

The Guide's Forecast - volume 12 issue number 8

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 19th – February 25th, 2010**

Oregon Fisheries Update:



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Willamette Valley/Metro - After a flurry of spring chinook action, fishing success for early run fish has tapered. Effort remains high with the good weather but anglers likely won't see significant catches until mid-March, even with a record run predicted to return.

Managers are finally expected to set the salmon and sturgeon seasons this Thursday at Oregon City but public testimony is not likely to be taken.

Lower Willamette water temperature is gradually increasing which should improve sturgeon prospects for those who aren't targeting early spring chinook. Springer fishing will remain open seven days a week for a daily bag limit of two hatchery fish.

The McKenzie is low but trout fishing is fair on nymphs. Most steelhead available are runbacks.

North Santiam steelheading has been slow with the steady flows at Minto and Packsaddle offering the most promise.

Jigs have been hooking a few steelhead on the Clackamas as have drifted eggs. The river will be dropping and clearing this week. Eagle Creek put out some winter steelhead over the past weekend to hardware and fly fishers.

Bait has been most effective on the Sandy where fishing is fair to good for a mix of wild and hatchery steelhead.

Scheduled to be stocked with trout are Mt Hood Pond, West Salish Pond and Creswell Pond.

Northwest – After a long period of low water conditions, steelheaders welcomed the recent rain freshet just prior to the weekend. Boaters reported good action on larger streams like the Wilson and Trask with only fair action reported for the Nestucca system.

Despite persistently good conditions on Sunday, action had slowed significantly. Anglers are catching a mix of wild and broodstock steelhead with an occasional spawned out fish still present. River levels will once again drop to low levels by the weekend and a poor tide series will cause success rates to continue to drop. Most systems see a temporary downturn in activity in mid-February but better prospects will come around again by early March.

Smaller systems like the North Fork Nehalem, Three Rivers and the Necanicum River will remain poor prospects until a few wild fish enter on the next significant rain event. Spawning cutthroat trout will readily take bait this time of year but must be released unharmed.

Sturgeon fishing has dried up on Tillamook Bay and a poor set of tides will put this option further out of reach.

Crabbers took to north coast estuaries this weekend with mixed reports coming in. Most crabbers did only fair with the ocean being the best option, just too rough to access last weekend. The East wind forecasted for this week typically knocks down nearshore swells making crabbing and inshore reef fishing a good option. Watch the weather closely before heading out and be prepared to turn around and cancel the trip pending bar crossing conditions.

Alder Lake, Big Creek Reservoirs 1 & 2, Cleawox Lake, Dune Lake, Munsel Lake and Olalla Creek Reservoir are scheduled to be planted with hatchery trout.

Southwest – Steelheaders have continued to take fish on the mainstem and North Umpqua. The venerable pink worm has been effective over the past week.

Productive for several weeks, steelhead action on the Coquille has cooled.

Coos Bay has been fair to good for crabbing and should only improve this week. Steelheading on the Coos River has been a challenge but drifted bait put some fish on the bank recently.

Expect water conditions and steelhead fishing to be fair to good on the Elk through the weekend.

Anchor fishers have been running plugs with consistent success in the lower Rogue as conditions have improved. The middle Rogue has been producing multiple hookups on winters bound for the Applegate River. Springers are due in March.

Just over 4,000 cfs on Tuesday this week, the lower Chetco is forecast to be around 3,000 cfs by the coming weekend and continue to drop into the coming week. Bank and boat anglers will find success in these conditions. Long, skinny steelhead are returning to the ocean after spawning and should be released. They're not worthwhile table fare.

While ocean conditions are predicted to be marginal in the coming weekend, boats should be able to make early morning forays for rockfish and ling cod before the seas get too rough. Limits are the rule and crabbing has been good.

Lake Selmac is scheduled to be planted with hatchery trout.

Eastern – The Deschutes has been fishing fairly well as reddsides are responding to March Brown dry patterns fished tight to the bank.

Sturgeon anglers fishing the Columbia River reservoirs east of Bonneville Dam continue to eat away at their respective quotas. Fair weather will likely result in fair catches this weekend with the Bonneville Pool scheduled to close on February 21st with the increased quota of 1,400 keepers expected to be reached.

SW Washington – District rivers remain void of any big numbers of steelhead but broodstock fish should become available in the coming weeks. The Kalama holds the most promise.

Spring chinook should begin to arrive in the coming weeks with catches peaking in mid-April. The Cowlitz and Lewis Rivers will be the best options this season.

Persistent smelt dippers did take some fish on the Cowlitz last weekend. Limits were hard to come by but dippers willing to invest in several hours of effort did produce fair results.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Spring chinook are now heavily on the minds of many as almost daily reports of catches are coming in. As is often the case, early run fish are typically larger than the later returning 4-year old fish as **pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)** proved on Wednesday with a guided 20 pounder taken just below the I-5 bridge on a trolled herring.



