

The Guide's Forecast - volume 12 issue number 10

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **March 5th – March 11th, 2010**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Spring chinook is all the buzz on the lower Columbia but catches have faded in recent days. Catches are coming with more regularity however, with the bulk of the success happening downstream of St. Helens. "Snow-belly" Willamette bound salmon have made up the bulk of the catch but "upriver" springers, identified by a darker, more dusky chin and face, are beginning to make a stronger showing. This stock of fish is expected to make up the bulk of the run entering the Columbia this year. A few fish have already crossed Bonneville Dam.

The Sandy and Clackamas are producing a few steelhead on a variety of baits and lures but fishing has been slow. There has been a rare exceptional day on the Clackamas in recent weeks. Hatchery broodstock steelhead should begin to make up a larger portion of the catch.

With the water temperature in the lower Willamette in the high 40s, expect sturgeon fishing to be worthwhile. A couple of springers have crossed the Falls with the steelhead count right at 3,000 for the year. Slow but steady results will be the rule for spring chinook trollers with catches improving through March.

Water levels have been dropping as the temperature increases on the McKenzie. Trout fishing prospects are good here.

Fishing is fair for steelhead on the North Santiam. There are a few summers in the system.

Henry Hagg Lake, which opens for the season on Saturday, March 6, will be planted this week with 18,000 rainbows. Other locations scheduled for stocking include Huddleston Pond, Sheridan Pond, St Louis Ponds, Dexter Reservoir, E. E. Wilson Pond and Junction City Pond.

Northwest – Steelheaders had excellent fishing on the Wilson late last week but action dramatically slowed over the weekend. Side drifters took good numbers of wild and hatchery fish on the last river rise. The Trask has also been producing fair results with the bulk of the catch there comprised of wild fish.

Effort was running high on the Nestucca River early in the week with fair catches reported there in recent days. North Coast streams are forecasted to continue to drop through the weekend, making the extreme lower portions of these rivers the best option. Fish will hold up in the deeper pools upriver where anglers will aggressively target them, causing them to become weary.

The mainstem Nehalem may become a good option in the dropping flows. Weekend anglers are forced to take out at Roy Creek as Mohler Sand and Gravel is closed on the weekends. The upper portions should fish well for bank anglers. This river is managed for wild fish, making it mostly a catch and release option.

Razor clam digging was good over the weekend but clam tides won't be productive again until later in the month.

Crabbers working Tillamook Bay realized some good catches over the weekend. Although it's not consistent, crabbing can be good in the spring months. The lower Columbia however is reported to be slow.

There may be some offshore fishing and crabbing opportunities over the weekend. Pay close attention to the offshore forecast and bar crossing info before heading out.

Southwest – Another rough offshore weekend is forecast with a morning ebb further discouraging launches.

A decision regarding ocean chinook fishing off the central and southern Oregon coast will be made by the Pacific Fishery Management Council in a series of meetings ending March 11th. Officials have voiced optimism regarding an offshore fishery this season.

The mainstem Umpqua near the confluence of the North and South forks has remained consistently productive for steelheaders this week.

It has been slow for steelheaders on the Coos and Coquille rivers. Even the Millicoma system, which has been productive most of the season, has stalled.

Steelheading has been very challenging on the Elk and Sizes in low, clear water but has picked up with every freshet.

Rogue River steelheaders had a fair weekend but the first spring chinook catch has yet to be confirmed but is expected any time.

With steelhead numbers down on the Chetco this year, fair fishing is about the best one can expect here. Another rise in the water level is predicted this week. Near shore bottom fishing has been excellent out of the Port of Brookings.

Reinhart Pond, Bradley Lake, Upper and Lower Empire Lake, Johnson Mill Pond, Powers Pond, Saunders Lake, Ben Irving Reservoir, Cooper Cr. Reservoir, Galesville Reservoir, Loon Lake and Plat I Reservoir are scheduled for trout planting.

Eastern – Trout fishing is fair with nymphs on the lower Deschutes with the occasional steelhead falling for trout offerings.

The Crooked River is running clear but providing fair trout fishing to anglers drifting nymphs.

Wallowa River steelheaders continued to make good catches of steelhead over the past weekend.

SW Washington – Although effort remains light, steelheaders will have some good opportunities in the coming weeks for fresh fish. The Cowlitz will draw a lot of attention but the Kalama is also a strong option for later returning broodstock fish.

The East Fork of the Lewis will have some quality wild fish available but their numbers are somewhat suppressed.

Spring chinook should become more evident in the coming weeks with the Cowlitz and Lewis Rivers experiencing the bulk of the adult returns. Catches won't peak until later in the month.

The final smelt dipping opener ended on a poor note with no catch reported. Sport dipping season is closed for the remainder of the year on all rivers except the mainstem Columbia.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Spring chinook jargon quickly dominated the conversation on the mainstem Columbia in recent weeks but anglers experienced a slow down in success this week. Waters downstream of the Willamette muddied a bit this week, slowing catch and expectations for salmon success. Some persistent anglers still managed to boat some quality fish this week as the Willamette bound snow bellies continue to dominate the catch.

