

The Guide's Forecast - volume 11 issue number 51

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 18th – December 24th, 2009**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro - The 2010 spring Chinook forecast has anglers buzzing with excitement for the upcoming season. Although a full-blown season into much of April is unlikely, with a forecast of 470,000 adults, there is clearly some good fishing ahead.

Increased flow and improved water color will occur in the lower Willamette where the lower river has been fishing best for sturgeon. Fish the deeper holes. No decision has been made about open days for sturgeon retention in 2010. Steelheading is slow at Meldrum Bar.

The lower McKenzie produced reddsides to nymph fishers over the past weekend in chilly temperatures.

Water level and flow will increase only slightly on the North Santiam as Detroit Reservoir is below normal winter levels. Fishing is slow.

The Clackamas is forecast to rise about two feet this week but will be dropping by Friday. While it's still early for the winter run here, the fishery is off to a good start. Robert Campbell, Kelly Richner and Jake Reardon took 2-fish limits from Feldhiemers to Carver on Monday. They caught most of their fish on bobbers and jigs in shallow water.

Early catches have boded well for the winter steelhead season on the Sandy and rain this week will only help. The river is likely to come back into shape by the weekend. **Pro guide Jack Glass (503-666-5370)** reports a couple of steelhead were caught early this week but that the river blew out mid-week.

Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake are scheduled to be planted with hatchery trout.

Northwest – Most anglers have been waiting for the rain that finally hit the coast early in the week. Cold weather coupled with low, clear water conditions brought any start of a steelhead bite to an abrupt halt. Anglers that did target steelhead in these conditions found fair opportunities but lethargic fish often bit reluctantly, resulting in poor strike to hook ratios.

The much needed rain freshet is forecasted to swell rivers but north coast systems could drop into ideal shape by the weekend. If the forecast plays out, it will be a peak week for early run hatchery fish available on many north coast streams.

Best big river bets include the Nestucca and Wilson Rivers with a few late-run chinook possible too. The higher the flows, the more anglers should target steelhead in the shallower, slower water. Bait proves most effective in higher flows while plugs produce better when the rivers drop and clear.

Smaller systems like the North Fork Nehalem, Necanicum, Three Rivers and to a lesser degree the Kilchis are also good options, especially when larger systems remain too high to fish. Fish should be well distributed throughout these systems but will concentrate close to their liberation site.

Small streams along Highway 30 near Astoria should also produce just as soon as precipitation slows. Big Creek and Gnat Creek will be prime options even before the weekend.

Frigid weather kept anglers off of most estuaries so crabbing and sturgeon fishing were poor options last week. The increased precipitation will likely keep crabs close to the mouths of most estuaries.

Southwest – There's a bonus awaiting ocean crabbers in the Winchester Bay area. Dungeness have been tagged and for every tag returned to the Oregon Dungeness Crab Study, anglers will receive \$20 but must include where the crab was taken and the tag number as well as contact information. Return information to 29 Second Street S.E. in Newport, 97365. At the end of the program, a drawing for \$1,000 will take place from those who have returned tags.

Reports from southwest rivers have been few this week as all are low and clear. Rain is forecast to continue here however, and winter steelhead will take advantage of the freshet to enter tributaries.

Chetco steelhead have started entering while the chinook run is about wrapped up here. Despite the time of year, a bright 50-pounder was taken Friday, December 11th when river was at its lowest level. The ocean swell is likely to remain big and winds are predicted to remain strong. When offshore conditions have allowed, nearshore bottom fishing has been productive and the seas have produced limits of Dungeness.

The last push of late returning chinook will enter the Elk River with rain this week. Historically, the run is timed later here and will reward anglers while the chinook season is all but over in many other rivers.

Eastern – A few late summer steelhead are being taken on the Deschutes but they're showing some color.

The Crooked River was fishable over the past weekend and while it was low and cold, it produced a few whitefish and fewer reddsides on nymphs.

