

The Guide's Forecast - volume 12 issue number 13

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **March 26th – April 1st, 2010**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

*** * * SPRING CHINOOK SPECIAL * * ***

Red hot spring chinook fishing is right around the corner and with a record return predicted this year, the action is sure to be great! Here is a list of spring chinook options for the 2010 season!

Portland area spring chinook only, 1/2 day trip (minimum 4 hour "sunrise surprise")

4 to 6 people for \$75.00 per person,

1 to 3 people for \$85.00 per person

Portland area spring chinook full day trip (minimum 8 hours of fishing)

4 to 6 people for \$150.00 per person,

1 to 3 people for \$175.00 per person

Also booking Tillamook Bay spring chinook, Astoria sturgeon and Buoy 10 salmon. Full details on our 2010 calendar available here: http://www.tgfusa.com/fishing_season.asp



Book your trip NOW by calling (503) 812-9036 or emailing Bob Rees at brees@pacifier.com.

Willamette Valley/Metro- After good success rates prior to the weekend, mainstem Columbia anglers have struggled for success recently. Today's upriver opener (I-5 to I-205) will likely yield good catches and anglers should find more consistent success this week and into April. The bulk of the fish are being taken on herring but plugs should become more effective when the water warms.

Sturgeon catch and effort is on the rise in the Columbia River Gorge. Both bank and boat anglers

are finding increasing success using smelt for bait. Anglers fishing downstream of I-5 are taking fish on herring as salmon trollers pitch their unbitten baits overboard, simulating a herring die-off.

The Willamette dropped and cleared this week with another round of showers in the forecast for the valley. Spring chinook are crossing the Falls in mostly single digits with fewer than 100 in the count so far. Fishing is getting more consistent from Oak Grove to Oregon City but action has slowed from previous weeks when double digit days came from Sellwood Bridge. Over 450 summer steelhead have been counted.

March Browns remain the hatch of interest on the McKenzie although caddis will also be present, particularly on bright days.

Summer steelhead are joining winters in the North Santiam but it will be a while before reliable numbers are available.

Steelheading has been slow on the Clackamas. The next round of rainfall may revitalize fishing here with early summers, late wild and hatchery winters all available.

Some anglers have been doing well for steelhead on the Sandy River. Late run fish tend to pool up near Marmot, often falling to bobbers and jigs. Conditions have changed here however since the breaching of Marmot Dam.

Blue River Reservoir, Foster Reservoir, Timber Linn Lake and Waverly Lake are scheduled to be planted with trout.

Northwest – With Monday the exception, steelheaders on the north coast are finding scant success. Rivers were low and clear by midweek with inconsistent results coming from the Wilson, Nestucca and Nehalem Rivers.

Most seasoned anglers would call the March effort about average but the run is not over yet. Late winter steelhead and early summer run fish will be available through mid-April and spring chinook should start to make a showing around mid-April. More rain systems this week should once again stimulate the action.

Numerous coastal river systems will close March 31st so check regulations for the body of water you prefer. The exceptions will be river systems that have hatchery runs of steelhead and salmon.

Crabbing in the ocean is the best bet when vessels can safely cross the bar. Unsettled weather makes offshore fishing a poor option this weekend. Crabbing in most coastal estuaries, including the lower Columbia, is fair at best.

Southwest – Incoming tides will greet boaters mornings while mild minus tides occur afternoons on the south coast this weekend. Bar crossings may be challenging.

While winter steelheading is winding down on many southwest rivers, a few enjoy extended runs at this time of year.

With many rivers closing on March 31st, the South Fork Coquille will remain open through April.

Steelheading remains steady on the North Umpqua which has continued to deliver winters in good condition amongst downrunners although a high percentage of these are natives which

require release here. Chinook are entering the lower river and a good run is in the forecast.

Coos Bay has produced the occasional sturgeon. Crabbing has been fair.

Rogue steelheaders have continued to score winter steelhead even as the spring chinook season gets underway. As long as the water temperature remains in the mid-50s, springers should cooperate and early results have been very good.

Pro Guide Randy Wells (907-947-3349) recommends the Upper Rogue River with the coming rainfall this week.

With a seasonal closure looming at the end of March, steelheading, which has been fair at best on the Chetco, continues to wind down with mostly spawned out fish available now.

Pro Guide Andy Martin (206-388-8988) reports taking limits of rockfish are some very large ling cod out of the Port of Brookings.

Scheduled for stocking with hatchery trout are Bradley Lake, Middle and Lower Empire Lake, Johnson Mill Pond, Floras Lake, Garrison Lake, Bluebill Lake, Bradley Lake, Eel Lake, Johnson Mill Pond, Powers Pond and Saunders Lake

Eastern – Redsides and whitefish are falling to nymphs on the Deschutes around Maupin.