Good catch rates are not so typical this early in the season but warmer than usual water temperatures certainly contributed to good success and although it's not supposed to be a 100,000+ adult year on the Willamette, the early 5-year old component of the run does seem to be surprisingly good. ODF&W manager Steve Williams recently commented that the upriver fish were beginning to make a stronger showing this week and should begin to come on strong in the coming weeks if the Columbia predictions is supposed to come to fruition.

The early season sturgeon gillnet fishery realized somewhat typical results of "incidentally" caught salmon in their fishery with Willamette fish mostly in the catch.

Starting downriver, anglers fishing the Tenasillahe and Puget Island section of the lower Columbia realized an occasional fish but overall, catches were not that impressive last week. Herring did take fish on both the incoming and outgoing tide but during peak outgoing flows, fish can be challenging to catch. And we did have some screaming outgoing tides in the afternoon last week.

Most recently, anglers have reported poor fishing from I-205 and downstream. Columbia River anglers are anxious to get this season underway but it's clear that the bulk of the catch is coming from Willamette bound fish, making success above I-5 a bit more unlikely. The Columbia did have significantly better clarity than the Willamette and Multnomah Channel did however and that always bolsters an anglers confidence.

Because the regulations are quite complicated this year, we are repeating the press release that came out of the last compact on the salmon and sturgeon regulations. It may behoove you to print this section out and keep it handy before you plan your next trip. For example, you'll want to remember that fishing is closed river wide for salmon anglers this Tuesday, March 9th.

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.

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 downstream of Bonneville are still struggling for success but as temperatures warm, so should the bite. Some keepers are being taken in the Longview area but far more shakers are in the catch.

Check regulations if you plan on fishing in the reservoirs above Bonneville as new catch and release regulations have recently gone into effect.

Walleye fishing is beginning to pick up on the John Day and The Dalles Pools with almost a fish kept per boat in each reservoir.

The Guide's Forecast – Anglers shouldn't expect dramatic improvement in the Columbia River fishery although the water clarity is likely to improve downstream of St. Helens. Numbers should begin to build, especially with the upriver fish more likely to show in stronger numbers. Like the Willamette, the earlier run is made up largely of older 5-year old fish but only typically make up about 15% of the run. None-the-less, these quality fish make the best tablefare of any salmon that swims or so the price dictates.

Herring will still take the bulk of the catch this early in the season but anglers will still work plugs in the outgoing tide. Although we've just come off a minus tide series, the low tides are still quite low, which will cause a strong outgoing tide. So here's another reminder that the stronger the outflow, the closer to the beach you want to run your gear. These calorie counting adults will beach hug in strong flows and catches in 4 to 6 feet of water are more common than you think. Of course this will work best on outgoing tide. Don't be afraid to troll bait on the outgoing tide either. Most anglers are anxious to anchor with plugs but herring will also take good numbers of biters when present.

The river downstream of the Multnomah Channel will remain your best bet but action should begin to pick up closer to I-5 and I-205 in the coming weeks if the run comes in as predicted. Use green label herring this time of year. Blue label herring can be trimmed down and the larger 5-year olds are more likely to bite these bigger baits than the 4-year olds that peak later into April.

Sturgeon anglers should still be focusing their efforts in the lower Willamette River but shakers are becoming more available in the mainstem downstream of the mouth of the Willamette River.

Walleye anglers should begin to seek their quarry. Spring months are peak times prior to the spawn. The spawn and bite could very well happen earlier this season as water temperatures are unusually high for this time of year.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Lower Willamette sturgeon anglers did well over the last retention period, especially those who toughed it out through inclement weather. Spring Chinook results this week, however, have been poor.

Water level and flow will remain steady on the North Santiam in the coming week.

Henry Hagg Lake is expected to be crowded at the season opener this Saturday, March 6th. A

fresh stocking of 18,000 legal trout was made this week and there are holdover trout in the depths.

The Guide's Forecast – The lower Willamette will deliver keepers to anglers finding the right spot for keepers. As always, take a variety of baits and be prepared to move if action doesn't start up in 20 minutes or so. While springer fishing has been a near non-event this week, it will improve as the season progresses and as numbers of fish continue to build. Those not trying are guaranteed to go fishless.

A good weekend is expected on the McKenzie as levels drop into prime conditions. |

Prospects are good for native wither steelhead on the North Santiam and most certainly there are a few early summers in the system although counting of them at Willamette Falls didn't start until March 1st.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Clackamas water levels will be falling through the weekend following the recent rise which should give steelheaders reason for optimism.

The Sandy is low and clear this week but there are winter steelhead available to anglers using stealth techniques. Drift boaters will be relieved to know that the downed timber that was creating a hazard below Oxbow has been cleared and the river is easily passable.

