

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 26<sup>th</sup> – March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro** - More consistent action is being recorded on the mainstem Columbia with some boats reporting multiple opportunities downstream of the mouth of the Willamette and the lower Multnomah Channel. Good catch rates this early in the run indicate the record prediction is likely to materialize.

Fishery managers set salmon and sturgeon seasons last week. They are complicated and can be studied from a recent press release here: <http://www.dfw.state.or.us/news/2010/index.asp>. Boat anglers will not be allowed to fish above the I-205 bridge to Bonneville Dam.

Spring Chinook are being hooked by trollers in the lower Willamette at Sellwood. Double digit days were recorded recently with the catch comprised mostly of larger 5-year old adults. Herring is the bait to use. Sturgeon fishing is fair and smallmouth bass are starting to bite.

While Blue-Winged Olives are hatching on the lower McKenzie, nymphs remain most effective for trout.

Drift bait or fish jigs on the North Santiam for a shot at wild winter steelhead. Take a camera & release the fish.

Clackamas steelheading is slow. There are winters in Eagle Creek but they have become spooky in low water. Rain this week may help.

Crowds are at Cedar Creek along with the winter steelhead which have become available in fair number at the mouth of this Sandy tributary. Broodstock steelhead are due in larger numbers in the coming weeks and should provide fair opportunity through March.

Scheduled for planting with hatchery trout are Alton Baker Canal, Cottage Grove Pond, Cottage Grove Reservoir, E. E. Wilson Pond, Junction City Pond, Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake.

**Northwest** – Steelheaders were reporting fair results in the larger north coast streams this week with low, clear water conditions to work with. The Wilson was producing the best but the next rain freshet should provide better results.

The mainstem Nehalem began to fish fair as well but may blow out again with the current weather pattern.

The Nestucca has been producing a few fish but will likely improve into March. Broodstock steelhead are available here as well but the river hasn't produced as good as it did in the earlier years of the program. Anglers are still encouraged to take part in the wild broodstock collection program by registering with ODF&W in Tillamook at (503) 842-2741. Help is needed on the Wilson too.

Anglers pursued rockfish offshore in the calm seas over the weekend scoring easy limits of seabass on the south jetty out of the mouth of the Columbia and nearshore reefs on the north coast. Delicious lingcod were also in the creel as adults near the shoreline to begin the spring spawn.

Crabbing was surprisingly poor in both the ocean and north coast estuaries this weekend. Commercial crabbers fared exceptionally well this winter season with predictions of an even better year next season.

Good razor clam tides are currently underway with the beaches north of Seaside likely to produce well through the weekend although a rough ocean may keep clams from feeding near the surface where diggers have access to them.

**Southwest** – Minus tides late in the day this coming weekend will provide clamming opportunities for those prepared to seek them after dark.

Umpqua steelheaders continue to pick up a few here and there but most of the fish available here are wild which requires release.

Tenmile Creek once again picked up, producing good catches of winter steelhead as the water dropped over the past week. Bass in Tenmile Lake are starting to come out of their winter lethargy and move to shallower water.

As the Coos and Coquille water conditions improved, steelheaders have enjoyed decent catches. The freshet this week is expected to bring additional fresh winters into these systems. Crabbing has been good in Coos Bay.

Elk and Sixes steelheaders have been taking fish but rain this week is needed to improve water conditions. These rivers are producing the highest percentage of hatchery fish. Steelheading has been slow on the lower Rogue, fair on the Grant Pass stretch and above for a mix of wild and hatchery fish.

Just as the Chetco was approaching low and clear status earlier this week with steelhead catches slowing, rain arrived to alleviate the situation. It is predicted to crest on Friday this week and drop through the weekend which should provide some steelhead opportunities. The winter run is winding down on this system. Assessments of returns this season indicate numbers have been lower than previous years.

Catch the Lower Umpqua Fly Casters Expo in Reedsport this coming weekend during which local guide Frank Moore will be inducted into the Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame, located in Hayward, Wisconsin.

**Eastern** – Green Peter has continued to deliver fair catches to trollers, which is quite good for this early in the season.

John Day sturgeon anglers will move to catch and release regulations beginning March 1<sup>st</sup>. Steelhead catches in the John Day Pool remain good for trollers.

