishing the mainstem Columbia River below McNary Dam may also retain two marked, hatchery-reared adult salmon or steelhead (or one of each) per day. However, only one hatchery adult chinook salmon may be retained per day downstream from Bonneville Dam.

A daily limit of one hatchery adult chinook is also in effect on the Kalama and Lewis rivers, where hatchery returns are expected to be relatively low. One hatchery adult chinook will also be the daily limit on Deep River whenever the section of the Columbia River downstream from Hayden Island is open for salmon fishing.

In all areas, anglers are required to release any chinook salmon or steelhead that have an intact adipose fin. For best results, Hymer recommends sinking a flatfish or herring plug fairly deep - 20 to 30 feet - and resisting the urge to set the hook too quickly. "The fish are fairly lethargic in the current cold-water conditions," he said. "My advice is fish deep, and give the fish time to grab your lure or bait." Low flows may be problematic for bank anglers, he said.

Anglers fishing for spring chinook salmon may also retain **hatchery steelhead** and **shad**, as outlined in the recently adopted rules. Fishing for late-run hatchery steelhead is still decent on the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers, Hymer said.

The best **smelt** dipping may be over for the year on the Cowlitz River, but the fishery will remain open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. each Saturday through March 28. Hymer cautions dippers to observe season rules, noting that nearly a dozen people recently received citations for fishing outside of those hours. The daily catch limit per person is 10 pounds of smelt, which equates to about one-quarter of a five-gallon bucket. Only dipnets may be used.

The results of smelt test fisheries are posted each Thursday on the WDFW website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/creel/smelt/index.htm>). All other tributaries to the Columbia River in Washington state are closed to smelt fishing at this time.

As most anglers know, smelt make for great **sturgeon** bait. Despite cold water conditions, sturgeon fishing has been picking up on the lower Cowlitz and Willamette rivers as well as the Bonneville Pool and The Dalles Pool. Anglers are reminded that new "fork-length" size limits are now in effect for sturgeon fisheries throughout the region. See <http://wdfw.wa.gov/do/newreal/release.php?id=dec2308a> for more information.

While the spring chinook run builds, some anglers have been catching **trout** in year-round lakes around the region. Kline Pond was recently stocked with 1,000 catchable-size rainbows, after receiving several thousand half-pounders last month. Lacamas Lake also got 4,000 catchables in recent days.

## **Eastern Washington**

The March 1 fishing season opened with lots of **rainbow trout** catches from the well-stocked Tucannon River impoundments on WDFW's Wooten Wildlife Area in Columbia County in southeast Washington.

Just before the opener, the seven man-made lakes received "catchables" (fish weighing about one-third of a pound) and "jumbos" (fish weighing about one-half pound) from the Tucannon and Lyons Ferry fish hatcheries. Beaver was stocked with 513 catchables; Big Four received

2,025 catchables and 300 jumbos; Blue was stocked with 150 jumbos; Deer received 702 catchables and 25 jumbos; Rainbow received 100 jumbos; Spring was stocked with 2,025 catchables and 100 jumbos; and Watson received 3,002 catchables and 100 jumbos. Additional stocking information is available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly/>.

Walla Walla County's Fishhook Pond also was stocked with catchable-size rainbows before the March 1 opener. Fishhook Park doesn't open until April, but anglers can access the lake by parking outside Fishhook Park and walking south of the railroad right-of-way on U.S. Army Corps of Engineers property (between the railroad tracks and the orchard).

Lakes that opened March 1 further north in the region saw little or no action because they are still thawing out and partially iced over.

Three lakes opened for the first time this year on March 1 - Downs Lake in southwest Spokane County with **bass, black crappie, yellow perch** and rainbow trout; Liberty Lake east of Spokane with rainbow and **brown trout**, bass, and perch; and Medical Lake near the town of the same name with brown and rainbow trout.

Also open is 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; North Silver Lake in southwest Spokane County for rainbows under selective gear rules and a requirement to release adipose-fin-clipped fish; and Deer Lake in southern Stevens County for **lake trout**.