The Guide's Forecast - The Clackamas River and its hatchery tributary, Eagle Creek, will be in good shape this weekend. Given the time of year, fishing is expected to be as good as it gets here. Try above Gladstone or Carver to improve the odds as it's been much slower in the lower river.

Try the sandy from Dodge to Oxbow. The stretch above Dodge Park also holds promise. Count on first light to be most productive. Steelhead catches have been reasonably steady here but the action slows considerably on weekends as boat traffic increases dramatically. The days are getting longer; try to get out early or late on a weekday for the best chance of a hookup.

North Coast Fishing Report – Steelheaders are coming away with mixed emotions on the north coast these days. Overall, fair to good reports are coming in from the two most heralded systems; the Wilson and Nestucca.

Most recently on the Wilson, steelhead action has slowed although early boats get the worm when starting at Donaldson's and working their way quickly to Sollie Smith Bridge. As flows drop, smaller baits have been most effective but backrolled plugs are also beginning to draw fair numbers of strikes as well. Some anglers have commented that the broodstock fish seem to be oddly absent this year but it's still too early in the season to call it a bust. Overall, there have been good numbers of broodstock fish already taken.

The Nestucca, like the Wilson, showed signs of brilliance late last week but quickly faded over the weekend. Savvy anglers were certainly still able to take advantage of fair numbers of fish present but some admitted to fishing long distances to achieve their goals of success. **Pro guide Kent Anderson (503-550-6303)** reported getting most of his action later in the afternoon in the lower drift downstream of First Bridge on Monday. It seemed pretty evident that these fish were fresh "tide-runners". Kent also commented that although broodstock fish were present, both

hatchery and wild fish were more likely the 2-salt returnees and averaging somewhat smaller than they usually do.

Kent also fished the Trask on Tuesday and reported good action using plugs in the lower stretches. He taped 2 fish over 12 pounds and landed another 3 fish in the same drift. They tagged one broodstock fish with the other 4 wild fish safely released. He floated from Cedar Creek downstream to the 101 take-out, getting most of their action downstream of the Trask River Hatchery.

Smaller streams in the area will require a much bigger rain freshet to jump start remnant returns of wild fish. The North Fork Nehalem and Necanicum can be good late season options but river levels remain too low for good action.

Action remains slow for sturgeon in Tillamook Bay but there should be some fish available. Crabbing has recently improved in Tillamook Bay and the lower Columbia River.

Michael sez: While trout stocking in the Northwest Zone doesn't begin in earnest until next week, Lorens Pond near Tillamook has already been planted with 1,000 legal sized rainbows along with a few hundred larger (foot-long) trout. Take the family and create some memories. Ten years from now when the kids want to get their bodies pierced, tattooed or otherwise disfigured, remind them what a good parent you were and ask where you went wrong.

The Guide's Forecast – Steelheaders working north coast streams will have to put up with low water conditions once again. It's certainly better than high water conditions but anglers wanting to be successful will need to be a bit more aggressive in their approach.

Start low on the drift and start early. Fish will be well pooled up in obvious holding water with deep pools producing to bobber and jig pitchers and fast moving shallow and broken surfaced water producing for bait and sidedrifters.

The Wilson and Nestucca will remain favorite systems for those seeking a hatchery option. Don't be afraid to float the extreme lower portions including the tidewater areas. Use bobbers and jigs in these sections as drifted bait is simply not an option.

The Nehalem River will once again become an option and should produce fair results in the floatable sections as well as the upper reaches for bank anglers. Flows will be about ideal for sidedrifters and the river won't be nearly as crowded as only a rare hatchery stray is available.

Crabbing and sturgeon fishing should be a fair option over the weekend. Tillamook Bay will offer up the combo option and the lower Columbia may produce fair results for crabbers although the best action will certainly be close to the south jetty and a large swell is forecasted for the weekend.

Central & South Coast Reports – If the siren song of the sea is ringing in your ears, don't miss the sixth annual Saltwater Sportsmen's Show in Newport this weekend. Tackle, technique and rigging for varied offshore species will be discussed with particular emphasis on ocean safety. The event runs from 9 AM to 6:30 PM on Saturday and 9 to noon on Sunday. It's only \$5 for adults with kids under 12 getting in free.

Ocean conditions are predicted to be lumpy this weekend although Sunday may allow offshore launches. Check the latest wind and wave conditions prior to making the trip and allow for an AM

outgoing tide. Trips next week will not be an option with the surf predicted to top 20 feet on Wednesday.

When the ocean has allowed offshore launches, quality bottom fishing and crabbing has been making trips worthwhile and there has been no depth restriction for anglers. This will change in about a month, however, as the 40-fathom limitation once again comes into play. We'll let you know in advance.

Although there are some winter steelhead to be caught in the Siletz, bank fishing opportunities exist only at Moonshine with access to the river above open only on weekends. For those drifting the river, avoiding the Moonshine launch would be the best plan. Boats, even with experienced drifters on the oars, continue to go down in the tricky water just below that launching point.

