

The Guide's Forecast - volume 12 issue number 49

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 10th – December 16th, 2010**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- The only keeper sturgeon tallied in last weekends creel check occurred in the Portland to Longview stretch. The Bonneville stretch is effectively over for the next few months. Some good sturgeon fishing is likely to occur however above Bonneville, where in recent years, good adult populations have fueled a strong but short consumptive fishery.

Fishery managers are busy calculating 2011 predictions due out next week. Season shaping for salmon and sturgeon will occur over the next several months so stay tuned for public meetings. Now is a good time to purchase your 2011 licenses and tags.

With the river high, steelhead are crossing Willamette Falls in single digits daily. Plunkers at Meldrum Bar have been picking up a few winters.

McKenzie water levels have dropped but remain high for fishing.

The Santiam system is too high and the water too cold for the system to fish well.

Early hatchery winter steelhead are available in the Clackamas with drift fishing most productive. It's best to wait until the water level starts to drop. Higher river levels remain in the forecast, making Eagle Creek an attractive option through the weekend.

A few early Sandy winter steelhead have been caught but results will improve in the coming weeks.

Northwest – High water levels this week have kept most anglers focusing on smaller river systems. Charlie Wooldridge of Bay City landed a chrome chinook buck in the 20-pound range early last week fishing the lower Kilchis River using a Flatfish wrapped with sardine fillet. A few hatchery winter steelhead are also available but this system doesn't get the planted numbers other north coast systems do.

The Wilson has been high for much of the week but anglers did get out over the weekend. Chinook are still being caught on the Wilson but with all the early positive news for steelhead, anglers are switching over to target early fish.

The North Fork Nehalem hatchery has been a steelhead highlight on the north coast recently. In the lower flows, bobbers and jigs produced well. Fishing near the hatchery will likely remain productive for the next few weeks, especially as fish get recycled back downstream by hatchery personnel.

Necanicum anglers have been tangling with steelhead as this system closely mimics the North Fork Nehalem when returns are good. Three Rivers, a Nestucca River tributary near Hebo, is also peaking right now and anglers fishing near the hatchery should produce good weekend catches.

A brief window of offshore opportunity early this week produced magnificent crab catches in the ocean out of Garibaldi and Depoe Bay. A delay in the commercial crab opener contributed to sport success. Anglers sticking close to shore had good conditions for ling cod and rockfish. Anglers aren't likely to see ocean conditions like that again for a long time, certainly not this weekend.

Southwest – Ocean crabbing opened at the beginning of December and has been productive for quality Dungeness when ocean conditions have allowed the activity.

Boats launching out of Depoe Bay have been taking limits of ling cod, rockfish and crab for many boats, good catches for others.

Trollers targeting wild coho at Siltcoos Lake have had poor results over the past week.

Rockfishing has been good off the South Jetty at Winchester Bay when wave action has allowed safe access. High water has hampered fishing on the Umpqua system.

Crabbing has remained good in lower Coos Bay despite recent rains. Winter steelhead had been caught on the South Coos and East Millicoma prior to the water levels rising.

Drift gear allowed anglers to hook a good number of chinook on the Elk River over the past weekend. Rain this week should improve prospects with winter steelheading improving. Ocean trolling at the mouths of the Elk and Sixes is closed.

Winter steelhead are entering the Rogue but high water has prevented fishing around Agness. Anglers are taking some chinook on plugs in the Grants Pass stretch where a few steelhead have been caught. High flows have slowed fishing on the upper Rogue.

Rockfishing has been excellent out of the Port of Brookings when the ocean is calm enough to recreate on. Salmon and steelhead are available in the Chetco although chinook catches (and bright fish availability) are winding down as steelhead action is ramping up. Checking the river level and flow before you hit the river will determine whether anglers pack drift or plunking gear.

Eastern – Nymphing has been most effective for trout on the lower Deschutes. Summer steelhead remain available above Maupin but are pretty well colored up. There was snow on the ground at Maupin on Tuesday this week.

Crescent Lake has produced some large mackinaw to trollers launching in the snow.

The Grande Ronde remains a good option for cold weather steelheaders. A slight warming trend should produce better catches with current creel statistics indicating a fish for every 4 to 7 hours of effort.

