

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 11th – December 17th, 2009**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro - Catch rates don't justify the effort for Columbia River sturgeon anglers. As water temperatures continue to drop, biters will become even more lethargic. Look to the Willamette for warmer water temperatures and better action.

Fresh smelt may soon enter the lower Columbia. Managers are expecting another poor return of smelt to the Columbia and Cowlitz Rivers with a pending decision on an ESA listing for this popular baitfish due out this spring. Sport dippers may still get a limited season on the Cowlitz, likely to be a 12 – 24 hour season one day per week.

Weather this week has drove water temperature down on the lower Willamette to near 40 degrees. It remains to be seen how this cooling affects sturgeon fishing. Winter steelhead are being caught by plunkers at Meldrum Bar.

Small flies are taking trout from the low, clear waters of the McKenzie. Expect very little company given the cold temperatures. The water temperature was 37 and dropping at Vida on Tuesday this week.

The upper North Santiam will offer the best chance of a hookup with wild winter steelhead now as water from Detroit is warmer than that in the lower river. A couple of winters have been taken on the Clackamas River but it's still early for this fishery.

Results have been better on the Sandy where early catches have been above average. Wind this week has made fishing a challenge.

Northwest – Although steelheaders are typically in full swing by this time on the north coast, water and traveling conditions are less than ideal for even the most motivated anglers. Frigid early mornings put fish off the bite and make casting challenging as rod guides often ice up in the below freezing temperatures.

Larger streams offer the best opportunities as fish will likely hold in the deeper slots and holes, awaiting the next rain freshet and warmer weather to draw them upstream.

The Wilson and Nestucca Rivers will be the best bets but anglers should focus their efforts on the warmest times of the day. Bobbers and jigs or nickel spinners work best under these conditions but persistence will be required to entice the lethargic fish in these cold conditions. Chinook are still present on these systems as well but action is slow. The freshest fish will be found downstream of Sollie Smith Bridge.

The North Fork Nehalem and Necanicum Rivers should be peaking right now but these systems are so clear and low that fish aren't moving and those that are present, are not biting.

Tides in Tillamook Bay are still adequate for sturgeon but a cold east wind is making it too uncomfortable for most. Although most anglers target the last few hours of outgoing tide, the first part of incoming tide can be equally productive.

Although a large swell still persists, ocean anglers and crabbers are finding favorable conditions

to pursue offshore bottomfish and large Dungeness crab. Catches have been good. The swell is forecasted to continue to moderate making for even better opportunity through tomorrow. Wind waves are expected to increase by Saturday.

Southwest – Following a slow season for winter steelhead in some locations last year, ODFW biologists are predicting good runs and catches on southwest Oregon rivers with results starting early.

Plunkers on the Umpqua have been taking a few steelhead. Sheepshead has been particularly productive. While Umpqua anglers are taking a few and flow is adequate, the water is too clear to fish as well as it could.

Coos anglers have taken a few early winters but this fishery has yet to get underway. Rain would improve results here. Bay fishers are taking good numbers of rockfish and perch. Crabbing has been excellent.

The Coquille is expected to provide good results for steelheaders as is the Millicoma where steelheading has been worthwhile recently. Historically, catches start early on the Millicoma.

Winter steelhead continue to enter the lower Rogue. While it's early for this fishery, it should be very good this season, once it gets underway.

Crabbers dropping pots in the ocean out of the Port of Brookings have been taking consistent limits of large, hard Dungeness. Steelhead have started entering the Chetco River where anglers have scored a few but it's the tail of the chinook season here with winter steelheading yet to take off.

Chinook are holding in the low waters of the Elk and Sixes rivers and are not cooperating with anglers. Rain is needed here to re-invigorate this fishery.

Eastern – Hard core fly fishers are taking redsides on the Deschutes around Mecca Flats. Browns are taking streamers on the middle Deschutes but fishing is slow to fair.

Crescent Lake has been fair for Mackinaw on the troll in frigid conditions. It will remain accessible until snow falls here.