**SW Washington** – Steelheading has improved on the Cowlitz and Kalama Rivers recently. Steelhead numbers should improve into March.

Spring chinook have been rumored on the Cowlitz and the first salmon of the season was recorded at the salmon hatchery earlier this week. A good return is forecasted for SW Washington streams but is still weeks away from peaking.

The Saturday smelt opener was another bust. It appears what little run came in is over. The last day to dip smelt will be this Saturday. The popular baitfish has been petitioned for listing on the endangered species list with a determination due next month.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – Spring chinook effort and catch are coming through in unprecedented highs in recent days. Multiple opportunities are being reported by several anglers working the warmer than usual waters of the lower Columbia. Catch managers stated that they have never had a precedence to go by when reviewing and forecasting the potential adult returns based on jack returns from last years migration. No one will be going out on a limb here but catches like what we're seeing for this early in the season are extremely positive for the run to come in as predicted or better over the course of the next two months. Keeping in mind that the information age has propelled anglers reports more than we've ever seen before but the reliable reports that are coming in on a daily basis are quite impressive for late February.

Most anglers are taking fish on herring; herring in all 3 popular sizes none-the-less. Red and green label herring are the most popular for spring chinook but blue label will be responsible for the deaths of many salmon this season as well. Buzz Ramsey recently reported that one lucky angler recently won the Worden's Mag Lip springer contest trolling when fishing the Columbia River. He was trolling just 45 minutes when the fish took the Mag Lips lure flatlined behind the boat. Not your typical technique for Columbia springers but the gentleman didn't see another fish caught so he may be on to something!?

Fish seem to be pretty well distributed throughout the lower river with catches coming from just below I-5 downstream to Tenasillahe Island. As previously mentioned, trollers are taking the majority of fish and a good portion of the catch is larger than 15 pounds. It's quite typical that on both the Columbia and Willamette, that the larger 5-year old fish are the first to return. The rare six-year old too!

Here's the recent press release in regards to the 2010 sturgeon and spring chinook seasons recently set by Oregon and Washington (got a lawyer?):

OREGON CITY, Ore. – Fishery managers from Oregon and Washington set spring chinook salmon and sturgeon fishing seasons for the Columbia and Willamette rivers today during a joint state hearing.

Several fisheries, including those in the Willamette River and in the Columbia River between Bonneville Dam and the river mouth, are currently open under permanent rules and will remain open through February. The seasons adopted today will take effect March 1.

In an effort to boost sturgeon populations, fishery managers also extended an existing sturgeon sanctuary on the Columbia Bonneville Dam, created a new sturgeon sanctuary on the Willamette River and announced their intention to close a bank fishing site below Willamette Falls known as "The Wall," effective April 1. Sturgeon fishing will be prohibited in the two sanctuaries from May 1 through Aug. 31.

In a separate announcement following the joint state hearing, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife announced that it will leave in place the current regulations that allow retention of spring chinook in the Willamette River open seven days a week, with a daily bag limit of two adipose fin-clipped chinook salmon or steelhead in any combination. ODFW is forecasting a return of 62,700 chinook salmon in the Willamette, which is one of the strongest returns in several years.

The Columbia spring chinook seasons are based on a forecast of 470,000 returning upriver spring chinook. As a conservative measure, the two states adopted a 40 percent buffer, leaving a combined harvest guideline of 17,200 fish in the sport fishery downstream of Bonneville Dam.

"Thanks to the large run forecast this year we are able to craft a spring chinook season that includes plenty of fishing opportunity throughout the river," said Steve Williams deputy administrator of ODFW's fish division. "If the forecast comes in as expected we may be able to provide even more opportunity."

The sturgeon seasons are based on a recreational harvest guideline of 19,200 fish, including 3,600 in the Willamette.

About 50 people including sport and commercial fishermen showed up to listen and present testimony at the hearing, conducted at the Oregon Historical Society Bldg. in Oregon City. The following is a summary of recreational fishing seasons adopted at today's meeting. Additional information may be obtained on the ODFW Web site at [http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/reg\\_changes/columbia.asp](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/reg_changes/columbia.asp).