SW Washington – Steelhead remain the most viable species to pursue with the Cowlitz a top option for district river systems. Side-drifters will likely take the bulk of the catch, especially in higher flows.

The Kalama and Lewis Rivers are also options but these systems typically get smaller returns than the Cowlitz. They also receive less effort so catch rates can be similar to the more popular system.

Don't overlook the Washougal this time of year. This smaller system can produce quality catches, especially on a good return year.

Columbia River Fishing Report – With steelhead the last viable fishery on the mainstem, you won't find much competition for any other species, any other place, other than the John Day Pool.

There is some effort for sturgeon in the Portland to Longview stretch and a single keeper and a handful of shakers were taken by boaters in this stretch last week. Anglers can look to good catch and release opportunities above Bonneville Dam but the consumptive fishery up there won't "re-charge" until the 2011 season gets underway.

Circling back around to the upstream area of John Day Pool, anglers did find good success for steelhead last week, particularly for wild fish (which must be released). Weekly creel check revealed: (cut and paste right from the ODF&W website) "Weekly checking showed one adipose fin-clipped steelhead kept, plus three unclipped steelhead released for 13 bank anglers; and eight adipose fin-clipped steelhead kept, plus 24 unclipped steelhead released for 21 boats."

Note the catch rate for steelhead for boaters was better than a fish per boat! It's clearly peak season here and it won't get much better than that.

The Guide's Forecast – If you're going to fish the mainstem, catch and release sturgeon fishing above Bonneville Dam may be one of the better choices for this time of year. Good bait may be hard to come by and to be honest, I'm not even sure of the regulations about using smelt now (a newly listed species), in any NW fishery. If it's legal, it would be a top bait for this area right now. Can anyone answer this question?

Steelheaders will keep trolling plugs in the John Day Pool and running bobbers and jigs in the John Day Arm. A slight warming trend should improve the action but windy weather will still make trolling a challenge. This fishery should begin to slow down in the coming weeks but it will remain one of the best options for anglers in this higher reach of the mainstem Columbia.

The first batch of Columbia River smelt usually enter the river about now but it doesn't really matter this year. There will be no sport or commercial harvest of the species this season, and maybe never again, unless it comes off the endangered species list. Sturgeon that typically took advantage of this valuable food source are now well dispersed into other estuaries up and down the NW coastline.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Rain is forecast to fall in the coming week and it's predicted to be heavy at times. While this will surely put some of the valley rivers out of shape, the good news in this equation is that it will be a warm rain which will help to alleviate cold water in many locations and, while it will hose fishing prospects (literally and figuratively) for a while, when there's a break in the precipitation, rivers will fish well as they drop.

Steelhead counts at Willamette Falls dropped off earlier this week with high, off-color water but have picked up again since December 6th with about 500 winters upstream now.

The water level and flow is on the rise at the McKenzie but the water temperature is also on the way up.

Boaters are advised to remain above Stayton or below Green's Bridge as the stretch from Shelburn to Green's Bridge is hazardous due to trees downed by the wind and unpredictable channels cut by high water.

Sheridan Pond received 50 brood trout this week. Hooking one of these large rainbows would give any young angler a thrill.

From the ODFW: **EVENTS**

Dec. 11 – Winter fly fishing seminar with Rob Crandall, 10 a.m., Royal Treatment Fly Shop, 21570 Willamette Drive, West Linn. Contact: Joel Lafollette, 503-850-4397.

Dec. 12 – Winter steelhead fly tying seminar with Kevin Erickson, 11 a.m.–2 p.m., River City Fly Shop, 11429 S.W. Scholls Ferry Road, Beaverton. 503-579-5176.

Dec. 12 – Winter steelhead clinic with Jack and Brandon Glass, 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., Dick's Sporting Goods, 1140 N. Hayden Meadows Drive. 503-285-5040.

The Guide's Forecast – Anglers in lawn chairs during dry weather or waiting patiently in the cab of their pickups in the rain are taking a Clackamas-bound hatchery steelhead now and again in a plunking game, the major requirement of which is a good supply of patience.