With overnight temperatures below zero, hardcore trollers still took large Mackinaw from Crescent Lake recently.

Grande Ronde River anglers are waiting for ice to clear as excellent numbers of steelhead are available. Catch rates should improve in the coming week.

SW Washington – The Cowlitz River produced fair steelhead results this week as the historic peak typically takes place about this time of year. Action should continue into January but anglers often focus on other river systems after January.

The Lewis is showing fair signs for steelheaders even though hatchery returns are lagging from 2008 counts. This system does have a late run steelhead component although fast action is not nearly as common as it used to be.

Low angler effort and catch was observed on the Kalama River last week. Improved weather conditions should bump up the catch and effort.

Columbia River Fishing Report – It's only a steelhead show upriver in the John Day Pool. Despite very cold and inclement weather, steelhead action was good for the few anglers

participating in the fishery. In the John Day creel check last week, boats averaged 3 fish per boat even though very few boats were fishing.

Crabbers were also reluctant to try their luck in the lower river and given the amount of commercial pressure, it's a bit of a futile effort. Other estuaries that don't receive the commercial pressure are more likely to produce. Unfortunately, those estuaries also have high volumes of fresh water right now.

The Guide's Forecast – Although weather is likely to continue to be inclement, action should pick up with the warmer temperatures in the forecast. Trollers will continue to take steelhead through the end of the year but fish are beginning to color. As this season wanes, results will only get more inconsistent but it will remain a viable option for boaters that can tolerate the cold (translate: bring a heater with you!).

Crabbing is effectively over for the year on the lower Columbia. It may not get good again for quite some time so focus your efforts in other coastal estuaries when fresh water influxes taper. The ocean will be the best option but won't be all that friendly in the coming weeks.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Rain has predictably increased the level and flow of the lower Willamette. In addition, the roiling of the water and reduction of visibility are positive factors for sturgeon fishing. For those anxious for spring Chinook news (and who isn't), the preliminary prediction is 62,700 for the Willamette system, about three-quarters of which will be of hatchery origin. Tentative, early discussions involve a seven-day-per-week fishery. That's all good news if it comes to pass.

McKenzie rose about two feet due to rainfall this week. A few summer steelhead were being taken below Leaburg Dam before the water came up but these fish are getting colorful.

ODFW sez, "Large brood trout were released this week in Huddleston Pond in Yamhill County. The fish are 4- and 5-year-old rainbow trout from ODFW's Roaring River hatchery and range in size from 8 to 18 pounds."

Expect to pay a little higher rates at Oregon State Parks next year. Following a 13-year period during which there were no increases in user fees, it will cost an additional \$3 for tent camping and \$4 for an RV. Day use fees will be \$5, up from \$3 previously.

The Guide's Forecast – While off-color water bodes well for sturgeon anglers, the best results will come from an increase in water temperature. In wether, the reason the Willamette fishes well is that it's warmer than the Columbia which will draw sturgeon in like a magnet. Fishing should be good during the retention period this week and in weeks to come if the water stays warmer here than in the big river. There's a chance for plunkers to intercept winter steelhead bound for the Clackamas as they hug the bank in high water along Meldum Bar but usually this activity involves a great deal of waiting for something to happen.

A few summer steelhead were being taken below Leaburg Dam before the water came up but these fish are getting colorful. Fly fishing for trout is slow to fair above the dam but give it a while to drop into shape.

A few summer steelhead are available on the North Santiam as this system transitions to a catch-and-release fishery for wild winter fish.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Clack over 77,500 cfs on Thursday this week from 1,500 on Monday. It's still rising and unlikely to fish this coming weekend. When the weather breaks and conditions improve, there will be some fish around although it's early as the Clack has fully implemented a broodstock program which means a late-season return. Eagle Creek is in good shape but between runs is not the best time to fish it.