Brandon reports, "20 pound spring Chinook caught by Mirco Hinz of Germany fishing with Pro Guide Brandon McGavran (360) 607-1327. This early Spring beauty was caught on the Columbia (2-17-10) on a slow trolled plug cut Herring fished close to the bottom. The fish was landed on a Lamiglas 10' 6" Kenai Kwik composite rod. The water is low, clear, and several degrees warmer than usual for this time of year; 43 degrees near Vancouver. Ideal trolling conditions for an early fish."

Most recently, action has been a bit off despite a fair amount of effort taking place on the lower river. With this kind of lull in the fishery, action is likely to pick up again in the near future. Most anglers, whether trolling or on anchor will fish herring this time of year. The colder water seems conducive to this bait and either technique can produce results with herring. With the excitement of a record return, interest will only increase in the coming weeks; hopefully, the catch does too.

Sturgeon fishing below Bonneville remains slow. Effort remains low and catch even lower. Anglers upriver of Bonneville Dam are reporting better than a fish per boat average. So good in fact, that this section of river is scheduled to close on Sunday, February 21st. Here's the ODF&W press release:

CLACKAMAS, Ore. – Oregon and Washington fishery managers announced today the closure of sturgeon retention in the Columbia River and tributaries from Bonneville Dam to The Dalles Dam, effective 12:01 a.m. Sunday, Feb. 21.

The closure was approved in response to creel surveys that indicated catch rates in Bonneville reservoir have been much higher than expected since the beginning of the year.

Relatively mild weather, good river conditions, and recent increases in the number of legal-sized fish contributed to unusually high catch rates, according to Chris Kern, assistant manager of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Columbia River Fisheries Program.

Earlier this year, fishery managers doubled the harvest guideline in Bonneville reservoir from 700 to 1,400 fish, based on population estimates that showed the number of legal-sized sturgeon in that section of the Columbia had increased substantially from prior years.

"Apparently word got out that sturgeon fishing above Bonneville has been exceptional because we're seeing very high effort and catch rates," said Kern.

In January, ODFW counted a total of 1,400 angler trips in Bonneville reservoir, with 390 sturgeon kept. That compares to only 400 trips and 20 sturgeon kept during the same period in 2009. Through Feb. 7, anglers had harvested an estimated 790 sturgeon. Biologists calculate if catch rates continue to be high anglers will reach the harvest guideline as early as Feb. 21 with a projected catch of 1,382 fish.

Sturgeon fisheries in The Dalles and John Day reservoirs and below Bonneville are not affected by this closure. Those fisheries will be evaluated during a scheduled Oregon-Washington Joint State Hearing on Feb. 18 in Oregon City. That meeting will take place at the Clackamas County Historical Society building, located at 211 Tumwater Drive, beginning at 10 a.m.

Although temperatures are on the rise downstream of Bonneville, better fishing is still months away. Look for action to pick up in the gorge just in time for the new deadline to come into effect in the spring time.

Further upriver, trollers working The Dalles Pool tallied 17 steelhead (both wild and hatchery) for 6 boats. Most fish were wild and dark for that matter. Only 3 were retained but you can't deny the action for this time of year. Walleye anglers were also tallying good catches with exactly 4 walleye per boat in The Dalles Pool and nearly a fish a boat for the 17 boats participating in the John Day Pool fishery. It's walleye time!

The Guide's Forecast – Although spring chinook will likely pick up after the current lull that we're experiencing, don't go expecting to see a bunch of fish caught. Anglers that have confidence in the area that they are fishing may want to explore their favorite haunts in the upcoming nice weather this weekend. It'll be good to get the kinks out early. Whatever you do, troll or anchor fish with herring, it's your best bet. For clarification, here are the regulations for the fisheries downstream of Bonneville Dam:

COLUMBIA RIVER MAINSTEM, Buoy 10 Line upstream to Tongue Point/Rocky Point Line: Under permanent regulations this section of the Columbia River is open January 1-March 31, 2010 to the retention of adipose fin-clipped spring chinook, adipose fin-clipped steelhead, and adipose fin-clipped coho with a daily bag limit of two adult salmon or steelhead (chinook greater than 24 inches and coho greater than 16 inches or steelhead greater than 20 inches) and five jacks. Modifications to the 2010 spring chinook fishery will be considered at the Feb. 18 Compact hearing in Oregon City.

COLUMBIA RIVER MAINSTEM, Tongue Point/Rocky Point Line to I-5 Bridge: Under permanent regulations this section of the Columbia River is open January 1-March 31, 2010 to the retention of adipose fin-clipped spring chinook, adipose fin-clipped steelhead, and adipose fin-clipped coho with a daily bag limit of two adult salmon or steelhead (chinook greater than 24 inches and coho greater than 20 inches or steelhead greater than 20 inches) and five jacks. Modifications to the 2010 spring chinook fishery will be considered at the Feb. 18 Compact hearing in Oregon City.