The McKenzie will fish well in winter mode once the water level starts to drop.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – The Clackamas was on the rise as of the morning of Thursday, December 19th. Since fishing early winter steelhead can be sufficiently frustrating when numbers are few, wait until the water level starts to drop to make an effort here. Here's near-real-time data:

http://nwis.waterdata.usgs.gov/or/nwis/uv/?site_no=14210000&PARAMeter_cd=00065,00060

Sandy water levels are also on the rise with rain this week with little respite in sight for a while. Here's the link for river info at Bull Run: <http://nwis.waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis/uv?14142500>

The Guide's Forecast – Try around the mouth of Eagle Creek on the Clackamas as some early winters are being hooked here. While a couple have been landed within the creek, this fishery will improve later in the season as the crowds become intolerable. Only a few, late-running, wild coho will still be available as the season is about over for the year.

While many of the steelhead being hooked on the Sandy are wild, an unusual number have been of hatchery origin. Since stocking here has been only of broodstock fish, the early return this year has surprised both anglers and biologists, although the former quite pleasantly. While fishing is still only slow to fair, hookups can occur anywhere from Oxbow downstream. Results are will improve in the weeks and months to come.

North Coast Fishing Report – A rough stretch of weather has dampened effort on the north coast with the exception of smaller systems that are witnessing good returns of early hatchery steelhead. Top on the list remains the North Fork Nehalem River where bank anglers are having a good time with adult returns, especially those targeting fish near the hatchery. For much of the week, persistent anglers could have expected to have a great chance at landing a fish or two.

This years early returns seem to mimic what we witnessed last year on this and other north coast systems. Although a strong early return bodes well for the remainder of the season, it isn't the "canary in the coal mine" which might indicate the late return to be strong as well. But couple this early return with the strong wild coho now being seen on these systems and it's clear that survival rates were good for these fish when they entered the ocean.

Other north coast systems have produced well including the Necanicum and Three Rivers near Hebo. Recent reports from the Necanicum produced fair catches downstream of Kloodchie Creek (largest sitka spruce tree). Some wild fish were reportedly caught as well.

The Kilchis is also a good option when other systems are just a bit too high to fish.

The Wilson has produced some fair early season catches but river levels have been a bit high lately. To exacerbate the problem, a significant slide near milepost 20 is contributing large amounts of sediment to the mainstem Wilson, slowing catches as well. Stray hatchery steelhead are likely to be found in the Trask River when conditions allow.

Chinook were recently caught on the Wilson River and in high flows, can often be found in typical steelhead haunts. Plugs often take these fish in the shallower tail-outs in higher flows but diver and eggs can be effective as well. The Wilson and Kilchis remain the only real late river options for chinook.

Tillamook Bay has been void of angling effort with persistent winds for much of the week coming from one direction or the other. Early in the week, an east wind chilled the area but calmed the common westerly swell offshore. This made for some rare December opportunities for ocean recreationalists to take advantage of calm seas. Ocean crabbing was as good as it gets with willing participants taking easy limits of big, quality crab. Some dedicated bottomfishers found good catches of rockfish and lingcod. Depoe Bay was another strong option but the farther you went offshore, the more rough the weather got even though it was coming from the east.

Estuary crabbing remains poor although some good catches continue to come from Netarts Bay and of course the lower Columbia River.

Sturgeon effort remains next to non-existent due to rough weather conditions.

The Guide's Forecast – Although river levels are forecasted to be good through Friday, by the weekend, forecasters are expecting a large system to bring most north coast streams to near flood level. This should put out even the smallest of streams for steelhead and salmon options through the weekend.

Of course, the forecast may not come to fruition. It is likely however, even if we don't get the rainfall amounts predicted, that the smaller systems will fish the best in these conditions. Not only do they have some of the better returns on the north coast, but they are smaller streams and therefore, easier to target holding fish if you can read steelhead water.

Prioritize these systems in order but keep in mind that due to the good fishing, crowds will follow:

- 1) North Fork Nehalem Hatchery- the closer to the hatchery you are, the better the results.
- 2) Three Rivers – same goes for this system, the closer to the hatchery, the better.
- 3) Necanicum River and Highway 30 systems (Gnat and Big Creek, Klaskanine River) should all be equally productive.
- 4) Kilchis River- not as many hatchery plants and a more extensive system for fish to hide.
- 5) Wilson River- will not clear by the weekend but when it does, fish should be well distributed throughout the system. An occasional chinook may fall but only keep the bucks as hens will likely cut pale.
- 6) Trask River- a few hatchery steelhead strays, maybe a late winter chinook. Try the Dam Hole in higher flows, only accessible to bank anglers.