## **CHINOOK SALMON**

### **Columbia River from Buoy 10 to I-5 Bridge**

Anglers will be permitted to fish seven days a week from March 1 through April 18 or until the harvest guideline is achieved. The season will be closed on Tuesdays, March 9, 16, 23 and 30. The purpose of the Tuesday closures is to provide possible commercial fishing days. The daily bag limit is two adipose fin-clipped adult salmon or steelhead in combination, of which no more than one may be a chinook. The rules also allow retention of up to five adipose fin-clipped jack salmon per day.

### **Columbia River from I-5 Bridge upstream to I-205 Bridge**

This area is open to retention of adipose fin-clipped chinook salmon seven days a week from March 1-14 and three days a week Thursday through Saturday from March 18 – April 3, or until the harvest guideline is achieved. The season is closed Tuesday, March 9. The daily bag limit is two adipose fin-clipped adult salmon or steelhead in combination, of which no more than one may be a chinook, and up to five adipose fin-clipped jack salmon per day.

### **Columbia River from I-205 Bridge upstream to Bonneville Dam**

This area will be closed to boat angling for salmon and steelhead through June 15 or until further notice. However, bank angling for salmon will be permitted from the I-205 Bridge upstream to Bonneville Dam seven days a week from March 1 – 14 and Thursday through Saturday March 18 – April 3. The season will be closed Tuesday, March 9.

### **Columbia River from Bonneville Dam to the Oregon/Washington border**

This area is open to retention of adipose fin-clipped steelhead through March 15 under permanent rules. Effective March 16, this area will be open to retention of adipose fin-clipped steelhead and adipose fin-clipped chinook through May 31, or until the harvest guideline is achieved. The daily bag limit is two adipose fin-clipped adult salmon or steelhead in combination, and up to five adipose fin-clipped jack salmon per day.

Angling for salmon and steelhead from a boat between Bonneville Dam and the Tower Island power lines, approximately six miles down stream from The Dalles Dam, is prohibited. Bank angling is allowed in this area.

## **Willamette River**

Open to retention of adipose fin-clipped adult chinook salmon and adipose fin-clipped steelhead seven days a week the entire year. Bag limit is two salmon or steelhead in any combination below Willamette Falls. Above the falls, one additional adipose fin-clipped steelhead may be retained.

## **STURGEON**

### **Columbia River from Buoy 10 to Wauna power lines (River Mile 40)**

Retention of white sturgeon is allowed seven days a week Jan. 1 – April 30, with a daily bag limit of one fish with a fork length of between 38 and 54 inches. This area is closed to retention of white sturgeon May 1-May 21. The season reopens seven days a week from May 22 through June 26, or until the harvest guideline is achieved, with a daily bag limit of one fish with a fork length of 41 to 54 inches.

### **Columbia River from Wauna power lines upstream to Bonneville Dam (including all adjacent Washington tributaries)**

Retention of white sturgeon is allowed three days a week on Thursday, Friday and Saturday Jan. 1 – July 31 and Oct. 1 – Dec. 31, or until the harvest guideline is achieved. Daily bag limit is one white sturgeon with a fork length of 38 to 54 inches. Angling for sturgeon is prohibited from the upstream end of Skamania Island at River Marker #82 upstream to Bonneville Dam May 1 – Aug. 31.

### **Columbia River from Bonneville Dam to The Dalles Dam**

This area is expected to reach the harvest guideline of 1,400 fish on Feb. 20, 2010 and will close to retention of white sturgeon effective 12:01 a.m. Feb. 21. Catch-and-release sturgeon angling will remain open.

### **Columbia River from The Dalles Dam to John Day Dam**

This area is open to retention of white sturgeon seven days a week under permanent rules from Jan. 1 until the annual harvest guideline of 300 fish is met. The legal size limit for retention in this area is 43-54 inches fork length.

### **Columbia River from John Day Dam to McNary Dam**

This area is expected to reach the harvest guideline of 165 fish Feb. 28, 2010 and will close to retention of white sturgeon effective 12:01 a.m. March 1. Catch-and-release sturgeon angling will remain open.