Pro guide Steve Fleming (1-888-624-9424) warns of hazardous ice on the John Day River during what is typically a very good time to target steelhead. A warming trend is needed but several night of near zero temperatures has expansive tracts of water locked up in a freeze.

Pro guide Mac Huff (1-800-940-3688) reports there are good numbers of steelhead present in the Grande Ronde system but anglers will have to also be crafty when targeting these fish. Bobbers and jigs will work when cast between the ice flows but fly anglers will have to wait until the warmest part of the day to have the best chance at a fish.

SW Washington – District rivers continue to see steelhead returns significantly lower than last year although some anglers reported a slight improvement in catches prior to the cold snap. The Cowlitz and Kalama are the best bets but there are some early fish in the Lewis River now.

Fishing should improve when temperatures warm and the next infusion of rain raises river levels.

Columbia River Fishing Report – We won't be wasting much of your time or ours in reporting on sturgeon fishing for the next several issues. That is, unless something uncharacteristically

begins to heat up. Stay tuned, we'll be giving you smelt reports as we get them. Be sure to read the short version of the newsletter for more info on the upcoming smelt season.

Steelheading took a nose dive in the John Day Pool this week as cold weather shut down what little bite remained for this fishery. Catch rates plummeted but it's still noteworthy to mention that this fishery didn't take off like most thought it would; given the magnitude of the summer steelhead numbers we had over Bonneville. Catches were very poor last week.

With the commercial fleet working the lower Columbia and very cold weather over the last several days, effort for crabbing out of Hammond has dropped off significantly. Keepers should still be available but since many of the crab in that stretch of the river are large enough to be commercial legals, they will likely get harvested by the in-river commercial fleet.

The Guide's Forecast – Columbia River sturgeon fishing.....stay home. John Day Pool steelhead fishing.....stay home until the air and water temperatures warm up; maybe by Sunday but you'll have a weather change to deal with. Lower Columbia River crabbing: how well do you enjoy hypothermia? Stay home although if dressed properly, you should be able to get some keepers but don't go with high expectations. Crab downstream of Hammond.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – The lower Willamette level and flow has been dropping and cooling in the dry, frigid weather this week.

A few steelhead have been caught this week below Leaburg Dam on the McKenzie, but these fish are slow to respond with the water cold.

Fishing is slow in the low clear cold water of the North Santiam.

Licenses and tags for 2010 went on sale in Oregon on December 10th for personal or gift purchase. Anglers are reminded of the new option for a two-rod permit for lakes, ponds and reservoirs is available for an additional \$17.

The Guide's Forecast – Sturgeon fishing has slowed in the lower Willamette and Multnomah Channel due to cold water temperatures. Plunk off Meldrum Bar for a chance at intercepting a winter steelhead bound for the Clackamas.

Expect to find fair fishing for trout on the McKenzie with midges while steelheading is slow.

No catches of summer steelhead have been reported for a while from the North Santiam so count on the few fish available here to be wild winters.

Junction City Pond, Walter Wirth, Walling, West Salish Pond, Mt. Hood Pond, and St. Louis #6 were planted with four- and five-year-old rainbow trout from ODFW's Roaring River hatchery and range in size from eight to 18 pounds. These will be great places to take the kids for a thrill.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Coho season is basically over and only a few winters have entered the Clackamas making for slow fishing here. ODFW biologists are proposing the stocking of bull trout in the upper Clackamas. Once prolific, these fish were treated like Northern Pikeminnow with fishermen paid at one time to kill them here as they were thought to compete with more desirable species. Stay tuned for updates.

Steelhead continue to be caught on the Sandy, though not many as it's still early for this system. The river is in fair condition given how dry it's been but steelhead are dodging ice flows this week. Conditions will improve next week and good numbers of fresh winter steelhead will be entering here in January although early catches have been exceptional for this broodstock fishery.

North Coast Fishing Report – Abnormally cold weather has anglers turned off even more than the low, clear water conditions all north coast rivers are experiencing right now. It's actually a bit dangerous out on the rivers right now as if you are not dressed adequately, you risk danger of hypothermia.