The latest reports on the Sandy are of high, roiled water. This one may not recover if the rain continues are predicted but it's supposed to break next week. Then the Sandy becomes fishable, it should also become productive if early catches are any indication. It'll be a good bet. Plunkers will take the first fish as the river starts to drop, then spinners as it clears.

Pro guide Jack Glass (503-666-5370) reports, "A couple fish were caught Sunday, Monday on the sandy with the rain I expect the river to blow out and not fish till Friday or Saturday. I hope steelheading will kick into gear after that."

North Coast Fishing Report – It's been another cold week at the coast, keeping most anglers at home and tying steelhead rigs for the upcoming season. The river has been low and clear but there are a few fish present. The few anglers in pursuit of fish are commenting on a lot of spawning Chinook salmon and light biters when they can get a steelhead to go. These lethargic bites are a typical behavior in really cold weather and I don't think anyone has a solution on how to actually catch these fish.

Anglers won't have to worry about that again for a while as rain has once again inundated the north coast and rivers are on a sharp rise at this writing. With continued precipitation in the immediate forecast, the rivers will be very predictable as to when each one will come into shape. See the next section for your best bets.

Dangerously cold weather kept sensible anglers off of the bays and rivers this last week so reports are scarce. It's probably a good thing so we don't have to read about anyone in the obits this week.

A quick honorary shout out goes to my great uncle Jimmy Rees of Sandy Oregon however, for living 96 years as an Oregonian. Grew up in Shaniko and fished the Deschutes River for subsistence. What a great guy, he will be missed. Rest in peace Uncle Jimmy! He passed on Monday.

The Guide's Forecast – Follow these rivers into steelhead success:

North Fork Nehalem, Necanicum, Three Rivers and Kilchis River- The North Fork Nehalem may be one of the best options as early run steelhead will concentrate near the hatchery, providing some good opportunities for both walking and handicap anglers. Use big baits in big water but the river should remain in good shape at least until the weekend. Pressure will be up for this small tributary. The Necanicum will be a close second but fish will be more spread out as there are more liberation sites for this river. Three Rivers will certainly be in the mix as well although hatchery plants to this system have dropped off in recent years but could change back in the near future. The Kilchis is a distant 4th as hatchery plants of early run fish have also dwindled here as a trade-off for more broodstock plants in the Wilson River. None-the-less, there should be some fish available from Kilchis Park to the 101 take-out but you'll have to work every nook and cranny to come up with results.

The other great option will be the Trask River but the Dam Hole will be your best bet until the river drops back into fishable shape. Although it's a bit early for this mostly wild river to produce

great numbers, the dam hole this time of year can boot out some quality catches of fish. This is a bank only show and bait drifters fishing close to the rivers edge in high water will often be pleasantly surprised this time of year. The lower section will fish better when the Wilson gets into fishable shape.

The Wilson and Nestucca Rivers- The Wilson will be the best option with the higher drifts producing the best results late in the week. As flows drop, driftboaters working from Vanderzanden's to Sollie Smith should find fish, both Chinook and steelhead in their traditional haunts. Plugs will take Chinook in the higher flows, especially in the tailouts and choose a smaller plug, like a Tadpolly, and you can effectively target either specie. Bait works best for steelhead in the higher flows with plugs producing well when the Wilson gets below 5 foot.

Like the Wilson, the Nestucca will produce best up high until flows drop and fish slow their upstream migration. Fish from 5½ Bridge to 1st bridge early in the drop and by the weekend, the lower drifts should be producing some fair action. It's important to keep in mind however that the Nestucca has not had the returns it's experienced in years past but most are expecting better this year. According to river models, we should get a rain reprieve enough for fair action over the weekend. A variety of offerings should work by then including bait and plugs. A rare Chinook may also be available but you're more likely to encounter one on the Wilson over the Nestucca.