With the water level at the Alsea slowly but steadily declining and levels decent to hold fish, expect a good turnout here in the coming weekend but then prospects are decent.

Despite the fact that results have slowed for anglers, Tenmile Creek has been getting a great deal of pressure recently. This may be due to the fact that, unlike many nearby rivers, the majority of returning winter steelhead here are of hatchery origin, hence, may come home for dinner.

Boats launching out of Winchester Bay are enjoying great fishing for bottom dwellers with frequent seven-fish limits and good catches of large ling cod. The Mainstem Umpqua has continued to provide good action for mostly wild steelhead with the best action near the forks. The river will be dropping through the coming weekend. An ongoing discussion in the fishing community about the 'early springer run' has yet to produce any confirmed catches.

Coos Bay crabbing continued to deliver keepers and while no limits were reported, the trip can still pay for itself in fresh seafood.

Coquille steelheaders are scoring some fish with the South Coquille fair to good at times.

The first springer of the year (an unclipped fish) was caught and released on the lower Rogue on Tuesday this week.

Story a picture here:

<http://www.mailtribune.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100304/LIFE/3040306/-1/OREGONOUTDOORS#STS=g6e2fyfq.u3l>. Let the madness begin. Steelhead counts on the Rogue are some of the best in a decade but fishing reflects that bounty only periodically. Plugs have been effective in hooking winters in the lower river this week. The Grants Pass stretch has been slow.

Water level at the Chetco River is on the drop and this situation will continue through the weekend with flows dipping below the 4,000 cfs mark on Sunday according to the NOAA forecast. Steelheading should be worthwhile but biologists agree with anglers: there are fewer winter steelhead in the system this year than in the last several seasons.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Trout fishing is fair for fly casters on the Deschutes around Maupin with no risers in evidence. A few summer steelhead have shown up here recently. It's shaping up to be a decent season here.

Limits of kokanee are being taken by deep-trollers on Lake Billy Chinook.

Blue-winged Olives along with a few stoneflies are hatching on the Fall River and providing some dry fly action.

Michael sez: This is news to me. Brine shrimp (what, like sea monkeys?) come from a freshwater lake in southeast Oregon. Evidently, it's difficult to obtain a commercial permit (only three are allowed per year). In order to hang on to a permit, one has to harvest a minimum of two and a half tons per year. If this sounds like your cup of shellfish, a lottery will be held for two (only!) of the permits by lottery with names going in the ODFW hat in Salem no later than March 10, 2010. For more information and how to apply, follow this link:

<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/news/2010/march/030210.asp>

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report March 3 through March 17

North Puget Sound

While there have been a few reports of anglers hauling in some nice blackmouth, salmon fishing in Puget Sound continues to be slow. "To have any success in northern Puget Sound, anglers really need to put in some time on the water," 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. Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) is closed to salmon fishing.

Thiesfeld said anglers might want to consider heading to the Strait of Juan de Fuca, where salmon fishing continues to be good.

Marine areas 5 and 6 have been the hotspots, he said. In Sekiu, 23 anglers in eight boats landed 17 blackmouth during the last day in February. Anglers have also been landing good numbers of fish at the Ediz Hook ramp in Port Angeles. "The season started strong in the Strait and it's stayed that way," said Thiesfeld. "It's definitely the best bet for blackmouth right now."

Meanwhile, numerous rivers are closed to **steelhead** fishing, including the Skagit, Sauk and Samish. The three rivers, usually open in March, closed early to protect wild steelhead that are listed as "threatened" under the federal Endangered Species Act. The closures include:

- The Skagit River, from the mouth upstream to Highway 536 (Memorial Hwy. Bridge) at Mount Vernon, through April 30; and from Highway 536 (Memorial Hwy. Bridge) at Mount Vernon upstream to the Gorge Powerhouse through May 31.
- The Sauk River, from the mouth upstream to the Whitechuck River through June 4.
- The Samish River, from the mouth to the Hickson Bridge, through June 4.

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

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

Anglers are reeling in increasing numbers of steelhead from rivers on the Olympic Peninsula, while catch rates remain strong for blackmouth salmon in the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Lingcod fishing opens March 13 in ocean areas south of Cape Alava, and another razor clam dig is tentatively scheduled March 26-April 1 at various ocean beaches.

"This is a great time of year for fishing and other outdoor activities, but deciding where to go can be tough," said Steve Thiesfeld, a WDFW fish biologist. "With so many opportunities out there, anglers have to make some hard choices about how they want to spend their weekends."

Steelhead fishing on the northern peninsula is definitely a good bet right now, said David Low, another WDFW fish biologist. During a creel check on the Sol Duc River conducted during the last four days of February, 78 anglers reported catching 74 wild steelhead (and releasing 64 of them) along with 13 hatchery fish (and releasing four of those). On the Calawah River, 21 anglers reported catching 22 wild fish and releasing 19.