The few anglers that are pursuing fish are not coming up with consistent results. Most north coast rivers that sport early returning hatchery fish this time of year do have fish present but cold mornings and low, clear water is really hampering success rates. It would be wise to wait for the warmest part of the day before venturing out. Fish will remain quite lethargic until the air and water temperatures warm up a bit.

The Wilson may offer the best options and there is still a rare chinook around although the ones most available to anglers in the upriver stretches are turning dark right now and should be left alone to spawn. The Nestucca also has fish present but action is very slow under these conditions. Only a very rare steelhead is coming from the North Fork Nehalem near the hatchery and it often comes from the handicap only platform.

Bay salmon and sturgeon fishers are non-existent; and for good reason. Exposure to the east wind will make anybody miserable. There is some surface ice forming in the upper reaches of many north coast estuaries.

Bay crabbing is poor. With the commercial opener offshore and the recent amount of fresh water these systems have endured, you'll have to crab long and hard for just a few keepers. A weather change may also change things for the better but more fresh water will only hamper success.

The Guide's Forecast – A much needed weather change is coming on Friday or Saturday but a rain/snow mix doesn't sound all that positive. What the north coast systems need more than anything is a warming trend. These fish are put off more by the cold weather than the clear water. Once the water and air temperatures begin to rise, action will improve significantly. You shouldn't exactly expect limit fishing but the action should dramatically improve for steelheaders.

There is a significant rise in river levels forecasted for the middle of next week. It would be a welcome change and should stimulate action on most systems that harbor hatchery steelhead runs. As a general rule, target the smaller streams on the rise and the larger systems on the fall. Although river level models are drawn out through the middle of next week, it's way too early to have confidence in them. Use the Wilson River gauge to draw from and when the Wilson is just as 5 foot and dropping, fish it. If it is above 5 foot, fish the smaller streams like the Kilchis, North Fork Nehalem or Necanicum River. Three Rivers on the Nestucca is also an option. Anglers may have one last shot at a bright chinook on the Wilson, Nestucca or possibly even the Trask River. The season closes on the 31st for chinook.

Afternoon sturgeon tides begin to look good again on Saturday but wind and weather will again keep anglers from being too motivated. Sand shrimp will work best during the last few hours of outgoing tide. There should be fish present in the west and middle channels.

Ocean crabbing offers the best chance for quality keepers when the bar and ocean conditions allow. Offshore forecasts are:

FRI

E TO NE WIND 5 TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 1 FOOT. W SWELL 4 FT.
SLIGHT CHANCE OF RAIN...POSSIBLY MIXED WITH SNOW OR FREEZING RAIN
NEAR THE IMMEDIATE COAST.

FRI NIGHT

E TO NE WIND 10 TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 1 FOOT. W SWELL
4 FT. CHANCE OF RAIN...POSSIBLY MIXED WITH SNOW OR FREEZING RAIN
NEAR THE IMMEDIATE COAST.

SAT

E TO NE WIND 10 TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 3 FT.
CHANCE OF RAIN.

SAT NIGHT

N WIND 10 TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 3 FT. W SWELL 4 FT.
CHANCE OF RAIN.

SUN

NW WIND 10 TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 3 FT. W SWELL 7 FT.

MON

S WIND 20 TO 30 KT. WIND WAVES 6 FT. W SWELL 7 FT.

You're not going to see conditions like Friday's and Saturday's all that often so if you can endure the frosty weather, offshore crabbing and bottomfishing may be good. You do have the commercial crabbing fleet to contend with however.

Estuary crabbing has been poor, especially in the Nehalem Basin.

Central & South Coast Reports – For a river that historically gets a later start for winter steelhead than most, the Siletz has been under a surprising amount of pressure lately. Try this one starting in mid-January for better results.

Crabbing is slow to fair at Yaquina Bay with boat traffic heavier on weekends despite lackluster results. Most Dungeness in the bay are fully hard. Waldport is producing similarly with even heavier traffic on weekends.