Davis Lake bass are yet to become active but a few large trout are taking swipes at anglers' fly offerings.

It's the time of year to start thinking of the John Day as a smallmouth fishery rather than a steelhead destination. While it is dependent on water conditions and temperature, it won't be long before these fish are active.

SW Washington – The Cowlitz and Kalama Rivers are the best bets for early spring chinook and late winter steelhead. Both systems are expecting good returns of spring chinook as the focus will quickly turn to them in the coming weeks.

The Lewis River remains a viable option for wild winter fish with fewer anglers competing for biters.

With less than 200 springers over Bonneville Dam, the Drano and Wind River fisheries are not underway. Flows in the Bonneville Pool will make boat launching challenging at least until April 3rd.

Coastal beaches will be open for razor clam harvest beginning March 26th. Check out your options on the WDF&W website.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Effort is clearly ramping up as most anglers anticipate the large number of returning fish due back to the mainstem this spring. Anglers are well distributed throughout the more constricted river section this year giving managers a clear glimpse as to how many fish may be in the system. Catch rates have been fluctuating this week but most anglers agree that good fishing was witnessed by many last Thursday and Friday in the I-5 to I-205 stretch that is only open through Saturday. Multiple opportunities were reported by several boats.

By Saturday, action had slowed dramatically and by Monday, only a rare fish was being taken home. The one exception was downstream near Westport however where anglers reported a nice surge of fish prior to the Tuesday closure. Fish should be well distributed in the lower and middle river for much of the week. It looks as if the run is finally going to arrive.

Although the bulk of anglers are trolling herring, as the water continues to warm, folks are reporting better success on plugs wrapped with sardines. With little flow experienced on some days, stronger ebb tides and spill from upriver may be a welcome addition. You have to have ample flow to work plugs on the mainstem.

Anglers continue to keep baits fishing close to the bottom although some are reporting success higher in the water column, especially during slack tide situations. If you have multiple rods to play with, it may pay dividends to stratify depths until the flows pick up.

Sturgeon anglers are going to want to pay attention to catch rates in the gorge in the coming weeks. Last year, there was good action reported in the lower gorge around late April for those using smelt in the shallower water. With little run-off in the forecast, the closer to Bonneville Dam one gets, the more productive the fishing is likely to be. Smelt will be the top bait in this section of river but anglers may want to seriously consider tipping your smelt with fresh sand shrimp.

Downriver, closer to the mouth of the Willamette, anglers are also finding good numbers of sturgeon present. Anglers in this reach are reporting success using herring for bait. As salmon trollers discard their baits after trolling them for a while, sturgeon have been keying in on these throw-away's. Those in the know are reporting good shaker and legal size keeper catches. The lower Willamette is productive too but the bite is short lived over the course of the tide in this section of river.

Finally, crabbers working the estuary are having to put in their time to achieve any measurable results. Multiple pots with multiple pulls are rarely even yielding a limit for even one crabber.

The Guide's Forecast – It will be a good week to salmon fish. Anglers should see their first and most consistent good batch of spring chinook on the mainstem Columbia. Although passage is progressing slower than most had anticipated, the run timing the last few years has clearly shifted to later on in the season. With low flows, anglers may find fish sticking around longer in their favorite areas downstream of I-205 where that section of river is only open to I-5 just 3 days per week.

Troll herring for much of the tide and keep them fishing close to the bottom. You'll see a pattern that most anglers will want to adhere to but don't be afraid to break from the pack and try deeper or shallower over the course of the morning and afternoon. Effort will be running high in the coming weeks so you will need an edge to draw consistent results. In other words, soak baits in scent and change them out often.

Anglers are trying to figure out whether or not they need to have "bling" on their lines in order to catch fish. Bling, being defined as flashers or some other kind of visual attractor are a good idea but plan on dealing with more than the usual twisted line and tangles. I decided to run the bow rods with bling this season to see if it made any difference. The one bite I had for a 4 hour effort on Monday did NOT come on a flasher, just straight herring.

Anglers should focus in on their favorite stretch of river this weekend as fish should be well distributed throughout the lower river. With several years now under our belts, anglers have a pretty good idea what section of river they have the most confidence in. Just keep in mind the

regulations as several anglers have been pinched for fishing above I-5 when it's been closed (Sunday – Wednesday). Check back issues of this publication from the archive section for pertinent regulations for your favorite body of water.

Don't hesitate to anchor with plugs on the outgoing tide. Although in the lower flows, fish won't be as concentrated along the shorelines as they would in stronger flows, action could be good in deeper water if you can stay out of the popular trolling lanes. There are good minus outgoing tides into the weekend but they switch over to morning ebb tides by Sunday. Also, don't be afraid to anchor with herring either.