Tillamook Bay will remain a poor option for salmon and sturgeon although that's not always the case. High winds and brown water will hamper success for both species. Don't even think about crabbing this estuary. The tides aren't very conducive to sturgeon fishing either. The ocean is NOT an option.

Crabbing could be good in the lower Columbia or Netarts Bay. Weather however may be downright deadly. Don't be foolish, they're only crab!

Central & South Coast Reports – High seas, high wind, high drama offshore. It won't be worth taking a chance on an offshore launch over the coming week. If forecasts remain accurate, bots will be kept at bay from Newport to Brookings.

When boats have been able to get out of the bay at Newport, they have found fair to good fishing for rockfish and lings along with limits or near-limits of large Dungeness in excellent condition. Similar results have been reported by boats launching out of Depoe Bay.

Steelheading has been very slow on the Siuslaw but incidental catches of coho have kept anglers somewhat entertained if not mollified.

Fishing has remained poor at Siltcoos Lake for trollers, many of whom are hanging it up for the season to pursue other species.

Results for wild coho are somewhat better at Tenmile Lake although trollers should expect to encounter a mix of bright and dark fish. Tenmile is scheduled to remain open through the end of the year or the unlikely fulfillment of a quota of 500 coho.

Few Chinook are being taken in Winchester Bay as most have migrated upriver. Crabbing remains good, however, as does rockfishing off the South Jetty whenever the ocean lays down. Dark coho and a few lingering, darker Chinook are in the Umpqua mainstem along with a few, fresh winter steelhead although the 2010/2011 return is forecast to be a good one. Winter steelhead have started up the North Umpqua as the first few have been counted at Winchester Dam. Winter steelhead are tricking into the South Umpqua with the better fishing opportunities available in the first few months of 2011.

Boats crabbing near the jetties in Coos Bay have been enjoying excellent results. Rainfall has not reduced catches although that possibility exists with every passing storm front. Winter steelheading has improved with the South Coos as well as the East and West Millacoma producing steady catches. Drift gear with corkies or cured eggs has been effective.

Plunking has produced a few winter steelhead on the Coquille but fishing overall has been slow. Results are expected to improve in coming weeks as winters move into the East, South and North Forks.

The Elk River has been productive for Chinook when conditions have allowed. As of Thursday this week, rain which has forecast had not materialized and the river was dropping. It will fish well whenever this is the case for weeks to come. Boaters are reminded that motors are not allowed here.

Although a few winter steelhead have been taken on the lower Rogue, with the river on the rise, results have been poor recently. The latest flow was about 6,700 cfs at Agness early Thursday this week. Given the time of year, fishing will improve when the river starts to drop. Coho remain available on the middle Rogue and while susceptible to spinners, they are mostly wild and many

are dark. A few winters have been taken but anglers in this stretch are still anticipating the main push to come as the run kicks into high gear in the coming weeks. With the flow up and the water temperature down, fishing has slowed on the upper Rogue but this situation hasn't decreased the pressure which has remained high for the occasional steelhead or coho.

Winter steelheading has been improving on the Chetco River when water levels are conducive. At this writing on December 9th, the river had risen late Wednesday this week but was dropping early Thursday. The latest data at Brookings indicated the flow was about 5,500 cfs which is plunking water. Chinook catches have continued to taper off as the percentage of dark fish has increased.

Dave Pitts of SalmonTroutandSteelhead.com sends this:

Plunkers get ready

"The transition continues as salmon taper off and steelhead move up river.

As always this time of year anglers both on bank and boat need to study the Chetco's flow, this will dictate methods for boaters, side drifting or pulling shots.

The Chetco like other coastal rivers once the water table is filled will retain that Kenai green tint that screams steelhead, the Upper Chetco above the Ice Box Bridge is a pristine run for anglers wanting to catch fish and see incredible scenery.

Boaters have been connecting on early steelhead while fishing from the Low water bridge area down river to Loeb. Most of these fish are coming on Hot N Tots with a 24 inch leader to a glob of boraxed roe. Side drifters have also been taking a few dandy fish in the 12 pound range from the Willows to Moffit Rock.

Pink works are making an early statement as anglers tossing these bright tubes into the soft side of the seam or behind a big rock where holding fish tend to lay in rest can't pass em up.