"This is peak season for wild steelhead on most of these rivers," Low said. "Anglers need to keep an eye on river conditions, but fishing is definitely good right now."

As in years past, anglers may retain only 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.

Low specifically reminds anglers that no wild steelhead may be retained on the Hoh River above the DNR Oxbow Campground. Rules for each river are described in the 2009-10 *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

Not surprisingly, angler turnout on the north coast has been strong - due to good catch rates and the fact that most rivers in the Puget Sound region are now closed to steelhead fishing. Low suggests the Skookumchuck River as a viable alternative for anglers looking to catch steelhead.

"This tributary to the Chehalis River is a great option for Puget Sound anglers looking for a fishing opportunity closer to home," said Low, noting that the Skookumchuck offers a strong run of late-returning hatchery fish. "Besides, it's pretty tough to find an empty seat in a guide boat on the Olympic Peninsula at this point in the season."

Rather catch a **blackmouth salmon** ? Several areas of Puget Sound are open to fishing for resident chinook, although marine areas 5 and 6 in the Strait of Juan de Fuca have clearly been the hotspots. In Sekiu, 23 anglers in eight boats landed 17 blackmouth during the last day in February. Anglers have also been landing good numbers of fish at the Ediz Hook ramp in Port Angeles.

"The season started strong in the Strait and it's stayed that way," said Thiesfeld, who also monitors the fishery elsewhere in Puget Sound. "It's definitely the best bet for blackmouth right now."

Another option is **lingcod** fishing, which gets under way March 13 in marine areas 1-3, south of Cape Alava. The minimum size for lingcod in these areas is 22 inches, with a daily limit of two fish per angler. In Marine Area 2 (Westport/Ocean Shores), recreational fishing for rockfish or lingcod is not allowed in waters deeper than 30 fathoms. Additional information about the lingcod fishery and other bottom fish is available on the WDFW Fishing Hotline (360) 902-2500 or online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm/>.

WDFW has also announced plans for a **razor-clam dig** tentatively scheduled March 26-April 1 at various ocean beaches. As always, final approval of the dig - the first of the spring season - will depend on results of marine toxin tests that show the clams are safe to eat.

Prospective diggers should note that the proposed dig would start on evening tides, then switch to morning tides for the final four days, said Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager. "The digs planned this month span the seasonal change, when the lowest tides shift from evening to morning hours," he said. "As in past months, razor-clam digging will be allowed after noon for the first three days of the opening, but will then switch to morning hours starting Monday, March 29."

Tentative days, tides and beach openings for this month's dig are:

- Friday, March 26, (4:29 p.m., +0.1) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Kalaloch
- Saturday, March 27, (5:19 p.m., -0.1) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Sunday, March 28, (6:04 p.m., 0.0) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Monday, March 29, (6:35 A.M., -0.1) Long Beach and Twin Harbors only
- Tuesday, March 30, (7:22 A.M., -0.7) Long Beach and Twin Harbors only
- Wednesday, March 31, (8:07 A.M., -1.0) Long Beach and Twin Harbors only
- Thursday, April 1, (8:52 A.M., -1.0) Long Beach and Twin Harbors only

Any 2009-10 annual shellfish/seaweed license or combination license is valid through March 31. However, a new license will be required for anyone age 15 or older to participate in a subsequent dig, tentatively scheduled April 16-18. Descriptions of the various licensing options are available on the WDFW website at <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov>.

Southwest Washington

Spring chinook fever continues to spread on the Columbia River, although the prized fish were hard to find during the last week of February. On the last Saturday of the month, 250 bank anglers and more than 300 boats were counted on the lower river - twice as many boats as the same time last year. But only three spring chinook, all from lower-river stocks, turned up in WDFW creel checks that day.

"We've had a pretty good showing of lower-river springers, but the upriver fish are off to another slow start," said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist. "So far, we have seen little evidence of the huge run of upriver fish expected this year, but that could change any day now."

According to the pre-season forecast, 559,900 **spring chinook salmon** - 470,000 of which are upriver bound - will return to the Columbia River and its tributaries this year, the largest run since 1938. While most of those fish aren't expected to arrive until later this month or early April, it's hardly surprising that anglers are eager to test the waters.

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

Under regulations established by fishery managers from Washington and Oregon, the fishery is now open at the following places and times:

- **Buoy 10 upstream to the I-5 Bridge:** Seven days per week from March 1 through April 18, except closed on the following Tuesdays: March 9, 16, 23 and 30.
- **I-5 Bridge upstream to I-205 Bridge:** Seven days per week from March 1-14, except closed on Tuesday March 9. Beginning March 18 through April 3, fishing will be limited to three days per week, Thursday through Saturday.
- **I-205 Bridge upstream to Bonneville Dam:** Bank angling only, seven days per week from March 1-14, except closed on Tuesday, March 9. Beginning March 18 through April 3, fishing will be limited to three days per week, Thursday through Saturday.
- **Bonneville Dam to McNary Dam:** Seven days per week from March 16 through May 31. Bank fishing only from Bonneville Dam upstream to the Tower Island power lines, six miles downstream from The Dalles Dam.