For sturgeon anglers, focus your efforts either in the gorge using smelt or near or downstream of the mouth of the Willamette using frozen herring for bait. The Willamette itself remains the best bet in the area but the Columbia will likely get cooking in the near future, especially in the Columbia River Gorge.

Don't bother crabbing the estuary unless you don't have much else to do. Lots of females are around.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Although water visibility plummeted in the lower Willamette mid-month, it has been clearing through the 24th. While the current round of showers is expected to add some color, it's not expected to be as opaque as it was in the second week of March. Water flow has also been moderating over the past week. Springers are being caught periodically in the lower Willamette and Multnomah Channel. A few summer steelhead have been landed at Meldrum Narrows. Sturgeon fishing is reliable for sheer numbers of fish. Keepers, as always, are a little more challenging to come by.

ODFW Release March 24, 2010:

Bank angling is prohibited from the east shore of the Willamette River the entire year at the "Oregon City Wall" defined as the area beginning west of Highway 99E, at the northern-most extent of the parking area near the intersection of 8th Street and Highway 99E in Oregon City, approximately 290 feet downstream of the Oregon City/West Linn bridge (Hwy 43) and extending upstream approximately 1715 feet to the retaining wall extending into the Willamette River at the NW corner of the Blue Heron Paper Mill.

Angling for sturgeon, including catch-and-release, is prohibited seven days per week during May 1 through August 31 from Willamette Falls downstream to the I-205 Bridge.

Good-bye Wall!

Tickets must be purchased by Friday this week to attend the Linn-Benton Family Flyfishers annual banquet on Tuesday, March 30th. All-you-can-eat lasagna with all the sides for \$15? Count me in. The raffle is just gravy, so to speak. Dinner is 6:30 PM at the Phoenix Inn, 3410 Spicer Drive SE in Albany. Take Exit 233 off I-5.

Big Cliff Boat Ramp remains closed as is the road above it until dam repairs are finished. No completion date has been forthcoming,

Canby Pond has been stocked for an ODFW-sponsored youth angling event on Saturday, March 27th. Kids to 17 years of age may participate from 9 AM to 2 PM. Staff and volunteers will be on hand to assist.

Spring break is this week and heavy trout planting in local lakes and ponds reflects it. Take a kid fishing!

The Guide's Forecast – Spring Chinook catches are likely to improve through the coming weekend with trolled herring the bait of choice although the wrapped Kwikfish contingent will also account for some fresh chrome. At this time of year, one can predict without fail that results will only improve in weeks to come. Try a variety of locations as well as bait for sturgeon but this time of year be sure to include herring in your arsenal.

Expect to see plenty of caddis hatching on the McKenzie but the March Brown hatch has been slow to get underway this week.

With numbers of winter steelhead at Willamette Falls at least 2,000 higher than last season, it follows that there are more available in the Santiam system. The first of the season have crossed Foster Dam on the south, below which anglers are catch and (by law,) releasing using bobbers and jigs. Similar results are occurring on the North Santiam.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Expect slow but steady steelheading on the Clackamas with fish scattered throughout the system. There's a chance at a spring chinook in the lower river.

Spring chinook may be seen rolling in the Sandy and although a few have been landed, it's early to target them here.

The Guide's Forecast - There's a good chance of a winter steelhead hookup this coming weekend on the Clackamas, particularly for those trying at first light. Springers will be a bit of a challenge this early in the season. Eagle Creek will probably be too low to be productive this weekend.

In low water conditions on the Sandy, drift along the bottom of deep pools for best results with steelhead.

North Coast Fishing Report – Steelheaders once again are finding challenging conditions on north coast streams. Low, clear water conditions haven't kept many anglers away for spring break and water levels remained pretty good for much of the early part of the week.

Action was slow however, especially after coming off of some good fishing just the week before. A small rain freshet graced the coast on Monday, stimulating a fair bite on the Wilson briefly. By Tuesday however, the action had slowed dramatically, with few boats reporting success. I

backtrolled plugs all day starting off at first light in some fairly cold conditions. It warmed up nicely in the late morning but that didn't stimulate any action either.

The Nestucca has also been challenging lately with guides working the lower stretches in hopes of finding fish washing in with the tide. Most of the upper floats are poor options until the next rain freshet.

The Nehalem did produce a few fish last weekend but anglers were reporting crowded conditions this week. With low flows dominating the area, the Nehalem is a great option and should be producing fairly consistently.

The Trask also had fresh fish available with not as many people in pursuit. Like most streams, until rain once again swells the rivers, the lower stretches will be most productive.