### **Willamette River downstream of Willamette Falls including the Multnomah Channel**

Retention of white sturgeon is allowed three days a week on Thursday, Friday and Saturday Jan. 1 – March 31 and Nov. 1 – Dec. 31. Daily bag limit is one white sturgeon with a fork length of 38 to 54 inches. On the Willamette, angling for sturgeon is prohibited from the I-205 Bridge upstream to Willamette Falls May 1 – Aug. 31.

In other business the agencies took the following actions:

- Adopted the 2009 Winter/Spring Preseason Commercial Fishing Plan
- Set commercial fishing seasons for Select Area fisheries, including Blind Slough/Knapa Slough, Tongue Point/South Channel, Deep River and Young's Bay.
- During chinook salmon season, limited retention of fin-clipped steelhead and shad to only those days where salmon season is open.

Limited the chinook salmon daily bag limit to one fin-clipped fish a day in Select Area fisheries on those days when the Columbia River below the I-5 Bridge is open to retention of chinook.

Sturgeon anglers on the Columbia continue to struggle downstream of Bonneville Dam. Catches have been light and the red-hot above Bonneville fishery closed on Saturday after a much better than anticipated catch quota was reached. Anglers that fish above the John Day Dam are next on

the butcher block as their catch and keep quota is scheduled to be filled by March 1<sup>st</sup>, effectively closing off that section of river to retention. The quota was only 165 keepers for that reach.

Steelhead continue to be caught in the John Day Pool but most are of wild origin and are being released. Anglers fishing downstream of Bonneville are also tallying an occasional steelhead, likely a late returning winter steelhead but an early summer run fish is not unheard of.

Walleye fishing is best in The Dalles Pool but action should pick up river-wide as water temperatures begin to crawl upwards.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Keep after those spring chinook! Although the weather may deter anxious anglers from pursuing the regions most prized fish, catches are undeniably good for this time of year. Get out when you can and realize that this will be the best opportunity that most anglers have ever seen to try and catch a prized spring chinook. The tides are improving this weekend but the cold front scheduled to come on shore could put a damper on the bite. Also, just because we've seen some great catches of fish already this season, doesn't mean it will remain this consistent through the peak. Anglers will have to expect some lulls and inconsistencies this early in the year but even better catches are certainly ahead.

The best areas to stay focused on are from the mouth of the Willamette downstream to Westport. Strong minus tides this weekend should promote a fair chance for bank anglers as salmon and steelhead will be huggin' the shoreline in an attempt to get out of the calorie robbing flows of the main part of the river. Plunkers use spin-n-glos for the most part but if you're not using scent on those lures, you'll have a harder time catching fish. Boat anglers working the outgoing tide in the lower stretches will likely find success using plugs of herring fished near the bottom. Troll on the incoming tide.

Sturgeon anglers will have to wait another several weeks before you get too excited about your quarry. Fishing near the mouth of the Willamette will be best but up in the Willamette if you're really serious about your sport.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – The Willamette will be on the rise through most of the weekend. This will put the kibosh\* on spring Chinook and steelhead efforts in the lower river, sturgeon fishing should be unaffected. See cautions, below. The first spring Chinook crossed Willamette Falls on February 21st for those who keep track of this sort of thing.

While the March Brown hatch started this week (barely), McKenzie redsides are giving the fresh bugs only a nod in acknowledgement. Following rain and high water this weekend, the MBs and dry action should start to crank up for the season. Levels are on the rise but conditions should be excellent following a respite in the rainfall

The level of the North Santiam is expected to rise with rain this week. The road to Big Cliff Reservoir has been closed though no reason for nor duration of the closure has been forthcoming.

\*Note to Bob: 'Kibosh' is a real word - Michael

**The Guide's Forecast** – Depending on how much rain falls this week and the effect it has on the Willamette, there may be debris washing downstream. It is always a wise precaution to keep an eye upstream. The lower Willamette and Multnomah Channel will remain more productive than the Columbia as long as the water temperature is higher. Various baits have been effective

with smelt and squid on every list. An increase in level, flow and turbidity will only serve to improve the bite. Trout fishing will be good and improving on the Middle Fork as the March Brown hatch begins.

Fly fishing results have been positive on the McKenzie with the year shaping up to deliver large, broad-shouldered trout. While the river won't fish well again until next week sometime, it shows a great deal of promise this year.