Anglers fishing below Bonneville Dam may retain one adult spring chinook salmon per day, while those fishing above the dam can keep two per day. As in previous years, only hatchery-reared fish marked with a clipped adipose fin and a healed scar may be retained. All wild spring chinook, identifiable by an intact adipose fin, must be released unharmed.

After watching spring chinook runs fall short of expectations for the past two years, fishery managers exercised caution in setting fishing seasons below Bonneville Dam. In calculating the number of fish available for harvest, they set aside a 40 percent "buffer" until the forecast can be verified by data collected once the run is under way.

On area tributaries, the first spring chinook of the season has returned to the Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery and some springers have been showing up in the catch on the Cowlitz, Kalama and Lewis rivers. In addition, anglers are catching **late-run hatchery steelhead**, particularly on the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers where the run is reaching its peak. As an added bonus, anglers fishing the lower Cowlitz River may now keep steelhead with a clipped right ventral fin.

In other waters, anglers should be aware that March 15 is the last day to fish for steelhead on Abernathy, Cedar (Clark Co.), Germany, Mill (Cowlitz Co.), Rock (Skamania Co.), Salmon (Clark Co.) creeks and on the Coweeman, Elochoman, Grays, East Fork Lewis and Washougal rivers.

Other rule changes coming up in the days ahead will affect several tributaries to the Bonneville Pool:

- **Drano Lake:** The anti-snag rule will no longer be in effect as of March 16. Starting April 16, fishing around the outlet of Drano Lake will be limited to bank fishing west of a line projected from the eastern-most pillar of the Highway 14 Bridge to a posted marker on the north shore.
- **Wind River:** Starting March 16, the anti-snag rule will no longer be in effect from the mouth upstream to the Burlington Northern Railroad Bridge.
- **Klickitat River:** Starting April 3, anglers fishing from the Fisher Hill Bridge downstream will be able to retain two hatchery chinook, hatchery steelhead or one of each as part of their daily limit. Fishing will be open four days per week - Mondays, Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays.

Meanwhile, anglers have been reeling in some **legal-sized white sturgeon** from The Dalles Pool, although none were found in creel checks conducted the last week of February. Sturgeon retention is closed in the Bonneville and John Day pools, and fishing has been slow below Bonneville Dam where most of the big fish have yet to awaken from their winter slumber.

In mid-February, fishery managers from Washington and Oregon adopted fishing seasons for white sturgeon that provide greater protection for declining numbers of sturgeon below Bonneville Dam. New harvest guidelines approved by both states will limit this year's catch below the dam to 24,000 fish, a 40 percent reduction from levels approved in 2009. Of that total, 19,200 will be available for harvest by the sport fishery and 4,800 by the commercial fishery.

To increase protection for spawning sturgeon, fishery managers also agreed to expand the existing six-mile sanctuary area below the dam, where sturgeon fishing is prohibited in late spring and early summer. The new agreement expands the sanctuary 3.5 miles downstream to Skamania Island and extends the fishing prohibition from May 1 to Aug. 31, adding the month of August. Oregon will also establish a new spawning sanctuary on the Willamette River downstream from Willamette Falls to Interstate 205.

Fishing seasons for retention of white sturgeon approved for the 2010 sport fishery in the Columbia River and adjacent tributaries are as follows:

- **Buoy 10 to the Wauna powerlines:** The retention fishery for white sturgeon is open seven days per week through April and again from May 22 to June 26. The fork length of retained sturgeon must be a minimum of 38 inches through April and 41 inches beginning in May. Maximum fork length is 54 inches. Catch-and-release fishing is allowed during non-retention days.

- **Wauna powerlines to Bonneville Dam:** The retention fishery for white sturgeon will be open three days per week (Thursday, Friday and Saturday) through July 31, and again from Oct. 1 through Dec. 31. The fork length of retained sturgeon must be a minimum of 38 inches and a maximum of 54 inches. Catch-and-release fishing is allowed on days when sturgeon retention is prohibited, except in the sanctuary area from May through August.

The fishing periods will be reassessed in June based on available catch data, and may be modified to match catch guidelines.

Smelt (eulachon) dipping is now closed in all Washington rivers except the mainstem Columbia River, but fishing for **walleye** and bass is picking up above Bonneville Dam. Boat anglers fishing the John Day Pool have been averaging a bass per rod and a walleye for every three rods. The Dalles Pool is also giving up some walleye.

A recent creel check at Kline Pond tallied 26 bank anglers with 42 **rainbow trout**. Kline Pond was recently stocked with 2,300 half-pound rainbows, while Battleground Lake got 1,000 and Kress Lake near Kalama got 16 **surplus hatchery steelhead** averaging 10 pounds apiece.