Desperate offshore bottomfishers found good success on lings and rockfish for a brief period last week. It wasn't long before the winds came up however and caused people to rethink their options. Offshore crabbing was good in several ports over the weekend.

Inshore crabbing however has been poor with most estuaries only producing a few keepers for a lot of effort.

Spring chinook (fin-clipped only) opens on April 1st but don't have high hopes until at least May.

The Guide's Forecast – A one day rise and subsequent drop is in the forecast just in time for weekend anglers to take advantage of ideal conditions if the system acts as predicted. Although river flow models are rarely accurate, rainfall does look likely later this week and any rain is better than no rain. Even further from likelihood is the March 28th model that indicates even a larger system that may very well prove productive after the river falls again. The way it's worked this year is we really don't know what kind of conditions we'll find when we go fishing from day to day.

The Wilson and Nestucca will remain the best options and the Nehalem is likely to blow out again. Bait will work best in high flows while small side-drifted gear or casting bait will work well in the dropping flows. I went 3 for 3 on plugs the other day. All fish fell to a silver plug. Save your plugs for a dropping river and be aware that someone will likely want to fish below you so don't anchor in the middle of the river impeding passage.

The Trask may also be a good option for large, native fish with an occasional stray. Effort will likely be low at that time however. Spring break lasts one more weekend.

Sturgeon fishing in the Tillamook Bay estuary is still an option but fewer boats are working this fishery right now. It will likely change after this weekend if catches don't pick up soon.

Crab the ocean when you can. I don't think we'll have great ocean opportunity this weekend.

Central & South Coast Reports – Winter steelhead are being taken on the popular Siletz this week with bobber and jig rigs a favorite here.

Crabbing has been slow to fair inside Yaquina Bay. Herring jigging has not been worthwhile recently, however. When boats have been able to cross the bar, rock fishing has been good while ling cod takes have been fair.

The Alsea is forecast to rise about a foot on Saturday and be on the drop this coming Sunday. While a little late in the season, over 1,000 winter steelhead have returned to the hatchery, conditions will be decent and chances of a hookup are fair although most late-season fish here are natives.

Tenmile Creek steelheading has held up pretty well for this late in the season and returns have shown a decent percentage of hatchery fish.

Anglers targeting rockfish and ling cod are doing well off the South Jetty at Winchester Bay. Crabbing has slowed. A few smallies were taken over the past weekend and while rain is in the forecast again this week, once the weather dries out and the main Umpqua recovers, mainstem Umpqua Anglers should start to enjoy smallmouth bass fishing. North Umpqua steelheaders continue to catch good numbers of mostly native fish although many are showing some color and numbers of spawned out fish returning to the ocean are increasing. Incidentally, here as with most southwest rivers at this time of year, these so-called 'downrunners,' while not suitable as table fare, are fun to catch and aggressive, often striking just about any offering. 'Might as well enjoy them. A few springers are being taken on the North Umpqua in the stretch below Winchester Dam.

While steelheading is slow in the Coos River, the bay has recently given up a few sturgeon to those soaking sand shrimp in fertile shallows on the outgoing tide. Crabbing has been slow to fair in the bay. Boats launching offshore during a break in the ocean conditions over the past weekend took limits of rockfish and ling cod. Ocean crabbing was good as well.

Elk and Sixes Rivers are under very little pressure now but have been providing fair but steady catches of winter steelhead with the typical late-season mix of bright and spawned fish.

Water temperature, a critical element in scoring chinook, topped the magical 50 degree mark over the past weekend in the lower Rogue and it was reflected in catches. While bright steelhead continue to be landed, the winter steelhead season is on the downturn while springer fishing is just beginning. Chinook averaging 25 pounds are being landed daily, however, with best results coming on the outgoing tide. Anglers enjoying a fine kickoff of the springer season are cautiously optimistic that this will pan out to be a great season on the Rogue. Middle river steelheaders report fair results over the past week. The upper river remains low from limited water release.

Pro Guide Randy Wells (907-947-3349) reports, "I have been fishing the Upper Rogue River for the past few days. The weather has been great since the last snow storm which was the week of March 10th. For the last two days I have been floating from Takelma Park down to ToueVelle park. We have been hooking up with winter Steelhead pretty regularly, boating 2-4 Steelhead per trip, and many Trout from 8-20in. I have been fishing with small Steelhead egg clusters that have been cured with Pro-Cure Orange-Borax and adding Pro-Cure Monster Bite. I have also been casting a small Prince Nymph fly and picking up a few Steelhead, but mostly good sized Trout have been hitting the flies.