COLUMBIA RIVER MAINSTEM, I-5 Bridge to Bonneville Dam: Under permanent regulations this section of the Columbia River is open January 1-March 31 2010 to the retention of adipose fin-clipped steelhead with a daily bag limit of two fish. The retention of spring chinook is prohibited. Modifications to the 2010 spring chinook fishery will be considered at the Feb. 18 Compact hearing in Oregon City.

Sturgeon anglers will be hitting the river hard for sturgeon; all the effort will be upstream of Bonneville Dam however. Some keepers may be available at the mouth of the Cowlitz however. Fresh smelt is necessary.

With low snow-pack and an early warming trend, this may be the year to try your hand at walleye fishing. The bite is good and there will likely be numerous boats out trying so that should make learning a bit easier.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Water in the lower Willamette is unseasonable warm at 40 degrees or better. With the Columbia also above average at 46 degrees, this data means the Willamette will maintain a thermal advantage. This is critical to winter sturgeon fishing which is historically better in the Willamette than the Big River for exactly this reason; sturgeon prefer the warmer water.

Trollers are working the lower river in search of springers but most are doing just that - searching. Chinook are being landed but the catch rate is fewer than one a day.

Decisions regarding sturgeon fishing on the lower Willamette, made in a meeting Thursday this week were not available by deadline for the TGF newsletter. It is probable that the sanctuary from Willamette Falls to the I-205 Bridge will be closed from May 1st through August 31st to protect spawning sturgeon. All other species may be taken but during the closure, catch-and-release of sturgeon will not be allowed. In addition, a quota of 3,600 keeper-sized fish is likely to be mandated with the river closing March 31st and re-opening in November for the remainder of the year. This is conjecture until the final decisions are made public. The notorious Oregon City Wall is slated for closure as of April 1st for certain.

McKenzie River water levels will be on the drop with the temperature in the low to mid 40s.

Level and flow on the upper North Santiam are stable with the only fluctuations on the lower areas due to runoff.

Henry Hagg Lake in the Scoggin Valley Recreation area opens Saturday, March 6th. Setting up a comfy lawn chair within sight of any of the popular boat ramps on opening day to watch folks launch for the first time this year (or, if you're lucky, the first time ever) is great entertainment.

The Guide's Forecast – Try squid or smelt for sturgeon on the lower Willamette and Multnomah Channel. as far as where is concerned, keepers have come from many locations along with plenty of shaker action. The best thing to have for spring Chinook on the lower river is patience and plenty of it; it's early yet. Try trolling herring and work on getting that 'magic spin.'

As we're treated to weather more spring-like than that of late winter, McKenzie fly anglers will enjoy worthwhile results for reddsides. March Browns are out in numbers that only tease while Blue-Winged Olives are hatching in fair number. Nymphs will be effective all day long but try the dries on sunny afternoons this week.

Catch-and release fishing on the North Santiam will be fair through the weekend with the water flow moderate and exhibiting decent clarity. Sheer numbers over the Falls ensure there are plenty available to target but getting them to hand for a safe release and a pleasant memory is up to the angler.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Expect to find the Clackamas in good condition for the weekend. Numbers over the Falls are indicative of steelhead movement but while the fish upstream on the Willamette are native, those that enter the Clack are hatchery keepers

The sandy is fishing well for winter steelhead and will be a worthwhile trip in the coming weekend.

The Guide's Forecast – Steelhead are being hooked this week up and down the Sandy River. Pulling plugs, throwing spinners or drifting bait will all hook fish.

Clackamas anglers are taking a few steelhead but those landed this week have been brilliant chrome. Steelhead have been moving through in 'pods' on Eagle Creek and sometimes into the afternoon. While dry weather this week is likely to slow action, patience and repeated casts should eventually pay off.

North Coast Fishing Report – Steelheaders working the north coast streams saw a flurry of activity last Friday with some success still happening on Saturday. With a prolonged period of dry weather, steelhead were staging in many tidewater sections of district streams. The Wilson likely enjoyed the best success but anglers working the Trask also found an occasional stray hatchery fish along with some wild brethren. The Nestucca also produced limited results but like other major systems, slowed in production by Sunday. A lot of anglers were still at the Sportsman Show and are beginning to key in on the lull in action that typically happens in mid-February.

One noteworthy observation however is that even during the "lull" times, when a larger run is anticipated like we're likely to have this year, lulls can oftentimes be fairly productive times to fish anyway. Well, we're back to low water conditions by the weekend so anglers will have to be prepared to employ stealth tactics once again.