Alsea steelheaders are hooking a few fresh winters on spinners and jigs. Steelhead are entering the trap on the North Fork but prospects will improve when the rains come.

Dean Hendricks (541-997-7080), owner of North Country Lures and Flies reports, "Siltcoos Lake and Tahkenitch Lake are still producing. Our STEP group is responsible for the fishery and we are just starting to get the fish in our traps. We need some rain to bring in bring in some new fish. We have a lot of fish below the dam. The weather is very cold outside at this time. The water temperature is 41 degrees on the lake. The fishing has been a casting situation this year. A customer of ours just caught the day before Thanksgiving a 26.4lb Coho on Siltcoos Lake which

would have been a new record but he cleaned it. It has not been a trolling game this year. The fish are right against the shore line. You want to cast to shore just like bass fishing."

Here's Hendricks making lures in his factory and below that, the fruits of his labor.



The mainstem Umpqua is producing winter steelhead but it's slow going with the water level low. Crabbing is good in Winchester Bay.

ODFW sez, "Over 200 adult, fin-clipped coho were stocked into Galesville Reservoir recently. Anglers can harvest one of these fish per day as a "trout" over 20 inches. For information on boat launching conditions, call 541-837-3302."

Crabbing has been very good in Coos Bay as well as offshore for ocean Dungeness. Bay clamming has been good to excellent when tides favor the activity.

Fishing has slowed river-wide on the Rogue. The lower river offers the best opportunity as fresh winter steelhead have started to enter but they have been reluctant to respond to bait or lure. Upcoming precipitation will bring better numbers into the Rogue and fishing will continue to improve through December and will be best in January.

The Chetco is low, clear, cold, fish skittish and very few steelhead. It should improve closer to the first of the year. The latest flow at Brookings on the morning of December 10th was 572 cfs. Calm mornings have allowed boaters to make early forays to make good catches of rockfish, ling cod and ocean crab out of the Port of Brookings. The tab for a charter boat trip is paid off with a limit of large, hard Dungeness for those ill-equipped for an ocean trip.

Elk and Sixes rivers are too low to fish well. On Wednesday this week, the temperature of the clear water of the Elk River was 36 degrees.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Pro guide Steve Fleming (888-624-9424) reports, "Last week was cold on the John Day River, and Wednesday morning's 19 degrees at the Cottonwood Bridge was surely cool. When we took off the river Wednesday there was ice 1' - 2' out from the bank about a 1/2" thick. It has been 0-10 at the river at night for five days now, and the river from Service Creek on up is froze up pretty tight. All the gauging station have been iced up since December 4th, and there is no relief in sight on cold night/day temperatures till Saturday. It will be a risky adventure floating the river at this time, and probably not possible in most sections above the Cottonwood Bridge, and probably below. **BIG CAUTION FOR FLOATING THE JOHN DAY RIVER.**"

According to a mid-week report, floating is no longer an option. The John Day River is under several inches of ice.

Steelhead are being caught on the Grande Ronde River but low, cold water is challenging to anglers.

Mac Huff (800-940-3688) confirms with this report, "Winter is here - ice in the river since Thursday and for a few more days, but there are lots of fish in the river and fly anglers can catch 'em later in the day when the ice thins and they can drift between the flows. Gear guys can catch 'em all day with B&J just letting the bobber drift with the ice flows. I've caught lots that way, doesn't make any difference to the fish and they definitely feel secure under that flow of ice. Catch rates from the state have been just under to just over 10 hrs per fish and my fishing and guiding success has been considerably better than this. It's still a good chance to catch some great steelhead."

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report *December 9th – January 5th, 2009*

North Puget Sound

Effort has been light in the region, but a few stalwart anglers who made it out on Puget Sound recently have hooked some bright salmon. "There are not a lot of anglers out on the Sound right now," said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fisheries biologist. "But those anglers who put in some time on the water over the last week are finding some fish. It's certainly not red hot, but fishing has been fair in some areas."

Marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands), 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner), and 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) are open for salmon. Anglers fishing those marine areas have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook.

Thiesfeld reminds anglers that Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet) is closed to salmon fishing through Jan. 15.

Crabbing also is an option in select marine areas. Marine Area 10 and most of Marine Area 9 are open for crabbing seven days a week through Jan. 2, 2010. The portion of Marine Area 9 south of a line from Foulweather Bluff to Olele Point is closed for the season. 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).

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. Fishers may catch six red rock crab of either sex per day, provided those crab measure at least 5 inches across. For more information about recreational crabbing in Puget Sound, see WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/shelfish/crab> .

In the rivers, there have been a few reports of anglers hooking some bright **steelhead** but, overall, fishing has been slow.

Anglers should be aware that a portion of the North Fork Nooksack River closed to sportfishing Dec. 1 until further notice. The river is 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. The closure is necessary to ensure egg-take goals are met for hatchery winter steelhead at the Kendall Creek Hatchery.

Other rules and regulations for all freshwater and saltwater fisheries can be found at WDFW's fishing regulation website at <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.

Favorable tides have allowed WDFW to tentatively schedule a **razor clam** dig starting New Year's Eve. If marine toxin levels show the clams are safe to eat, an evening dig will be held Dec. 31 and Jan. 1 at all five ocean beaches, followed by another evening of digging Jan. 2 at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis and Mocrocks. One beach, Twin Harbors, is scheduled for an evening dig Jan. 3. Final word will be issued about a week before the dig, after a final round of marine toxin tests has been completed.

"The last time low tides allowed for a New Year's Eve opener, more than 22,000 people came out," said Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager. "We'll let folks know whether it's a 'go' as soon as we can."

For best results, Ayres recommends that people start digging at least one hour before low tide. No digging will be allowed before noon any day. Evening low tides for the upcoming dig are:

- Thursday, Dec. 31 (6:16 p.m. -1.1 ft.) all beaches
- Friday, Jan. 1 (7:01 p.m. -1.8 ft.) all beaches
- Saturday, Jan. 2 (7:45 p.m. -1.6 ft.) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Sunday, Jan. 3 (8:29 p.m. -1.2 ft.) Twin Harbors

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 2009 annual shellfish/seaweed license or combination fishing license is valid. Another option is a razor-clam only license available in annual or three-day only versions. Descriptions of the various options are available on the WDFW website at <http://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov> .

Meanwhile, **steelhead** fishing is heating up on north coast rivers. A recent creel survey conducted on the Bogachiel River in the Quillayute system showed 162 anglers with 146 hatchery steelhead and two wild steelhead. All hatchery fish were retained and the two wild steelhead were released. "After a long stretch of high and colored waters, we're seeing some prime fishing conditions," said Mike Gross, WDFW fish biologist.

Although the Hoh and Calawah rivers drew fewer anglers, they're likely to see more action in the weeks ahead, Gross said. "December and January are prime months for hatchery steelhead and should be productive for anglers as long as the rivers stay in shape."

Wild steelhead-retention rules are now in effect on the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Hoko, Pysht, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc rivers. Anglers may retain one wild steelhead per license year. Because retention rules and the length of the wild steelhead season vary for each river, Gross strongly recommends that anglers check the 2009-10 Fishing in Washington pamphlet at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm> before heading out.

Farther south, anglers are still catching late-run **hatchery coho** on the Humptulips River where salmon fishing is open through January. "The river's been quite busy and anglers are doing well," Gross said. Still, anglers fishing Grays Harbor rivers are looking forward to steelhead season in the weeks ahead. Popular local rivers include the Satsop, Wynoochee and Wishkah.

Chum salmon fishing has all but wrapped up in most places, but is just beginning in the Nisqually River, which is open to salmon fishing through January. The late chum run doesn't hit

full stride until mid- to late December and generally remains strong until at least mid-January, said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "The Nisqually's a good fishery and the chum are typically bright and in good shape," he said.