Salmon anglers are seeing a steady decline in hook ups throughout the Chetco, most fish are dark and spawning but as ways a few bright fish have made their way into the system. Most of the kings that remain and have been taken are in the lower part from Loeb down. Three more Coho have been hooked and released while fishing above the Ice Box Bridge area this makes sixteen that have been reported.

"Outlook for steelheaders targeting the Chetco, Bank anglers will look at the Social Security area, the lower end of Social Security is the hot spot; it pinches prior to fish being able to make it into the flat. Spin N Glo's, Sherbet (Tequila Sun Rise) Pink Pearl, Stop N Go's in Size 2's and 4's are the ticket.

Bank anglers should target, below social Security at the Gate hole, across at the South Water tower the bottom of Social Security and throughout this bar. The North Folk and

"Make sure to try the Piling Hole side of the river on the South Bank, access can be gained here but bring your waders. This area will bring you directly across from the North Fork and is great for float fishing and side drifting from the bank.

Elk River

"Guide Casey Malepsy of Casey's Guide Service fished Brookings Art Selby and friend coming up with 11 kings caught and released and retaining a few good ones. The Elk will begin tapering off

as Christmas coming into view but at this time is one to look at. Watch the flows on this river and boat traffic can be an issue."

Central and Eastern Oregon – While fly anglers may see some Blue-Winged Olive hatches on the lower Deschutes at the warmest part of the day, small nymphs will generally be most effective.

With whitefish on the spawn at Crooked River, small egg patterns are effective in fooling resident rainbows. Expect an incidental catch of whitefish as well.

Streamers and nymphs have been effective for bull trout on the Metolius as the bite improves.

A warming trend has been taking place on the east side over the past couple of days which will improve the chances of BWO and midge hatches.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report for December 2010

North Puget Sound

During the holiday season, area anglers have a decision to make: cast for steelhead in the local rivers or head out onto Puget Sound, where fisheries for crab and blackmouth salmon are under way.

Marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands), 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) and 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) are open for **salmon** fishing. Anglers fishing those marine areas have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook salmon.

Steve Thiesfeld, Puget Sound salmon manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), said anglers who put time in on the water could hook some nice-size fish, especially around the San Juan Islands. "Anglers fishing for blackmouth in December traditionally have had success in the San Juan Islands," he said. "The catch rates in the San Juans are some of the highest and the salmon tend to be a little larger."

Thiesfeld reminds anglers that salmon fishing in Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet) closes Dec. 1. **Crabbing** also is open in some marine areas of Puget Sound. Marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu), 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 9, 10, 12 (Hood Canal) and 13 (south Puget Sound) are open for sport crabbing seven days a week through Jan. 2.

The daily catch limit in Puget Sound is five Dungeness crab, males only, in hard-shell condition with a minimum carapace width of 6¼ inches. In addition, fishers may catch six red rock crab of either sex per day, provided those crab measure at least 5 inches across. Additional information is available on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/shellfish/crab/>.

For a change of pace, anglers in the region may want to venture out in the evening and try jigging for **squid** in Puget Sound. Good spots include the Elliott Bay Pier in Seattle and the Edmonds Pier. More information on squid fishing is available on the department's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/shellfish/squid/>. Information on fishing piers is available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/piers/>.

In freshwater, several rivers are open for **steelhead** fishing, including the Skagit, Snohomish, Skykomish, Snoqualmie and Green (Duwamish). "Fishing for hatchery steelhead really gets going

around mid-December, when we traditionally see the peak of the run," said Bob Leland, WDFW's steelhead program manager. "As long as the weather cooperates and the rivers stay fishable, anglers should have some good opportunities to hook a steelhead."

Leland reminds anglers that Whatcom Creek, and portions of the North Fork Nooksack, North Fork Stillaguamish and Samish rivers close Dec. 1. For details on the early closures, check the rule changes at <https://fortress.wa.gov/dfw/erules/efishrules/>.

Rainbow trout are another option for freshwater anglers, who might want to try casting for lunkers at Beaver Lake near Issaquah. About 2,300 hatchery rainbows - averaging 2 to 3 pounds each - were released into the lake in early November. Beaver Lake, which is one of several westside lowland lakes open to fishing year-round, is best fished by small boat, although anglers also can be successful fishing from shore.