Eastern Washington

Anglers enjoyed spring weather at the region's dozen or so lakes that opened to fishing March 1, with catches coming out of open water instead of through the ice.

The seven impoundments off the Tucannon River on WDFW's Wooten Wildlife Area in Columbia County provided lots of action on hatchery **rainbow trout**. Beaver, Big Four, Blue, Deer, Rainbow, Spring and Watson lakes were stocked with "catchable-size" (about one-third pound) and "jumbo" (about 1.5 pound) trout from the Tucannon and Lyons Ferry fish hatcheries.

WDFW Fish Biologist Jeremy Trump checked anglers on opening day at most of the Tucannon lakes, where fish averaged about 12 inches. Better fishing seemed to be in the morning, except for at Big Four, where fishing was slower than expected all day. Spring Lake had the highest average number of fish caught per angler - just over three - and Big Four had the lowest, at less than one fish apiece. The largest rainbow measured was a 17.3-inch fish caught at Rainbow Lake.

Wooten Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Kari Dingman said camping activity on the area is picking up, along with the fishing, because of the warm weather.

Fishhook Pond in Walla Walla County and Pampa Pond in Whitman County were also well-stocked with rainbows for the March 1 opener, although no creel checks were conducted at those waters.

Chris Donley, WDFW central district fish biologist, said there was good fishing at most March 1-opening fisheries near Spokane. Downs Lake was producing **largemouth bass** in the three- to four-pound range, along with a few rainbow trout and **yellow perch**. Liberty Lake shore anglers on the opener averaged one fish each and boat anglers averaged three fish each - almost all were **brown trout** in the 14- to 20-inch range, with the occasional winter carryover rainbow up to 18 inches. Anglers fishing Medical Lake on opening day averaged three fish each.

Donley said that anglers at Amber Lake, which opened for catch-and-release fishing March 1, averaged five to six trout each. About 90 percent of the catch at Amber was rainbows measuring 13 to 20 inches. The remainder of the catch was **cutthroat trout** that measured between 14 to 18 inches.

Coffeepot Lake also opened for catch-and-release fishing, and although it was not officially surveyed, Donley said fishing was slow.

Bill Baker, WDFW northeast district fish biologist, reports that fishing for **lake trout** and **rainbows** was fair at Stevens County's Deer Lake on the March 1 opener. Lake trout anglers averaged less than one fish apiece, from 24 to 34 inches. Rainbow trout anglers averaged one fish apiece, from 13 to 15 inches. Baker said the water temperature was still cold, at around 37 degrees, so fishing will likely pick up as the lake warms up.

Baker also noted the winter-season fisheries, Hatch and Williams lakes, will remain open to fishing through March 31.

WDFW Fish Biologist Marc Divens said that although water temperatures are still a little cold to expect fast action, anglers interested in warmwater "spiny-ray" species have many opportunities now and in coming weeks and months at both year-round and early-opening waters.

For year-round lakes: Lake Roosevelt offers **walleye** and **smallmouth bass**, along with **rainbows** and **kokanee**; Silver Lake has **tiger muskie**, **largemouth bass**, and **yellow perch**; and Newman Lake has tiger muskie, largemouth and smallmouth bass, and **crappie**.

Among March 1-opening waters: Liberty Lake has largemouth and smallmouth bass, walleye, and yellow perch; Downs Lake has largemouth bass, yellow perch and crappie; Coffeepot Lake has bass, crappie and perch; and Deer Lake has smallmouth bass.

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. The show includes inland trout lakes seminars conducted by WDFW Fish Biologist Chris Donley. For more information see <http://www.greatwesternsportfishingshow.com/Home.html>.

Anglers can also pick up lots of information at the Inland Northwest Wildlife Council's **50th annual Big Horn Outdoor Adventure Show**, March 18-21, at the Spokane County Fair and Expo Center. An indoor kids' fishing pond, where youngsters can learn to cast and actually catch trout to take home and eat, is one of the highlights of this event. A non-profit organization, the council donates proceeds from the show to fish and wildlife projects. For more information about the show, see <http://www.wildlifecouncil.com/>.

Northcentral Washington

Anglers from 12 counties (six westside, six eastside) fished the Columbia Basin's opening day on March 1 on ice-free lakes and under sunny skies with unseasonably warm weather. "There were lots of folks out, considering that the opener fell on a Monday," said WDFW District Fish Biologist Chad Jackson of Moses Lake. "As far as fishery performance, it was a bit of a mixed bag with some good, some bad, and some under-utilized lakes."

Jackson said the greatest effort and catches were checked at Martha, Upper Caliche, and Lenice lakes. At Martha and Caliche lakes, anglers averaged nearly five-fish limits of **rainbow trout**, with several taking full limits in less than an hour. Most rainbows caught at Martha Lake were about 13 inches, with a few winter-carryovers running 16 to 24 inches. The size of trout harvested at Caliche Lake was smaller at 10 to 11 inches.