Thiesfeld also suggests some winter **blackmouth** fishing in Puget Sound, where the salmon fisheries in marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon Island) and 12 (Hood Canal) are open through Dec. 31. "Participation's been slow with this cold weather, but anglers who've been out are finding blackmouth in Hood Canal," Thiesfeld said.

Anglers fishing these areas may retain one chinook as part of their two-fish daily limit.

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, 2010. Until then, crab fishing is open seven days a week in marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu), 10 (Seattle/Bremerton), 13 (south Puget Sound), and a portion of Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet). The portion of Marine Area 9 south of a line from Foulweather Bluff to Olele Point is closed for the season.

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. Fishers may catch six red rock crab of either sex per day, provided those crab measure at least 5 inches across.

Recreational crabbers are required to send in a winter catch card or report their catch online by Jan. 15. People failing to submit their winter reports will receive a \$10 fine when they apply for a 2010 Puget Sound crab endorsement. For more information about recreational crabbing in Puget Sound, see WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/shelfish/crab> .

Southwest Washington

Anglers have been catching increasing numbers of winter steelhead on tributaries to the lower Columbia River, although fishing was slowed in early December by a winter freeze. Meanwhile, a pre-season forecast of next year's upriver spring chinook run is expected to cast a warm glow on fishing prospects for early 2010.

Hatchery-reared winter steelhead are striking in increasing numbers on the Cowlitz River near the trout hatchery as well as in the lower river, said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist. Steelhead action is also starting to pick up in the Lewis, Kalama, Grays, Washougal and Elochoman rivers, he said, while noting that returns to several area hatcheries have lagged behind last year's levels.

"Steelhead fishing has been locked in kind of a deep freeze during the early part of the run," Hymer said. "But once things warm up - especially if we get some rain - this fishery could really come alive."

As with all steelhead fisheries in southwest Washington, only hatchery fish with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar may be retained. All wild steelhead must be released.

During the week ending Dec. 6, Tacoma Power employees released 165 adult coho, one adult fall chinook and one winter-run steelhead into the Tilton River at Gust Backstrom Park in Morton. They also released 323 adult coho into Lake Scanewa above Cowlitz Falls Dam and another 216 adult coho into the upper Cowlitz River at the Skate Creek Bridge in Packwood.

A total of 70 hatchery-origin sea-run cutthroat trout were recycled downstream to the Barrier Dam boat launch.

Frigid weather has also slowed fishing for white sturgeon on the lower Columbia River, which is open Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays from the Wauna powerlines upriver to Bonneville Dam through Dec. 31. Only one legal-sized fish was counted among the hearty bank anglers who braved the cold east winds below the dam during an early December creel check.

"A thaw would give anglers a chance to catch a few more sturgeon before they lock up for winter," Hymer said.

A better bet might be Battleground Lake or Kline Pond, he said. On Dec. 7, WDFW planted 2,500 catchable-size rainbows in each location. Weather permitting, the department also plans to plant a similar number of fish at Battleground and Kline close to the holidays, Hymer said.

Looking forward to spring chinook fishing? Based on last year's count of upriver jacks, the prospects should be good, Hymer said. More than 80,000 upriver jack salmon were tallied at Bonneville Dam this year, which one fishery manager described as "off the charts." A preseason forecast of the upriver chinook run is currently being developed by the multi-agency panel that projects run sizes in the Columbia River Basin. Watch this space for information about that forecast.

Eastern Washington

Bill Baker, WDFW district fish biologist from Colville, reports that Hatch and Williams lakes in Stevens County produced good catches of **rainbow trout** on the Dec. 1 winter-only season opener, but are now icing up.

"Anglers were easily catching limits of rainbows at Williams, with fish ranging from 9 to 12 inches," Baker said. "Anglers were having to work a bit harder at Hatch Lake, but were still catching limits of 10 to 13-inch rainbows if they were persistent. All these fish are robust and overall, fishing is good."