The Highway 30 streams near Astoria are also strong options. All of these streams will be peaking this week with early run steelhead. Although these fish don't bite as well as broodstock or wild steelhead, they should provide some excellent opportunity for the persistent angler. If you're a steelheader, you'll want to be fishing this weekend!

Too bad the tides aren't conducive to good bay sturgeon fishing as it should be ready to take off under these conditions. With all the fresh water, juvenile crabs should be positioning themselves closer to the ocean and out of the way of bait dunkers in the west and middle channels of Tillamook Bay. Better tides ahead and likely better weather too...

Not the best option for crabbing, inside or outside of the estuary mouths. Lower fresh water levels are needed in the bay or calmer seas. Neither of which is in the forecast. Razor clam digging may be an option along Clatsop Beaches however. You'll need a lantern to see your quarry.

Central & South Coast Reports – While the ocean hasn't allowed offshore foray for the most part, crabbers heading out early to drop pots and traps are doing well with overnight sets. Dungeness are large, hard and prolific at this time of year. Bays have been slammed with fresh water this week and are likely to be poor producers until the salinity level reruns to normal.

The Siletz is brown with mud from rain this week but is forecast to drop and clear into the weekend. Winter steelhead are entering the Alsea where a few limits have been taken. The river went over 10.5 feet on Wednesday this week but will be around the seven foot level for the weekend. Try spinners or jig and bobber combos as the water recedes.

Water levels were over eight feet and rising on the mainstem Umpqua at Elkton on the morning of December 17th. Winter steelhead had started entering prior to the freshet which indicates there should be some worthwhile fishing as the river drops. The mainstem is expected to fish by the weekend with plugs and drifted bait taking winters. With early results good, the Umpqua will continue to fish well into February.

The Rogue River Went over 5.5 feet at Agness on Wednesday this week but was dropping Thursday morning. As the river drops, plunkers will be the first to take advantage of fresh winter steelhead entering with the freshet, the latest precipitation is well-timed to get the winter season off to a decent start. Upstream, summer steelhead are on the move in the middle Rogue and a few are still being caught on the upper river.

Anglers making brief, early-morning trips over the bar out of the Port of Brookings are enjoying good catches of rockfish and ling cod in shallow water. Crabbing has been excellent. The Chetco went over 13,000 cfs mid-week but is currently dropping. When the level hits 4,000 cfs, it's time to go fishing. While there are still a few Chinook available, they're not in good shape and with winters starting to enter, steelhead will be the logical target in weeks to come. As winters will be feeding on salmon eggs washing down from redds so roe is a logical choice. When the conditions improve, hit the river.

There are still Chinook to be caught in the Elk River although most are turning dark. Fresh winter steelhead are available, though, and anglers will be targeting them as the river level drops. Fishing is expected to be good. While fishing has been slow on the Sixes, it remains to be seen what the weekend brings as water levels drop.

Central and Eastern Oregon – The lower Deschutes is running a little off-color but there are steelhead in residence and they're willing bites. Small egg imitations have been effective.

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.

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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

Reader Ralph S. wrote via the Contact Form at the TGF website on December 11th, "I was not aware that fishing season was open on the Mckenzie this time of year?? Fly-fishing is what you reported. And I was on the Sandy river Wednesday morning and saw sheets of ice and little ice bergs floating down the river not to mention it was really low and clear, In these Icy conditions I don't see any good steelhead prospects in the smaller rivers at all, Columbia and Willamette maybe."

Most of the McKenzie is open for trout and steelhead although portions are artificial fly and lures only for part of the year. The complete 2009 regulations may be found online here:

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/docs/2009_oregon_sport_fishing_regs.pdf

For the 2010 regulations, go here:

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/docs/2010_Snake_River_Zone_Fish_Regs.pdf

You are right that the icy conditions were probably challenging less than a week ago but now the problem has changed to high water. When that goes away, fishing will resume.

Got a question, story to tell or information to share? Shoot us an Email!

Write to the TGF staff:

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GOOD LUCK!