In the higher flows like what we experienced over the weekend, sidedrifters realize some of the better results for a few reasons. One, sidedrifters cover more water in less time. With precision

casts in likely areas where fish are holding, this technique can effectively cover the water with one drift. Secondly, fish are well distributed throughout the width of the river. Only in lower flows do fish bunch up so even the most effective guide or angler will leave productive water untouched in higher flows. Finally, fish seem to respond best to bait in higher flows, especially when the bait is going the same speed as the flow of the river. Read that to mean: most likely mimicking the natural presentation of bait coming down river.

There is some great steelheading ahead, but we'll have to wait for those spring showers (early March) to bring in our silver flowers.

Sturgeon anglers continue to get disappointed but this pattern of strong winter fishing followed up by a tapering of the action by February is one we've experience before. It appears we're in a deja-vu.

Crabbers were out in force with the weak tide series and wonderful weather this weekend. Although success wasn't all that great, keepers were caught in Tillamook and Netarts Bays. Most people are still anxious to get out in the ocean where crabbing is likely still pretty good as commercial effort indicates. We may get that option in the coming days when looking at the long-range ocean forecast (see below).

The Guide's Forecast – Steelheaders will be looking at dropping water conditions for the weekend with flurries of fish still available. With the forecast as it is, expect to have your closest 1,000 friends fishing along with you so patience will be called for if you join them. Lower drifts will likely produce the best results with a mix of bait and plugs taking fish. As flows drop, you'll have to be one of the first boats down and fishing to expect good results. There will be lots of motivated early birds over the weekend but maybe a pre-season springers will draw crowds away from coastal systems.

The Wilson and Nestucca will be high targets among steelheaders as broodstock fish are most available on these systems. The Trask will also likely see a few strays but wild fish should dominate the catches on this system. Smaller streams have been producing poorly lately and will continue to do so except for the voracious spawned out fish.

The mainstem Nehalem will likely remain a bit too high for productive action but could drop down into favorable shape by early next week, maybe even Sunday. It should be prepped to produce good catches.

Mediocre tides won't inspire sturgeon anglers on Tillamook Bay and justifiably so. The fishing isn't very good anyway. Bar crossings may be feasible however and crabbers and bottomfishers have been chomping at the bit to get out. Be prepared for a last minute change of plans but the forecasted east wind often brings calm waters to the nearshore. Here's the forecast as of Thursday morning:

Fri...E wind 15 to 20 kt. Wind waves to 4 ft. W swell 7 ft.

Fri Night...E wind 10 to 15 kt with gusts to 20 kt. Wind waves 3 ft. W swell 8 ft.

Sat...E wind 10 to 15 kt with gusts to 20 kt. Wind waves 3 ft. W swell 8 ft.

Sat Night...E wind 10 to 15 kt. Wind waves 2 ft. W swell 6 ft.

Sun...SE wind 10 to 15 kt. Wind waves 3 ft. W swell 7 ft.

Mon...SE wind 10 to 15 kt. Wind waves 3 ft. W swell 9 ft.

Both crabbing and fishing should be excellent for those able to get out.

Central & South Coast Reports – The entire Oregon coast, including bays and beaches, is open for clam harvest but the taking of mussels is closed from near Charleston south to the California border due to an increase in natural but harmful biotoxins.

The offshore forecast for the coming weekend looks optimistic for the first time on weeks. Launches out of Newport and Depoe Bay should result in good catches of rockfish, ling cod and ocean Dungeness. Herring have been taken in Yaquina Bay this week and crabbing inside the bay is pretty good as well.

There is a mix of native and hatchery steelheading the Siletz but expect to put in some time to connect with one or two. Bobber and jig has been an effective rig here. The river will be in prime condition this weekend.

Steelhead are being taken on the Siuslaw where a very healthy return is evident at the hatchery trap.

With about 300 winter steelhead having entered at the Alsea Hatchery Facility, the water level will be low and dropping over the coming weekend. See Random Links, below, for a fishing map.

Steelheading has been good on the mainstem Umpqua above Elkton. The South Umpqua has been fair as water levels drop but the North Umpqua is getting a little skinny to fish as well as it might otherwise. Crabbing is fair to good and improving in Winchester Bay.

Following several weeks of fairly productive steelheading, Tenmile Creek has slowed with the water low and clear.

The waters of the Coquille were a little high and off-color earlier this week but steelheading was still fair to good. It will be dropping and clearing during the week and prospects will further improve here as this has been a productive river all this season. Drifting boat and pulling plugs will result in hookups here but expect to sort through a higher number of dark steelhead now.

Coos Bay, moderately productive for Dungeness through recent rain storms, will improve as salinity levels rise. Dock crabbing is yielding primarily red rock crab.

Catch the Douglas County Sportsmen's & Outdoor Recreation Show which scheduled for Friday through Sunday this week at the Douglas County Fairgrounds.