Few of us have landed winter steelhead where poundage could be measured in the high teens. The North Santiam is one of those locations where this is possible, and while that fish of a lifetime must be released, find comfort in the knowledge that it will procreate and make even more of 'em.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – Steelheading on the Clackamas has been a slow but steady affair with fish scattered in the system. Crowded Eagle Creek has slowed with the water level low.

The Sandy has been running low and very clear this week. Most anglers have been getting skunked with others connecting with the occasional steelhead who have reported a mix of native and hatchery fish.

**The Guide's Forecast** - Try drifting clusters of eggs on the Clackamas once the level starts in the downward direction. Once the water clears, jigs should become effective once again. A little extra flow from precipitation this week will only serve to rev up steelheading here.

Hopefully, showers starting Thursday night and continuing through the weekend will put a little color in the clear waters of the Sandy which, with a little additional flow, will improve prospects here.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – Steelheaders were once again challenged by low water conditions until just recently. Although steelhead action remained consistent for persistent anglers, you had to work for them using light line, small baits and stealth tactics. The Wilson remained a highlight with guides feeling good about boating 2 fish for a day's effort. Fish were also available in the Trask and Nehalem River but few found numbers that would impress an angler versed in the potential of our late winter steelhead fisheries on the north coast.

If anglers checked their logbooks, they'd note a familiar theme for mid-February steelheading. We seem to consistently run into a lull this time of year with most looking forward to a productive March of steelhead fishing. I don't think this year is going to be any different.

Smaller streams remain poor options with early run fish all but spent. A rare wild fish may be found on these systems (Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem, Three Rivers) but for the most part, these rivers will be done for a while now.

The Nehalem should begin to see numbers build but anglers working the lower stretches have not found large numbers of fish present. With any water what-so-ever, winter run fish feel pretty secure in making their way upstream in quick fashion. Bank anglers have good access to these fish as large stretches of the river above the Beaver Slide often are too treacherous to float.

Offshore and inshore crabbing was less than fruitful over the weekend but offshore bottomfishers found easy limits along most of their favorite reefs. Lingcod are beginning to hit pretty well.

Sturgeon are all but gone in Tillamook Bay and not likely to look back until next fall. It was a short lived season but did produce some impressive catches while it lasted.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Rivers levels are on the rise and the increase in flow should stimulate good numbers of steelhead to return to the rivers this week. Another freshet is likely to put the most popular rivers a bit out of reach for Friday anglers but the north coast systems should fish very well over the weekend.

With many folks beginning to already shift their focus on spring chinook in the metro area, rivers on the north coast may not receive the attention they typically do this time of year. The first week in March can often be one of the most productive of the season and given the early returns of fish that we have seen, we could be in for a bang-up March.

The Wilson will remain an angler favorite with a healthy broodstock program delivering a good dose of quality keepers to sidedrifters in the early part of the drop in river levels. Drifters working downstream of Siskeyville Boat slide should fare well using eggs or imitation eggs with pink yarn. Drifted sand shrimp may also produce good results in the higher flows.

The Nestucca should be a close second, also with a good broodstock program that seems to have faltered a bit in recent history. Seals often frequent the upstream pools this time of year on this river system.

The Trask also remains a great option but only a rare hatchery fish will be available. The bulk of the run is made up of wild fish with some of the larger adults returning later into April.

The Nehalem will be a poor option as predicted rainfall will likely put this system out again at least until mid-week. The upper stretches may begin to fish as the river drops.

A nice minus tide series is currently underway but harvesting all the species that are sought after in these conditions may be put down by the weather or have simply moved out of their winter lairs. Clams will not likely be close to the surface due to high surf and Tillamook Bay sturgeon have exited the estuary. Crabbing was poor anyway and an even poorer choice this weekend.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – When the ocean cooperated this week, boats launching out of Newport got into good numbers of rockfish and landed a few large ling cod. Jetty anglers are also catching good-sized lings but keep at least one eye out for sneaker waves.

Umpqua steelheaders have been doing fairly well river-wide with the most productive are near the confluence of the North and South Umpqua although some anglers on the North have been slamming multiple fish in a day. Bait has been more effective than lures this week. Local anglers are most anxious for spring Chinook fishing to take off and unconfirmed rumors of early catches are only fueling their fire.