"The Upper Rogue River is low as of March 18, 2010, on March 17th the river was flowing at 1670 cfs, this makes drifting from Dodge Bridge down quite tricky and not for the inexperienced drift boater. As of March 14th there was 5326 Winter Steelhead over Gold Ray Dam and decent numbers have made it up to the Hatchery.

"With the coming weather expected to be nice, I suggest getting on the Upper Rogue and fighting some fish."

It's late in the season for the Chetco but steelheaders in general and guides in particular are enjoying multiple hookups daily although the vast majority are either wild, spawned-out or both. The harbinger of the winter steelhead run on the Chetco is the locally-termed blueback (a common term on the northwest coast for sea-run cutthroat) which, in this case, refers to the small, topaz-hued, late-running sea-run rainbows which have been appearing in greater number as of late. The general consensus of local anglers is that this year's run has consisted of fewer than average steelhead with a higher wild fish component but the determining numbers won't be provided until ODFW releases surveys later this spring. Anglers are again reminded that the Chetco closes to fishing on Wednesday, March 31st. Offshore forecasts are marginal with Saturday looking like the best shot at a safe bar crossing. Be sure to get a last-minute update.

Pro Guide Andy Martin (206-388-8988) reports, "Lingcod and rockfish action is pickup up out of the Port of Brookings. The ocean has been fairly calm, although afternoon winds have shortened the window for getting out. We've been getting limits of nice black rockfish and are starting to find some nice-size lingcod and cabezon. Today's biggest ling was 38 inches (photo attached). Some of the black rockfish we've caught in recent days have pushed 5 pounds. We are getting most of the lings on live baits - either kelp greenling or small blue rockfish, but also have taken a few on large plastic twin tails. Expect lingcod fishing to remain good through May as the spawn continues. Oregon's lingcod limit is two fish a day over 22 inches, as well as seven rockfish per day."



Whenever the ocean lays down a bit, spin fishers are taking limits of surf perch from southern Oregon beaches. Natural baits work well as do small Berkeley Gulp! shrimp and sand worm imitations. These scented plastic innovations are not only effective but durable, far less messy and not subject to spoilage when forgotten under the seat of your vehicle. Unpaid product plug, by the way; it's that good

Out of work or need a potentially lucrative hobby? If you have knowledge of diving and the appropriate equipment, perhaps a career/avocation in the field of sea urchins harvesting is for you. In any event, if this unusual activity is of interest, the ODFW is holding a lottery for eight of only 30 permits to harvest these critters. Applications will be taken trough April 15th at the Salem office and must be accompanied by a \$102 fee for residents of Oregon, \$292 for nonresidents. Details are here: <http://www.dfw.state.or.us/news/2010/march/031810b.asp>

Central and Eastern Oregon – Lake Billy Chinook has been fair for kokanee for those trolling on the afternoon hours after the water warms a little.

Trollers are making fair to good catches of kokanee at Green Peter and are doing so fairly shallow (without downriggers) at this time of year.

The Grande Ronde and Imnaha rivers have been producing good catches of steelhead to eastside anglers.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report for March 17th – March 30th, 2010

North Puget Sound

With the region's rivers closed to steelhead fishing, anglers' attention has turned to salmon in the marine areas of Puget Sound. 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.

Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW biologist, said effort has been light in the region and fishing continues to be slow. "There have been a few blackmouth caught, but overall it's been a real grind for anglers fishing the waters of northern Puget Sound," he said.

Thiesfeld said the Strait of Juan de Fuca is the better bet for anglers looking to hook a blackmouth – resident chinook. Anglers fishing marine areas 5 (Sekiu) and 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca) have a daily limit of one chinook.

Looking forward to the **summer salmon fishing** season? There's still time to provide input on proposals for this year's fisheries. Several public meetings have been scheduled as fishery managers continue to develop the 2010 salmon seasons. Those meetings are scheduled for:

- **March 23** – Eastern Washington North of Falcon discussion, 6 p.m.-9 p.m., Benton PUD, 2721 W. 10th Ave. Kennewick.
- **March 24** – Second coastal fisheries discussion, 6 p.m.-8 p.m., Raymond Elks Lodge, 326 Third St., Raymond.
- **March 25** – Puget Sound commercial fisheries discussion, 10 a.m.-noon, WDFW Mill Creek Office, 16018 Mill Creek Blvd., Mill Creek.
- **March 25** – Puget Sound recreational fisheries discussion, 6 p.m.-8 p.m., WDFW Mill Creek Office, 16018 Mill Creek Blvd., Mill Creek.
- **March 29** – Public hearing on ocean salmon management options, 7 p.m., Chateau Westport, 710 W. Hancock, Westport.
- **March 30** – Final Grays Harbor/Willapa Bay fisheries discussion, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Room 172 of the Natural Resources Building, 1111 Washington St. S.E., Olympia.
- **April 6** – Second North of Falcon meeting, 9 a.m.- 4 p.m., Embassy Suites Hotel, 20610 44th Ave. West, Lynnwood.