With the region's recent single digit temperatures at night, both lakes are icing up quickly, but probably not enough to safely walk out on to ice fish, Baker said. A week or more of the same conditions and both might offer safe ice fishing.

The region's two other winter-only trout lakes - Fourth of July on the Lincoln-Adams county line and Hog Canyon in southwest Spokane County - will offer no fishing this season because they were treated this fall to eliminate undesirable fish and will not be restocked with rainbows until spring. Chris Donley, WDFW central district fish biologist from Spokane, reports that despite posted signs and several earlier notices of the situation, some anglers are attempting to access the lakes.

"If anyone catches a fish out of either of those lakes it would be a miracle," Donley said.

Baker says fishing for **burbot** on year-round Sullivan and Bead lakes in Pend Oreille County should be productive later in the winter as safe ice conditions develop.

Marc Divens, WDFW warmwater fish biologist, notes three year-round waters near Spokane - Eloika, Newman, and Silver - could produce decent catches of everything from **crappie** to **perch** through the ice when conditions are safe. At all three lakes winter anglers will see new boat launches and docks recently completed for use next spring.

All three fish biologists emphasize that winter anglers must be very cautious about ice. According to U.S. Coast Guard guidelines, no one should venture onto lake ice unless it is at least 4 inches thick, clear and solid. As much as 9 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, both day and night.

Ice depths vary throughout a waterway due to underwater structures, springs, geothermal activity, and water movement caused by flows, wind, or waterfowl use. Rivers and streams rarely have safe ice because of constant currents. Thawing and re-freezing can create air pockets that leave ice "honeycombed" or porous and significantly weakened.

Drilling a hole in the ice from a safe, near-shore location can give anglers an idea of ice depth. However, drilling only provides an estimate of the ice depth because shallow water near shore freezes quicker than deeper water in the middle of a lake where springs may slow the freezing process.

WDFW does not measure ice on fishing lakes and cannot guarantee ice fishing safety. But here are a few tips to help keep an outing safe:

- Don't fish alone. Let others know exactly where you and your fishing partners are going and when you plan to return.
- Keep fishing holes small and few. When drilling fishing holes with an ice auger, keep the diameter under eight inches. Bigger holes are not necessary to land fish and can create a safety hazard for others.
- Watch your step. Avoid ice fishing near feeder streams or known springs; brush, logs, plants or docks; multiple ice cracks or ice that is popping or otherwise audible; and dark-colored ice that may be weak.
- Spread out. Too many people congregated in one area may be more than the ice can safely support. Disperse weight and fishing holes.
- Be prepared for weather conditions. Dress in layers and wear thermal underwear, fleece or wool, and wind and waterproof outerwear, especially for feet, hands and head. Take extra clothes, food, water, sand for on-ice traction, and a sled for easy on-ice transport of all equipment.
- Be prepared for emergencies. Carry equipment such as ice picks or awls, rope, and personal flotation devices. Also pack a first-aid kit and matches for starting a fire.

Some of the best open water fishing in the region continues to be found at year-round Sprague Lake. The rainbow trout there range from 15-25 inches, and five-fish limits are still being caught. 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 is producing big net-pen-reared rainbows. Both boat trollers and shore anglers are catching fish throughout the reservoir.

Snake River **steelhead** action hasn't been officially measured recently. But anecdotal reports indicate the big ocean-going rainbows, which have returned in record numbers this year, are still being caught by those willing and able to brave the extreme cold and wind chill on the big water.

Northcentral Washington

Bob Jateff, WDFW Okanogan district fish biologist from Twisp, says **steelhead** fishing is slowing down a bit now in all Columbia River fishery areas above Wells Dam as water temperatures drop. Anglers are reminded of the mandatory retention of hatchery-marked steelhead caught in the upper Columbia River fishery. Daily limit is four adipose-fin-clipped hatchery steelhead.