Crabbing has held up at Coos Bay this week but it remains to be seen if the next storm puts enough fresh water in the bay to impact results.

Expect to see an increasing number of steelhead that are past their prime on the Coquille although results from plug pullers and side drifters are reported as fair to good.

Surf perch fishing has been decent from rocks, jetties and beaches whenever wave action allows safe access.

Water levels at the Elk and Sixes will drop quickly following rain this week. Either or both are expected to fish well for winter steelhead with the Elk holding a bit of an edge for numbers.

The freshet resultant of this weekend's storm from will revitalize steelheading on the Rogue River. Upper river fishers who have been frustrated by extremely low water levels for weeks due to meager releases from Lost Lake, will see a window of opportunity early in the weekend as the level spikes, then drops, providing a good chance for winters. Steelhead will be on the move through the middle Rogue where plug pullers and side drifters will be able to intercept them. Expect to see fresh winters enter the lower river if the surf isn't too high which would discourage entry into the estuary. Wherever you choose, the Rogue looks very promising this weekend.

Chetco levels come up dramatically overnight on Wednesday this week - above those considered 'fishable' here - and continued to rise, topping the 4,000 cfs mark. If forecast models remain accurate, the river will crest overnight on Friday, February 26th, and while predicted to drop through the weekend, the Chetco may not fish again until early March. When it does, expect to encounter an increasing number of spawned-out downrunners which should be released.

**Pro guide Andy Martin (206 388-8988)** adds this:

"Chetco steady as pressure lessens

"For the first time this season steelhead anglers on the Chetco River were hoping for rain as the river continued to drop after a week and a half of dry weather. Rain was expected before the upcoming weekend, just in time for the Rowdy Creek Derby on the Smith and Chetco rivers.

"The river has been dropping, but still has a green color, and there are still plenty of fish in the system," said guide Andy Martin of Wild Rivers Fishing.

The recent dry spell has dropped other nearby rivers into shape, allowing steelheaders to hit the Umpqua, Rogue and Coquille in Southern Oregon and Eel in Northern California. The result has been fewer boats on the Chetco and Smith.

"For the first half of the season, the Smith was fishing better than the Chetco. Now the Chetco is producing some better action," Martin said.

Most guides are averaging one to three fish a day on the Chetco, with a few more hook-ups. "It should get better after the next rain brings some more steelhead into the river," Martin said. Chetco anglers are still catching more bright fish than downrunners, but more spawned out steelhead are showing up in the catch.

"I've been using pink Puff Balls with roe cured in natural-colored Pautzke BorxOFire," Martin said. "Size 2 Eagle Claw hooks have been working well, but with the lower water, I'm switching over to size 4."

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – Gear anglers are out-fishing fly anglers at Wallowa where results have been fair to good. More information Gear anglers are out-fishing fly anglers at Wallowa where results have been fair to good. More information:

[http://www.josephoregon.com/wallowa\\_lake.htm](http://www.josephoregon.com/wallowa_lake.htm)

## Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report *February 17<sup>th</sup> – March 3<sup>d</sup>, 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, Kline 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**

Last week, **reader D. Calgano** wrote to ask about the smelt run on the Sandy river and Calix rivers. Having never heard of the latter, I (Michael) asked readers for help. Several who are better at homophones than I wrote to say he probably meant the Cowlitz.

Sorry, D., for the misunderstanding and to tell you there are no smelt in the Cowlitz either.

**Subscriber John M.** sent this photo in this week and said "What a way to start my Christmas. Early morning on one of our Coastal streams along HWY 26. Witnessed a few Elk grazing in the trees, a Bald Eagle sitting in a tree just above me and a fresh Winter Steelie to top it off. That was a nice Christmas gift. What a wonderful part of the country we live in." Thanks John!



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

**Write to the TGF staff:**

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**Random Links**

The 6th Annual SALTWATER SPORTSMEN'S SHOW is March 6th & 7th in Newport:

<http://www.oceaned.org/files/2010%20flyer.pdf>

World record peacock bass:

<http://www.examiner.com/x-16491-Fishing-Examiner~y2010m2d22-Angler-with-Captain-Peacock-Bests-World-Record>

**GOOD LUCK!**