Other good bets during December are Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish, where anglers can hook **perch, cutthroat** and **smallmouth bass**. Anglers targeting perch should fish near deep ledges, said WDFW fisheries biologist Danny Garrett, who recommends using nightcrawlers. "Perch are generally caught within a couple feet of the bottom," he said. For cutthroat or smallmouth bass, try trolling deep, 30-100 feet or more. "Anglers will likely have to put in some time to hook a smallmouth, but those that do could catch a big fish," Garrett said.

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

The holiday season has arrived and with it comes opportunities to hook hatchery steelhead on several coastal streams, crabbing and salmon fishing in Puget Sound and razor clam digs on five ocean beaches.

An early December **razor clam** dig has been approved at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks and Kalaloch. Opening dates and evening low tides are:

- Dec. 3, Fri. - 4:43 p.m., (-0.8 ft.), Twin Harbors
- Dec. 4, Sat. - 5:29 p.m., (-1.2 ft.), Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Dec. 5, Sun. - 6:14 p.m., (-1.3 ft.), Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Dec. 6, Mon. - 6:56 p.m., (-1.2 ft.), Twin Harbors

Later in December, razor clammers will have another opportunity. Tentative opening dates and evening low tides for that dig are:

- Dec. 31, Fri. - 3:40 p.m., (0 ft.), Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Jan. 1, Sat. - 4:31 p.m., (-0.4 ft.), Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Jan. 2, Sun. - 5:18 p.m., (-0.7 ft.), Twin Harbors

Clam diggers are reminded that they should take lights or lanterns for the nighttime digs and to check weather and surf forecasts before heading out. No digging will be allowed before noon on any of the five razor-clam beaches. Harvesters are allowed to take no more than 15 razor clams and must keep the first 15 they dig, regardless of size or condition. Each digger's clams must be kept in a separate container.

All diggers age 15 or older must have an applicable 2010-11 fishing license to harvest razor clams on any beach. Licenses, ranging from a three-day razor clam license to an annual combination fishing license, are available on WDFW's website at <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov> and from license vendors around the state.

Meanwhile, **winter steelhead** fisheries are under way in the region, where more and more hatchery fish are expected to move into rivers as the month progresses. During the last week of November, anglers were catching large hatchery steelhead on some rivers, said Kirt Hughes, regional fishery manager for WDFW. "December and January are prime months for hatchery steelhead fishing, and should be productive for anglers as long as the weather cooperates and the rivers stay in shape," he said.

Anglers fishing the Quillayute and portions of the Bogachiel, Calawah, Hoh, and Sol Duc rivers have a daily limit of three hatchery steelhead. In the Grays Harbor area, anglers fishing the Chehalis, Humptulips, Satsop and Wynoochee have a daily limit of two hatchery steelhead.

Bob Leland, WDFW's steelhead program manager, reminds anglers that they will not be allowed to catch and keep **wild steelhead** on eight Olympic Peninsula rivers until mid-February. Earlier this year, the annual opening date for wild steelhead retention was changed from Dec. 1 to Feb. 16 on eight rivers with fisheries for wild steelhead.

That change, adopted by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission last February, applies to fisheries for wild steelhead on the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc rivers. Those eight rivers are the only waters in Washington where wild steelhead retention is allowed.

The change was made to protect the early portion of the run, said Leland. He noted, however, that anglers will still have an opportunity to catch and keep a wild fish during the peak of the return. "Making this change will help to maintain the diversity of the run - including a range of late and early returning fish - that is important in preserving the wild steelhead population," Leland said.

Rather catch **salmon**? Anglers can find **late-run coho** salmon in some of the region's rivers, including the Chehalis and Satsop, where "nickel bright" fish have been hooked. For **winter chum** salmon, anglers should try fishing the Nisqually River. The late-chum run doesn't hit full stride until mid- to late December and generally remains strong until at least mid-January, said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "The Nisqually is a good fishery and the chum are typically bright and in good shape," he said. The Puyallup River also is a good option for anglers looking to hook South Sound chum.

Portions of Puget Sound also are open for salmon. Anglers fishing marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon Island) and 13 (South Puget Sound) can keep one chinook as part of a two-salmon daily limit. On Hood Canal (Marine Area 12), anglers have a daily limit of four salmon, but only one of those fish can be a chinook. Anglers are reminded that marine areas 5 (Sekiu) and 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca) are closed for salmon fishing.