Anglers can gear up and learn about fishing at the second annual Great Western Sportfishing Show, March 6-8, at the Spokane Convention Center. For more information see <http://www.greatwesternsportfishingshow.com/Home.html>.

Anglers, hunters, and wildlife viewers alike will enjoy the "outdoors indoors" at the Inland Northwest Wildlife Council's 49th annual Bighorn Outdoor Adventure Show, March 19-22, at the Spokane Fair and Expo Center. The event features vendors, guides and non-profit exhibitors, as well as activities for children, including a fishing pond, shooting gallery, and archery range. For more information on hours and admission fees, see <http://www.wildlifecouncil.com/bighornsubsite/default.htm>.

## **Northcentral Washington**

Anglers who braved a cold drizzle on March 1 in the Columbia Basin had near limits of **rainbow trout** from a few of the lakes that opened to fishing that day, said Jeff Korth, WDFW regional fish program manager. "Despite the weather, water temperatures under 40 degrees, and lake conditions that varied from almost total ice cover to open water, we still managed to pull off a pretty good opener where we expected to," Korth said.

Martha and Upper Caliche lakes on WDFW's Quincy Wildlife Area near the town of George in Grant County produced an average of nearly five trout per angler within an hour on opening day. The trout mostly ran 13-15 inches, with a few 18-20-inch carryovers from Martha. Upper Caliche is completely ice-free and Martha Lake is mostly ice-free.

Lenice and Nunnally lakes on WDFW's Crab Creek Wildlife Area just east of Beverly in Grant County are both completely ice-free. No checks were made at Nunnally on opening day, but anglers at Lenice averaged 3.6 trout per angler of mostly 17-21-inch rainbow, **brown**, and **tiger trout** within three to four hours. Both Lenice and Nunnally are under selective gear rules with a daily catch limit of one fish, so most fish were released.

Dusty Lake, on the Quincy Wildlife Area, is about two-thirds ice free and anglers on the opener averaged two, 14- to 20-inch rainbow trout each. Dusty is also under selective gear rules with a daily catch limit of one fish, so half of the fishing there was catch-and-release.

Lake Lenore, two miles north of the town of Soap Lake on the west side of Hwy. 17, was 90 percent ice-covered on the opener so no checks were made. A catch-and-release fishery for the first two months of the season and under selective gear rules, Lenore offers two- to seven-pound **Lahontan cutthroat trout**.

Burke Lake on the Quincy Wildlife Area was mostly ice-covered on the opener so anglers who attempted it averaged less than one 12- to 14-inch rainbow trout each. Korth notes when it opens up more, the carryover rainbows of 17-20 inches in size will likely make up about 40 percent of the catch.

Quincy Lake, also on the Quincy Wildlife Area, was un-fishable on the opener with complete ice cover. Korth reports the lake received 4,000 catchable-size (usually one-third pound) rainbows last fall.

"Things will improve on all these lakes quickly with a little more warm weather," Korth said. "Where ice conditions minimized participation on the opener, good fishing should persist through April. Catch rates should pick up at all lakes as weather and temperature stabilizes."

In the north end of the region, Bob Jateff, WDFW Okanogan district fish biologist, reports **steelhead** fishing is starting to pick up a bit on the Methow River as warmer weather starts to melt ice and make access easier.

"Both fly and lure or jig fishermen on the Methow are reporting fair fishing for steelhead six to eight pounds," Jateff said. "Everyone needs to remember to retain hatchery adipose-fin-clipped steelhead to allow a higher percentage of natural-origin fish on the spawning grounds." Selective gear rules-no bait-are in effect for the Methow.

Jateff also reported the Okanogan and Similkameen rivers are just starting to thaw out and should provide fair steelhead fishing during the month of March. "There are several public access points to these rivers within the towns of Omak, Okanogan, and Tonasket. They're both under the same no-bait selective gear rules as the Methow."