"Ice fishing opportunities will improve as colder temperatures help increase ice thickness," Jateff said. "Lakes to try in Okanogan County are Patterson and Davis near Winthrop, Big and Little Green near Omak, Rat near Brewster, and Sidley near Oroville. **Rainbow trout** are the predominant species in these lakes, with a five-trout daily catch limit. Patterson also has a good population of **yellow perch** with no minimum size and no daily catch limit."

Jateff emphasizes that winter anglers need to be very cautious about ice. According to U.S. Coast Guard guidelines, no one should venture onto lake ice unless it is at least 4 inches thick, clear and solid. As much as 4 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, both day and night.

Ice depths vary throughout a waterway due to underwater structures, springs, geothermal activity, and water movement caused by flows, wind, or waterfowl use.

Rivers and streams rarely have safe ice because of constant currents. Thawing and re-freezing can create air pockets that leave ice "honeycombed" or porous and significantly weakened.

Drilling a hole in the ice from a safe, near-shore location can give anglers an idea of ice depth. However, drilling only provides an estimate of the ice depth because shallow water near shore freezes quicker than deeper water in the middle of a lake where springs may slow the freezing process.

WDFW does not measure ice on fishing lakes and cannot guarantee ice fishing safety. But here are a few tips to help keep an outing safe:

- Don't fish alone. Let others know exactly where you and your fishing partners are going and when you plan to return.
- Keep fishing holes small and few. When drilling fishing holes with an ice auger, keep the diameter under eight inches. Bigger holes are not necessary to land fish and can create a safety hazard for others.
- Watch your step. Avoid ice fishing near feeder streams or known springs; brush, logs, plants or docks; multiple ice cracks or ice that is popping or otherwise audible; and dark-colored ice that may be weak.
- Spread out. Too many people congregated in one area may be more than the ice can safely support. Disperse weight and fishing holes.
- Be prepared for weather conditions. Dress in layers and wear thermal underwear, fleece or wool, and wind and waterproof outerwear, especially for feet, hands and head. Take extra clothes, food, water, sand for on-ice traction, and a sled for easy on-ice transport of all equipment.
- Be prepared for emergencies. Carry equipment such as ice picks or awls, rope, and personal flotation devices. Also pack a first-aid kit and matches for starting a fire.

Jateff also notes **whitefish** season opened Dec. 1 on selected areas of the Similkameen and Methow rivers. "Anglers need to be aware that in any area that is currently open to steelhead fishing, whitefish gear rules are not in effect, which means that anglers fishing for whitefish must abide by steelhead gear rules," Jateff said.

In areas where steelhead fisheries are not taking place (Similkameen above Enloe Dam and the Methow/Chewuch rivers above Winthrop), standard whitefish gear rules apply - one single point hook, maximum hook size 3/16 inch measured point to shank, and bait is allowed.

Southcentral Washington

The region's winter-only season **rainbow trout** water, North Elton Pond along Interstate 82 near Selah in Yakima County, is well-stocked with hatchery fish. Eric Anderson, WDFW district fish biologist, reminds anglers the daily catch limit at North Elton is two trout.

Anderson notes that winter anglers need to be very cautious about ice. According to U.S. Coast Guard guidelines, no one should venture onto lake ice unless it is at least 4 inches thick, clear and solid. As much as 9 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, both day and night.

Ice depths vary throughout a waterway due to underwater structures, springs, geothermal activity, and water movement caused by flows, wind, or waterfowl use.

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Anderson notes that winter **whitefish** action on the Yakima River's 3,500-foot stretch below Roza Dam will likely pick up as winter advances. 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 will run from 10 to 13 inches, found in winter groups in deep pools, and usually caught maggots or small artificial flies or lures.

TGF Inbox – Reader E-mail

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

Gift ideas for the fly anglers on your list (commercial site):

<http://oregonflyfishingblog.com/2009/12/08/best-of-2009-the-year-in-fly-fishing-books-and-dvds/>

News release regarding the Aquatic Species Prevention Permit required for all watercraft 10 feet or longer in 2010:

<http://www.boatoregon.com/OSMB/news/2009/2010AISfeesRel.shtml>

GOOD LUCK!