Prospects for surf perch of area beaches will improve along with ocean conditions in the weekend to come. Various baits will work well but don't overlook the Berkley Gulp! shrimp-colored soft plastics in smaller sizes. We weren't paid for that plug, BTW.

While the Elk River was productive mid-week, this small system is dropping and clearing rapidly and will probably be too skinny to fish well by the weekend. The majority of steelhead in both Elk and Sixes rivers have been of hatchery origin and both should fish well following rain next week.

With water dropping and clearing on the lower Rogue, prospects are fair for winter steelhead. Plug pullers are finding a few willing fish daily in many locations below Lobster Creek. Moderate

surf conditions will also encourage fresh steelhead to enter the river over the next several days. Steelheaders on the middle Rogue did well over that past weekend and with water conditions improving and fish on the move this week, it will be a worthwhile destination and will be even better following the next freshet due next week. Water restriction out of Lost Lake on the upper Rogue will result in the continuance of low, clear water conditions. Factor in low and declining counts at Gold Ray Dam and plan a trip downstream for more productive steelheading and the ability to keep one non-hatchery steelhead per day.

Offshore forecasts have moderated over the week, making a launch across the bar out of Brookings for excellent, nearshore bottom fishing a possibility this coming weekend. Rockfish and ling cod will be available in depths of 100 feet or less. Take the crab traps. The Chetco will continue to drop through the weekend and fishing should be decent if not hot in prime water conditions. Downrunners, which are steelhead that have spawned and are heading back to the ocean, are becoming fairly common in catches. While these fish should be released as they're not much good on the table, they are voracious, will strike almost anything and fight well. The Chetco should remain productive for a few weeks to come. The next storm will move in late on February 24th or so and is forecast to send the river over 10,000 cfs.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Steelheading has been good on the Grande Ronde but the window of opportunity here is limited. They'll be on the redds soon so get there before they spawn. Be prepared for unusually heavy pressure.

Kokanee fishing at Green Peter is fair to good for deep trollers.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report February 17th – March 3rd, 2009

North Puget Sound

Fishing for blackmouth continues to be slow throughout the marine waters of northern Puget Sound, but some anglers have been reeling in some nice fish recently in the San Juan Islands. Meanwhile, five major river systems in the Puget Sound area will close Feb. 18 to protect wild steelhead.

The early closure for **steelhead** will affect the Puyallup, Nooksack, Stillaguamish, Samish and Snohomish rivers and their tributaries. Pre-season estimates developed by the department indicate that returns of wild steelhead will fall far short of target levels in all five river systems, said Bob Leland, WDFW steelhead manager.

"This is the fourth straight year that we've seen a downward trend in wild steelhead returns," Leland said. "These closures are necessary to meet the conservation objectives of our statewide steelhead management plan and comply with provisions of the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA)."

Wild steelhead in the Puget Sound region have been listed as "threatened" under the ESA since 2007. Although anglers are required to release any wild fish they catch in those rivers, some of those fish inevitably die from the experience, Leland said.

For more information on the fishing closures, see the recent news release at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/do/newreal/release.php?id=feb1210a> or visit WDFW's emergency rule update website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

On Puget Sound, most marine areas are open for salmon, but **blackmouth** fishing continues to be slow. The Strait of Juan de Fuca, including the western portion of the San Juan Islands, is likely the best bet for anglers, said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist.

Anglers fishing Marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands), 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) and 9 (Admiralty Inlet) have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook.

Thiesfeld reminds anglers that Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) is closed to salmon fishing.

Before heading out, anglers should check the regulations for all saltwater and freshwater fisheries in WDFW's *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>).

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

The blackmouth season is off to a good start near Port Angeles and final word is expected late today (Feb. 17) on a razor-clam dig on five ocean beaches. Prospects are also improving for steelhead fishing on the Olympic Peninsula, although a number of rivers on the east side of Puget Sound - including the Puyallup, Carbon and White rivers - will close to steelheading Feb. 18.

Anglers having trouble finding **blackmouth** elsewhere in Puget Sound might want to give the Strait of Juan de Fuca a try. Creel checks conducted at Ediz Hook during opening day of the blackmouth season in marine areas 5 and 6 tallied 72 anglers with 30 fish. At Olson's Resort in Sekiu, 26 anglers brought in 14 resident chinook.

"That's pretty good fishing," said John Long, WDFW statewide salmon manager. "I don't think we've seen a stronger opening for blackmouth anywhere else this year." The daily limit for blackmouth in marine areas 5 and 6 is one fish, measuring at least 22 inches.

Anglers have also been docking blackmouth, albeit in lesser numbers, at boat ramps from Point Defiance in Tacoma to Misery Point in Seabeck. In the South Sound area, the fishery is open in marine areas 9 (Admiralty Inlet), 11 (Tacoma-Vashon) and 12 (Hood Canal), and opens March 1 in Marine Area 13 (south of the Narrows Bridge).