The final fishing package for Washington's waters will be finalized in mid-April. More information about the salmon season-setting process can be found on WDFW's North of Falcon website (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/northfalcon/>).

Meanwhile, a couple of lakes in King County that are open year-round have been planted with catchable-size **rainbow trout**. Angle and Green lakes each received 10,000 rainbow trout recently. Check out WDFW's weekly stocking report for catchable trout on the department's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly/index.htm>.

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

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

The fishery for wild steelhead is peaking on the northern Olympia Peninsula, and blackmouth fishing is still going strong on the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Rough seas have slowed the start of the lingcod fishery, but ocean beaches are tentatively scheduled to open March 26 for a weeklong razor clam fishery.

And just in time for spring break, WDFW is stocking several lakes in Mason and Grays Harbor counties with trout – some weighing up to five pounds apiece.

"Fishing opportunities are really picking up throughout the region," said Ron Warren, regional WDFW fish manager. "By the end of the month, there should be something for just about everybody who likes to fish or collect shellfish."

As local schools count down to spring break, WDFW is planting 5,000 catchable-size rainbow trout in Duck Lake, Lake Sylvia and Vance Creek (Elma) Pond #1 in Grays Harbor County. Lake Nahwatzel, in Mason County, will receive more than 3,000 catchable-size trout and several hundred coastal cutthroat.

Larger trout, averaging three to five pounds each, also will be planted in the four lakes in time for the spring-break fishery. Vance Creek (Elma) Pond #1, south of Elma, will be open from March 29 to April 4 for juvenile fishers, seniors over 70 and WDFW-licensed anglers with disabilities. The other three lakes are open year-round.

"This is a great opportunity for folks to enjoy early-season fishing during local schools' spring vacations," said Richard Ereth, a WDFW fish biologist in Montesano.

Ereth noted that a new daily bag limit is in effect this year on Duck Lake and Vance Creek (Elma) Pond #1. The new limit is five fish, including up to two fish over 15 inches. When bait is used, anglers must stop fishing after the first five fish are landed, regardless of whether the fish are kept or released.

Meanwhile, steelhead anglers continue to catch – and often release – high numbers of wild fish on rivers around the northern Olympic Peninsula. On the Sol Duc, 63 anglers reported catching 100 wild steelhead (91 released) and eight hatchery fish during a creel check conducted March 12-14. Elsewhere, success rates ranged from about a fish to two fish for every two rods.

Anglers fishing for blackmouth salmon in the Strait of Juan de Fuca have also continued to rack up good catch rates. While fishing has generally been slow elsewhere in Puget Sound, 10 anglers checked five fish in Seiku and 27 anglers checked 13 fish at Ediz Hook during a creel survey March 14.

But those hoping to catch lingcod off the south coast haven't been quite so fortunate. Heavy seas kept most boats at the dock for several days after marine areas 1-3 opened for lingcod fishing, said Wendy Beeghley, another WDFW fish biologist. "Based on the latest reports, they may not be able to get out for another week," she said.

The minimum size for lingcod in marine areas 1-3 south of Cape Alava 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. Marine Area 4, north of Cape Alava, remains closed to lingcod fishing until April 16. Additional information about the lingcod fishery is available on the WDFW Fishing Hotline (360) 902-2500 or online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/regs/fishregs.htm/>.

Those eager for the final word about a **razor-clam dig** at ocean beaches tentatively scheduled March 26-April 1 don't have to wait much longer. Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager, said the results should be available by Friday, March 19 from marine toxin tests required to make sure the clams are safe to eat.

Prospective diggers should be aware that the proposed dig is scheduled to start on evening tides, then switch to morning tides for the final four days, Ayres said. "The digs planned this month span the seasonal change, when the lowest tides shift from evening to morning hours," he said. "So 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 and 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

Southwest Washington

Spring chinook salmon fishing is starting to pick up on the lower Columbia River, although anglers are still working hard to catch fish. During a creel survey conducted during the second week of March, checkers counted 86 adult chinook and three steelhead among the 1,103 boat anglers contacted. Just one chinook and two steelhead were counted among the 196 bank anglers contacted.

"**Spring chinook** have been striking in fits and starts, but catch rates should start ramping up any day," said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist. "Regardless of how big this run turns out to be, fishing will almost certainly improve in the days ahead."