Jateff noted that ice fishing in the Okanogan is still ongoing with catches of **yellow perch** reported in Patterson Lake, and **rainbow trout** in Rat, Big Green, Sidley, and Davis lakes. "Heavier than normal ice cover should extend the ice fishing season this year, but anglers should exercise extreme caution during the month of March when warmer air temperatures start to affect ice thickness and safety," he said.

## **Southcentral Washington**

Paul Hoffarth, WDFW district fish biologist from Pasco, notes that catches should pick up this month and next in the Ringold **steelhead** fishery - that portion of the Columbia River from Hwy. 395 Bridge at Pasco to the Old Hanford townsite wooden powerline towers.

"Last year at this time bank anglers were averaging one steelhead for every three hours of fishing," he said.

The fishery is open for both bank and boat anglers through the month of March for catch-and-release, except up to two hatchery-marked steelhead may be retained. From April 1-15 the fishery is restricted to the eastern shoreline adjacent to the Ringold Springs Fish Hatchery and for bank fishing only. See *Fishing in Washington* rules pamphlet at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

Hoffarth reported an estimated 167 steelhead were caught in the Ringold fishery in February, based on WDFW staff sampling of 27 percent of total angler effort (155 anglers interviewed.) Overall effort was estimated at 2,168 angler hours, with bank anglers averaging 20 hours of fishing per fish and boat anglers averaging 10 hours.

Hoffarth noted that overall this season, anglers have caught 3,286 steelhead with 1,954 retained. Catch, harvest, and angler effort have been higher in the 2008-09 fishery than in the previous four years.

**Rainbow trout** fishing has been productive at year-round lakes in the Tri-Cities area, thanks to substantial hatchery stocking. Columbia Park Pond in Benton County just received 2,025 one-third pound rainbows from the Naches Fish Hatchery and Dalton Lake in Franklin County recently received 7,931 one-third-pound rainbows and 50 near one-pound rainbows from the Lyons Ferry Fish Hatchery. Both will be stocked routinely throughout the spring months. Columbia Park Pond is open only to anglers under 15 years of age and adults with a disability license.

Kittitas and Yakima county year-round waters also just received more rainbow trout from the Naches Fish Hatchery. Fio Rito Lake North received 3,010 one-third pounders ("catchables") and 700 near one-pounders ("jumbos"); Mattoon Lake received 1,120 catchables and 396 jumbos; Granger Pond, 611 catchables; I-82 Ponds #4 and #6, 2,509 catchables each; Myron Lake, 507 catchables and 500 jumbos; Rotary Lake, 2,509 catchables; and Sarge Hubbard Pond, 299 catchables and 100 jumbos. Watch for weekly hatchery stocking updates at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly/>.

### **Reader Email**

Subscriber Mary C. wrote to Bob Rees to as, "Could you mention the gill net schedule for the lower Columbia or else give a place to locate this information. Not sure what the Commission decided for these rascals."

Bob relied, "They are most easily found on this website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/crc/crc22jul08.htm>) under the "Joint State Action Notices" column. We also frequently list them in our archived reports that is available when you are paid subscriber to The Guide's Forecast.

"Thanks and good luck this year!"

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: [Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com](mailto:Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com)

### **Random Links**

How to measure a sturgeon from now on:

[http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/docs/sturgeon\\_angler\\_notice\\_flyer.pdf](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/docs/sturgeon_angler_notice_flyer.pdf)

Portland Boat Show info: <http://otshows.com/PBS/>

New crabbing report from the ODFW:

<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/MRP/shellfish/crab/reports.asp>

"Today she met me at the door, said I would have to choose, if I picked that fishing pole today, she'd be packing all her things and she'd be gone by noon....well I'm gonna miss her when I get home tonight. Right now I'm on this lake shore, and I'm sitting in the sun! I'm sure it'll hit me when I walk thru that door tonight. Yeah, I'm gonna miss her. Oh lookie there, I gotta bite!"

- Brad Paisley

**GOOD LUCK!**