For regulations specific to those waters, check the *Fishing in Washington* rules pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>).

Then again, conditions are shaping up for some good **steelhead** fishing on northern Olympic Peninsula rivers. High water rendered the Calawah and Hoh rivers unfishable during the second weekend of the month, but 63 bank anglers checked on the Bogachiel kept 19 wild fish and released 10 others.

"High water has brought a lot of wild steelhead into area rivers, and the forecast is calling for a period of dry weather," said Randy Cooper, a WDFW fish biologist. "Once those rivers drop into shape, the fishery should really pick up."

Anglers may retain one wild steelhead per license year on the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Hoko, Pysht, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc rivers. On all other rivers, anglers may retain only hatchery-reared steelhead marked with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar. Specific rules for each river are described in the 2009-10 *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

Meanwhile, the Puyallup, Carbon and White rivers will close to steelhead fishing Feb. 18, along with more than a dozen other rivers on the east side of Puget Sound.

Pre-season estimates indicate that returns of wild steelhead will fall far short of target levels in all five river systems, said Bob Leland, WDFW steelhead manager. "This is the fourth straight year that we've seen a downward trend in wild steelhead returns," Leland said. "These closures are

necessary to meet the conservation objectives of our statewide steelhead management plan and comply with provisions of the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA)."

Razor-clam digging may be an option. WDFW has tentatively scheduled a dig from Feb. 26 through March 1 at various ocean beaches and expects to receive the results of toxin tests later today (Feb. 17).

If the tests show the clams are safe to eat, five ocean beaches will open for digging on the following schedule. Evening low tides are shown in parentheses.

- Friday, Feb. 26, (4:49 p.m., -0.7) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Saturday, Feb. 27, (5:34 p.m., -0.9) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Sunday, Feb. 28, (6:16 p.m., -0.8) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Monday, Mar. 1, (6:57 p.m., -0.1) Long Beach and Twin Harbors only

Digging will be restricted to the hours between noon and midnight each day at all beaches. The best time to start is an hour or two before low tide. A lantern is strongly recommended for evening digs.

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. Clam diggers are no longer required to display their licenses on outer clothing.

A license is required for anyone age 15 or older. Any 2009-10 annual shellfish/seaweed license or combination license is still valid. Another option is a razor-clam only license available in annual or three-day only versions. Descriptions of the various licensing options are available on the WDFW website at <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov>.

Southwest Washington

The Bonneville Pool has been the "hotspot" for **sturgeon** fishing in recent days, but time is running short. Sturgeon retention from Bonneville Dam to The Dalles Dam and its tributaries ends for the year one hour after official sunset on Feb. 20. Meanwhile, anglers have been working hard to find **late-run winter steelhead** in lower Columbia River tributaries, and **spring chinook** are just beginning to show up in the catch on a daily basis.

But new fishing opportunities are coming up soon. At a meeting scheduled Thursday, Feb. 18, fishery managers from Washington and Oregon are scheduled to set 2010 fishing seasons for spring chinook salmon and white sturgeon. News releases outlining those seasons will be posted on WDFW's website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/>) the following day.

"This will give anglers a chance to make their plans for the months ahead," said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist. "Fishing in the Columbia River Basin always slows down a bit in February, but things really start heating up in March, when the spring chinook begin to return in large numbers."

Harvest levels for white sturgeon are expected to be down this year due to declining stock estimates, but the spring chinook run is forecast to be the highest since at least 1938.

Clam diggers are also awaiting news on the next **razor-clam dig**, tentatively set to begin Friday, Feb. 26, and run through Monday, March 1, at various beaches - including Long Beach. That announcement, based on the results of marine toxin tests, will also be posted on WDFW's website by Friday, Feb. 19.

Here's a rundown on fisheries now open on the lower Columbia River and its tributaries:

- **Steelhead:** Anglers are catching late-run winter steelhead returning to hatcheries on the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers where they were raised. Most are working hard to find fish, but fishing could improve as the run nears its peak in late February or early March. Fishing for leftover summer-run steelhead remains good in The Dalles and John Day pools, although anglers are encountering significant number of wild and dark fish.
- **White sturgeon:** A creel check found that 60 boat anglers caught or released 41 legal-size fish in the Bonneville Pool during the second week in February. Bank anglers also caught or released five legal-size fish. Clearly the hotspot for sturgeon, the Bonneville Pool will be closed to retention fishing beginning Feb. 21. Below Bonneville Dam, where fishing has been slow, anglers can retain legal-size white sturgeon seven day a week from Buoy 10 upriver to the Wauna powerlines, and Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays from the powerlines upstream to the dam.
- **Smelt:** The Cowlitz River will be open for smelt dipping two more Saturdays - Feb. 20 and 27 - between 7 a.m. and 3 p.m. this year. A few dippers took 10-pound limits during the Feb. 13 opener, but the run still appears to be weak as predicted. Sport fishing for smelt on the mainstem Columbia River remains open seven days per week, although anglers catch very few fish there.
- **Trout:** WDFW plants trout and some excess hatchery steelhead in a number of area lakes throughout the winter months. On Feb. 8, Klineline Lake and Battle Ground Lake in Clark County were each stocked with 1,500 catchable-size rainbows, while Kress Lake in Cowlitz County received 20 excess steelhead from the Kalama Falls Hatchery.
- **Walleye and bass:** Boat anglers averaged nearly two walleye kept per rod from The Dalles Pool and 0.4 per rod from John Day Pool during the week of Feb. 8-14. Bass are also beginning to stir in the John Day Pool.

For fishing regulations on waters throughout the state, see the 2009-10 *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

Eastern Washington

For the first time in several years, the March 1 fishing opener in the region is likely to promise all open-water fishing opportunities, thanks to a mild winter.

In the south end of the region, most of the seven impoundments off the Tucannon River on WDFW's Wooten Wildlife Area in Columbia County that open to fishing March 1 are being stocked now with hatchery **rainbow trout**. Beaver, Big Four, Blue, Deer, Rainbow, Spring and Watson lakes are receiving "catchable-size" (about one-third pound) and "jumbo" (about one-and-a-half pound) trout from the Tucannon and Lyons Ferry fish hatcheries.

Here's what's going in this month: Beaver, 500 catchables; Big Four, 2,000 catchables and 300 jumbos; Blue, 4,500 catchables and 150 jumbos; Deer, 700 catchables; Rainbow, 3,000 catchables and 100 jumbos; Spring, 2,000 catchables and 100 jumbos; Watson, 3,000 catchables and 100 jumbos.

Also opening March 1 to fishing for stocked rainbows are Fishhook Pond in Walla Walla County, which is receiving 3,000 catchables this month, and Pampa Pond in Whitman County, which is receiving 2,000 catchables and 25 jumbos.

Two year-round-open small impoundments off the Snake River near the bottom of Alpowa Grade west of Clarkston in Asotin County are also being stocked at this time. Golf Course Pond gets 3,500 catchables and 100 jumbos, and West Evans Ponds gets 4,500 catchables and 100 jumbos.

Orchard Pond, a year-round impoundment off the Snake River in Columbia County, gets 1,000 catchables and 25 jumbos.

In Walla Walla County, two year-round fisheries are scheduled to receive trout this month - Quarry Pond, 8,000 catchables and 100 jumbos, and Bennington Lake, 2,500 catchables and 50 jumbos.

When WDFW hatchery crews complete trout stocking, the results are posted at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly/>.

Other waters opening March 1 in the region should provide some open-water action on a variety of fish. Downs Lake in southwest Spokane County might be best early in the season for **yellow perch**, but it also has **bass, crappie**, and **rainbow trout**. Liberty Lake east of Spokane has rainbow and **brown trout, bass**, and **perch**. Medical Lake near the town of the same name in southwest Spokane County has brown and rainbow trout.

Amber Lake in southwest Spokane County opens for catch-and-release of rainbow and **cutthroat** trout on March 1. Coffeepot Lake in Lincoln County opens on March 1, under selective gear rules, for rainbows, perch and crappie. Both of these special rule fisheries should provide excellent fly-fishing opportunities.

Deer Lake in southern Stevens County also opens March 1 and offers bass, crappie, perch, rainbow and **lake trout**, and **kokanee**.

Three year-round fisheries in the region that continue to provide good fishing, are Lake Roosevelt for rainbows and kokanee, Sprague Lake for rainbows, and Rock Lake for rainbow and brown trout.

Steelhead fishing on the Grande Ronde River in the southeast has been excellent, said WDFW Blue Mountains Wildlife Area Complex Manager Bob Dice. Steelheaders in the Boggan's Oasis area, near the mouth at the Snake River, have been doing quite well, and fishing has also been good from WDFW lands in the Shumaker area, he said.

Anglers can gear up and learn about fishing opportunities at the third annual Great Western Sportfishing Show, March 5-7, at the Spokane Convention Center. For more information see <http://www.greatwesternsportfishingshow.com/Home.html>.

Northcentral Washington

All of the Columbia Basin **rainbow trout** lakes that open to fishing March 1 are ice-free and ready for good open-water fishing, reports WDFW District Fish Biologist Chad Jackson.

Martha Lake, along I-90 just east of George in Grant County, should be among the best on the opener, likely providing lots of five-fish daily catch limits. Martha is scheduled to be well stocked with thousands of half-pound or better hatchery rainbows.