Hymer said boat anglers, fishing between Cathlamet and Vancouver, have taken most of the springers hooked so far this year. Lower river stocks – including some lunkers up to 30 pounds – have accounted for about half the catch, although upriver fish have been increasing in number in recent days. As of mid-March, the fishery was drawing approximately 600-800 boats to the lower Columbia River on weekend days. Those numbers are also expected to increase along with more fish and hopefully spring-like weather.

"If you put in some time, there's a good chance you'll take home a spring chinook," Hymer said. "Boat anglers have better odds, because the river's so low right 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 at least 1938. Under regulations established by fishery managers from Washington and Oregon, fishing is now open at the following places and times:

- **Buoy 10 upstream to the I-5 Bridge:** Seven days per week through April 18, except closed Tuesdays in March.
- **I-5 Bridge upstream to I-205 Bridge:** Three days per week – Thursdays through Saturdays – from March 18 through April 3.
- **I-205 Bridge upstream to Bonneville Dam (Bank fishing only):** Three days per week – Thursdays through Saturdays – from March 18 through April 3.

- **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.

Spring chinook fishing opened March 16 on the lower Wind River and at Drano Lake, although Hymer noted that the action won't pick up there until more fish pass Bonneville Dam. Anglers can check fish counts at the dam on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers website at <https://www.nwp.usace.army.mil/op/fishdata/home.asp>. Anglers should be aware of several changes in fishing rules on tributaries to the Bonneville Pool:

- **Drano Lake:** The anti-s snag rule was removed 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:** The anti-s snag rule has been removed 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.

Below Bonneville, spring chinook are starting to make an appearance in several tributaries, although late-run **hatchery winter steelhead** continue to make up the bulk of the catch on the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers. At the Cowlitz Hatchery, 24 adult spring chinook and 225 winter-run steelhead were recovered during the second week of March. A creel survey that week on the Cowlitz turned up 17 hatchery steelhead and one adult chinook among 44 boat anglers. Eighty-eight bank anglers had caught 14 hatchery steelhead and released two others.

The odds of catching hatchery steelhead were even better that week on the Kalama River, where 12 boat anglers had caught five fish and released three others. "Fishing for late-run hatchery steelhead is peaking right now, providing a great fishing opportunity as more spring chinook move into the rivers," said Hymer, noting that anglers have also been catching some steelhead in The Dalles Pool.

Anglers should be aware, however, that March 15 was 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.

Meanwhile, **sturgeon** fishing has been slow, although boat anglers have been catching some legal-size fish in the Kalama area as well as in The Dalles Pool, where **walleye** fishing is starting to heat up along with the weather. Boat anglers fishing there have been averaging a walleye per rod, along with some **bass**.

Trout anglers should know that WDFW recently stocked Battleground Lake with 3,000 rainbow trout averaging half-a-pound apiece. Nine recycled winter steelhead were also planted in Kress Lake on March 10.

Eastern Washington

The Grand Ronde River, a tributary of the Snake River in the southeast corner of the region, is providing good **steelhead trout** action. Steelheading has been reportedly excellent near the mouth of the Grand Ronde and near the mouth of Cottonwood Creek, which flows into the Grand Ronde northeast of Troy, Oregon.

The seven impoundments off the Tucannon River on WDFW's Wooten Wildlife Area in Columbia County, which opened March 1, continue to produce catches of hatchery **rainbow trout**. Beaver, Big Four, Blue, Deer, Rainbow, Spring and Watson lakes have been stocked with "catchable-size" (about one-third pound) and "jumbo" (about one-and-a-half pound) trout from the Tucannon and Lyons Ferry fish hatcheries.

WDFW fish biologist Chris Donley of Spokane says some of the March 1-opening waters in the central district are also seeing good action on rainbow trout. Notable are Amber, Downs, Liberty and Medical lakes in Spokane County. Liberty and Downs recently received more catchable-size hatchery rainbows (see the WDFW Trout Plants at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly/> for details).

Downs Lake, on the Spokane-Lincoln county line east of Sprague, is also already providing catches of **largemouth bass**. Liberty and Medical lakes are also producing catches of **brown trout**.

Year-round fisheries at Sprague Lake, on the Lincoln-Adams county line, and Rock Lake in Whitman County, remain good, Donley said. Sprague is all rainbows and Rock has both rainbows and browns.

Donley also noted Lake Roosevelt, the Columbia River reservoir off Grand Coulee Dam, is good for rainbows and **kokanee**, "if you can find the fish."

The region's winter-season fisheries in Stevens County – Williams and Hatch lakes near Colville – offer completely open water fishing for stocked rainbows for the rest of the month. Both close March 31.

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

Over 30 waters in the Columbia Basin lakes open to fishing April 1 and WDFW district fish biologist Chad Jackson says prospects are fair to good.