Lenice Lake was the most popular and best performing selective-gear water on the opener, with most anglers catching and releasing around six trout each in two to four hours of fishing. Most of the trout were 19 to 21 inches, with a few up to 24 inches. A few anglers surveyed by Jackson said they had caught and released a few of last year's plants of **tiger trout**.

Nunnally and Merry lakes, near Lenice and also under the selective-gear and one-trout daily retention rules, were not checked on the opener. But Jackson said fishing, at least on the larger Nunnally, is similar to Lenice. Nunnally and Lenice will be re-stocked with trout this spring, he noted.

"Two lakes that underperformed this opener were Quincy and Burke," Jackson said. "Despite our supplemental catchable-size trout plants, on top of sizeable spring fry plants, both lakes failed to produce a harvest rate of one trout per angler. However, since the catchable trout plant occurred only two weeks ago, I expect that these two lakes will fish a lot better as the spring progresses."

Anglers who did catch trout at Burke had 12- to 24-inch rainbows, and those at Quincy had 20- to 21-inch fish from fry plants.

Jackson said angler effort appeared to be down on the opener at Dusty and Lenore lakes. The highest angler counts recorded during the creel survey at Dusty and Lenore lakes were eight and 13, respectively. That made determining the overall opening day success difficult, he said. Among the anglers checked at Dusty, one rainbow trout and one tiger trout were measured, both at 16 inches. At Lenore, which is catch-and-release through May, anglers each reported catching about seven **cutthroat trout** of 14 to 22 inches in length. "Both Dusty and Lenore will be very good to fish as the season progresses," Jackson said.

Other Columbia Basin lakes that opened March 1, but were not surveyed, are several "walk-in" waters on WDFW's Quincy Wildlife Area - Cascade, Cliff, Crystal, Cup, Dot, George and Spring.

Matt Polacek, WDFW fish biologist, said anglers are catching **yellow perch** at the Coulee City Marina on Banks Lake. Pre-spawn perch can be found in or near weed beds throughout the lake.

WDFW Okanogan District Fish Biologist Bob Jateff reminds **steelhead** anglers that 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 closures are necessary 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 fishery changes on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm>.

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.

Southcentral Washington

WDFW hatchery crews have been stocking catchable-size (one-third pound and nearly one pound) **rainbow trout** over the last couple weeks at waterways throughout Kittitas and Yakima counties. Eric Anderson, WDFW district fish biologist, said there are lots of good fishing opportunities during these warm, pre-spring days.

In Kittitas County, McCabe Pond recently received 510 one-third-pound rainbows, Woodhouse Ponds got 810, South Fio Rito got 1,500, North Fio Rito got 3,210, and Mattoon Lake got 1,610. North Fio Rito Lake also received 700 nearly one-pounders, and Mattoon Lake got 400.

In Yakima County, I-82 Pond #4 and Pond #6 each received 2,520 one-third pound rainbows, Sarge Hubbard Pond got 308, Rotary Lake got 2,520, and Myron Lake got 504. Sarge Hubbard also received 100 nearly one-pound rainbows, and Myron Lake got 500.

All catchable-size trout plants are posted weekly on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly/>.

TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail

TGF Subscriber Kevin wrote: was wondering if you can list your preferences in order of confidence while fishing for Spring Chinook while anchored.

Pro Guide Bob Rees replied with his list:

- Wrapped Kwikfish
- Mag Wiggle Warts
- Large Spinners
- Alvins, Spoons

Kevin: What is your go to rig (and color) if you know you will only get 3-4 trips for Springers and fish with a friend who will anchor in the Kalama area.

Bob: I prefer to fish with the spinners but have heard the water temperature needs to be > 50 degrees F and are reluctant to use them.

Kevin: Also, I think trolled herring is very effective for Spring Salmon. Can cut herring be used while anchored? Do you recommend it? Do you brine or brighten your herring? And, can you comment on rubber gloves. I know some guides and articles say it is a must when handling gear and bait?

Bob: I suggest just using plugs, either the new Worden's Mag Lip in green or Kwikfish in green or chrome with pink dots is another favorite. I would just stick to plugs in that stretch of the river. If you do use spinners, go small, not large. I do use gloves and recommend it. It's cheap insurance. I brine my herring in ocean water along with additional salt, then drain, then add my favorite scent and keep as cold as possible without freezing.

Good luck and thanks for being a TGF subscriber!

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

Oregon Legislature fixes glitch in get-tough poaching law:

<http://www.mailtribune.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?aid=/20100225/life/2250302/-1/oregonoutdoors#STS=g6dzhrq4.1qu8>

Portland Parks & Recreation offers new 3-month Spring Fishing Season parking pass for Willamette Park:

<http://pdxtraffic.blogspot.com/2010/03/portland-parks-recreation-offers-new-3.html>

GOOD LUCK!