Other Columbia Basin lakes opening March 1 on WDFW's Quincy Wildlife Area include Burke and Quincy lakes, southwest of the town of Quincy; Upper, Lower and West Caliche lakes, southwest of George; Dusty Lake, a selective gear rule fishery south of Quincy; and the small "walk-in" lakes - Cascade, Cliff, Crystal, Cup, Dot, George and Spring.

Lenice, Nunnally and Merry lakes, on WDFW's Crab Creek Wildlife Area just east of Beverly in southwest Grant County, open under selective gear rules March 1. Lake Lenore, north of the town of Soap Lake in Grant County, opens for catch-and-release trout fishing March 1.

Trout fishing further north in the region in Okanogan County had been mostly through the ice on stocked year-round lakes, but safe ice is marginal now with warming temperatures. However, WDFW Okanogan District Fish Biologist Bob Jateff reports that Patterson Lake near Winthrop and Sidley Lake near Oroville still have sufficient ice cover to provide some angling opportunities.

Yellow perch are being caught at Patterson, while rainbow trout are the predominant species at Sidley.

Jateff also reports **steelhead** fishing is starting to pick up on the Methow and Okanogan rivers. "Warmer water temperatures are contributing to catch rates of one steelhead for every five to six hours of fishing for both lure and fly anglers," he said.

Jateff reminds anglers that they must retain all adipose-fin-clipped steelhead up to the daily limit of four fish. He also notes two sections of the Okanogan River will close March 15 - from the first powerline crossing downstream of the Highway 155 Bridge in Omak (Coulee Dam Credit Union Building) upstream to the mouth of Omak Creek; and from the Tonasket Bridge (4th Street) downstream to the Tonasket Lagoons Park boat launch. Those section closures are to protect natural origin steelhead staging prior to spawning in those tributaries.

The rest of the steelhead areas upstream of Wells Dam will remain open until March 31, but Jateff advises anglers to periodically check for changes on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

Further west in the region, the Wenatchee River, from the mouth to 800 feet below Tumwater Dam, including the Icicle River from the mouth to 500 feet downstream of the Leavenworth National Fish Hatchery Barrier Dam, closes to steelhead fishing Feb. 28. The allowable impacts to natural origin steelhead due to angling on the Wenatchee River will be met by the end of February.

Whitefish remains open on portions of the Methow and Similkameen rivers until March 31. The daily catch limit is 15 whitefish and gear restrictions are in effect. Check the rules pamphlet for all details.

Fishing has been slow recently at year-round Rufus Woods Lake, the Columbia River reservoir on the Douglas-Okanogan county line.

Southcentral Washington

WDFW district fish biologist Eric Anderson reports that major **rainbow trout** stocking efforts have started this month in many of the region's year-round open lakes. Yakima County's Sarg Hubbard Park Pond and Rotary Lake, both near the Greenway Trail in Yakima, usually receive some of the first catchable-size hatchery rainbows.

Kittitas County's North and South Fio Rito lakes east of Ellensburg, along with McCabe Pond southeast of Ellensburg and Mattoon Lake in town, should also be receiving trout this month.

Franklin County's Dalton Pond, east of the Tri-Cities and about five miles northeast of Ice Harbor Dam on the north side of the Snake River, is scheduled to receive 8,000 one-third pounders and 100 "jumbos" or one-and-one-half-pounders, from WDFW's Lyons Ferry Hatchery.

When WDFW hatchery crews actually complete trout stocking, the results are posted at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly/>.

Although **steelhead** fishing in the district has been spotty this winter, it usually picks up in late February and early March, said WDFW fish biologist Paul Hoffarth of Pasco. He reminds anglers that the Columbia River is open for the retention of legal size **sturgeon** in the John Day Pool (Lake Umatilla) of the Columbia River.

"Sturgeon must be between 43 and 54 inches in fork length," Hoffarth said. "New regulations went into effect last year changing how sturgeon are measured from total length to fork length. Fork length is defined as the distance from the tip of the nose to the middle of the fork in the tail, and that's the length you record on your catch record card, even if the card has the old 'total length' column."

Hoffarth notes the sturgeon fishery in this area will remain open until the quota is reached and closure announced.

TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail

Reader D. Calgano wrote to ask, "Do you know when the smelt run on the sandy river or the Calix River? I would like to know thank you"

TGF co-editor Michael Teague responded, "Don't count on any smelt on the Sandy as it has been years since a significant number has shown there and this year is particularly bleak. The Calix is not familiar to me, Readers?"

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

Study: About half of young steelhead die in estuaries before going to sea:

<http://www.statesmanjournal.com/article/20100212/OUTDOORS/100212006/1034>

Detailed Alsea Fishing Map:

<http://www.oregonh2o.com/images/mapalsea.jpg>

GOOD LUCK!