"With one exception, all these waters are located either within or adjacent to the Columbia National Wildlife Refuge south of Potholes Reservoir," Jackson said. "Over half are planted with spring and/or fall **rainbow trout** fry. Although most are in need of rehabilitation to rid them of competing fish species, nice sized trout can be found in many, including Upper and Lower Hampton lakes, North and South Teal lakes, and the Pillar-Widgeon chain of lakes."

Jackson notes that anglers who plan on fishing the refuge area lakes, especially the hike-in ones, should remember that – with the unseasonably warm weather the Columbia Basin has been experiencing the past month – rattlesnakes may be out earlier and in greater numbers than normal.

Dry Falls Lake, which also opens April 1, is located just northeast of Park Lake within the Sun Lakes State Park southwest of Coulee City. The 99-acre lake is under selective gear rules and a one-trout daily bag limit.

"Opening day success at Dry Falls in previous years was a little slow because of cold weather," Jackson said. "But this year abnormally warmer air temperatures are heating up the lake much quicker and it may very well fish better on this year's opener. I expect anglers to take 13-14-inch yearling rainbows and carryovers up to 24 inches, just like the last two years.

Brown and **tiger trout** are also planted into Dry Falls Lake. Jackson reported that a total of 9,900 rainbow, 1,000 tiger, and 1,000 brown trout fry were stocked into Dry Falls Lake in 2009.

"Some of the Columbia Refuge area lakes also offer excellent fishing for **warmwater** species," Jackson said. "Probably the best opportunity is at Hutchinson and Shiner lakes. Since their rehabilitations in 1997, these two lakes have developed into quality fisheries for **largemouth bass** and **bluegill**. Anglers should note that only non-motorized boats are allowed on these two lakes."

Other warmwater fishing options are the Coyote, Bobcat, and Hayes creek ponds located just south of Morgan and Halfmoon lakes. Jackson says these ponds are relatively small and shallow, so they warm up quickly, and offer good fishing for largemouth bass. Another option might be Deadman Lake located just off McManamon Road next to Halfmoon Lake.

Further north in the region, **steelhead** fishing in the upper Columbia River above Wells Dam is scheduled to close one hour after sunset on March 31.

"Steelheading can be very good during the month of March as fish become more active due to warming water temperatures," said WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff of Twisp.

"Remember, there is mandatory retention of hatchery adipose-fin-clipped fish up to the maximum daily limit of four steelhead. And since March 15, there are two section closures on the Okanogan River – one is from the first power line crossing near Coulee Dam Credit Union Building in Omak upstream to the mouth of Omak Creek, and the second one is from the Tonasket Bridge on 4th Street downstream to the Tonasket Lagoons Park boat launch. Selective gear rules are in effect for the Okanogan, Similkameen and Methow rivers."

Several Okanogan County lakes open to fishing April 1. Jateff says Spectacle Lake, southwest of Tonasket, should produce catches of yearling **rainbow trout** up to 12 inches, with carryover fish to 15 inches. Washburn Island Pond, a diked oxbow of the Columbia River near Fort Okanogan State Park, mostly produces **largemouth bass** with some **bluegill** available.

Other waters opening on April 1 for catch-and-release fishing are Davis and Campbell lakes near Winthrop, Rat Lake near Brewster and Big and Little Green lakes near Omak. Predominant species for these lakes are rainbow trout.

"Anglers planning to fish the Winthrop area lakes -- Davis and Campbell -- should check first as the ice may not be completely melted by the opener," Jateff said.

Southcentral Washington

WDFW district fish biologist Eric Anderson of Yakima says fishing is still good in the region's year-round-open lakes.

"We just stocked more hatchery **rainbow trout** in I-82 Ponds 1, 2 and 3 near Yakima," he said. "About 2,500 one-third-pounders went into each of those waters this week. More will go into other waters in the region by the end of this month or early next month."

See the WDFW website for weekly catchable-size trout stocking details at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/plants/weekly/> .

Forecasts for strong **chinook salmon** returns to the Columbia River this summer could lead to improved fishing in the river and Washington's ocean waters. Public meetings in March and April will discuss regional fisheries issues and input will be considered as the season-setting process moves into the "North of Falcon" and Pacific Fisheries Management Council meetings to

determine the final 2010 salmon seasons. This year's meetings include one in the Tri-Cities area – Tuesday, March 23, 6 - 9 p.m., at the Benton Public Utilities District (PUD) building, 2721 W. 10th Ave. in Kennewick.

TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail

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

Sturgeon stocking in the Middle Willamette:

<http://cartt.4j.lane.edu/ttr/sturgeon/sturgeon.html>

McKenzie River Info

<http://flyanglersonline.com/features/greatrivers/mckenzie/>

GOOD LUCK!