Crabbing also is an option in some marine areas of Puget Sound. Marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu), 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 9 (Admiralty Inlet), 10 (Seattle/Bremerton), 12 (Hood Canal) and 13 (south Puget Sound) are open for sport crabbing seven days a week through Jan. 2.

The daily catch limit in Puget Sound is five Dungeness crab, males only, in hard-shell condition with a minimum carapace width of 6¼ inches. In addition, fishers may catch six red rock crab of either sex per day, provided those crab measure at least 5 inches across. Additional information is available on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/shellfish/crab/>.

An ADA-accessible fishing site is now open at the Bingham Creek Hatchery to persons with disabilities who permanently use a wheelchair, have a reduced fee license and/or who have a designated harvester card. More information is available at <http://bit.ly/b5PLcy>.

Before heading out, anglers should check the rules and regulations for all fisheries on WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/>.

Southwest Washington

This year's **winter steelhead** season got off to a promising start around Thanksgiving, when the first wave of fish started taking anglers' lures in several tributaries to the lower Columbia River. With decent river conditions, catch rates should continue to improve in the weeks ahead, said Joe Hymer, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

"Despite cold weather, that first jag of winter steelhead was definitely on the bite," Hymer said. "So long as the rivers don't rise too high or fall too low, we could be looking at a darn good fishery this year."

Best bets for winter steelhead include the Cowlitz, Lewis, Kalama, Grays, Washougal, Elochoman and White Salmon rivers, and Salmon Creek in Clark County. All have a two-fish daily limit, but Hymer cautions anglers to check the Fishing in Washington rules pamphlet <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/> for other rules specific to each river.

As with all steelhead fisheries in southwest Washington, only hatchery fish with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar may be retained. All wild steelhead must be released.

Water conditions, often highly variable at this time of year, can make a big difference in angler success, Hymer said. "If the water is too low, the fish get spooky - if it's too high it can be dangerous to be out there," he said.

As basic preparation for a steelheading trip, he recommends checking the Northwest River Forecast (<http://www.nwrfc.noaa.gov/>) or other sources before heading out. "Most anglers do best when water levels are rising or dropping," Hymer added. "It's a lot harder to catch steelhead in the peaks and troughs."

In deciding where to fish, it may also help to know how many smolts were planted in specific rivers and how many adult fish have returned to area hatcheries, Hymer said. In the first case, he recommends checking WDFW's smolt-planting schedule for 2009, available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/plants/steelhead/>. WDFW posts hatchery returns on a weekly basis at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hatcheries/escapement/>.

While winter steelhead are the main attraction right now, **late-stock coho** will continue to bite through December. Most of those fish are too dark for consumption, but some bright fish will make their way into anglers' creels, Hymer said. Best bet is the Cowlitz River where over 70,000 fish have returned this year.

Hymer also flagged several new fishing regulations that take effect Dec. 1 on specific rivers:

- **Grays River** - Opens to fishing for hatchery steelhead, hatchery coho, and adipose and/or ventral fin clipped chinook from the Highway 4 Bridge to the South Fork. The open area on the West Fork also expands from the hatchery intake/footbridge to the mouth that day.
- **Green River, North Fork Toutle River, and mainstem Toutle** from mouth to forks - Fishing is closed for hatchery steelhead and hatchery salmon.

- **South Fork Toutle River** - Fishing for hatchery steelhead is closed from the 4100 Bridge upstream. Fishing remains open under selective gear rules from the mouth to the bridge.
- **Lewis River** - The night closure and anti-snagging rule is lifted from Johnson Creek to Colvin Creek, although anglers may not fish from any floating device in that area until Dec. 16.
- **Blue and Mill creeks (tributaries to Cowlitz River)** - Blue Creek opens to fishing for hatchery steelhead and sea-run cutthroats while Mill Creek opens to fishing for hatchery steelhead.
- **Wind River** - Catch-and-release fishing is closed for game fish above Shipherd Falls.
- **Klickitat River** - Closed to fishing for trout, hatchery steelhead and salmon, except for salmon fishing from the Fisher Hill Bridge downstream. The salmon season from the Fisher Hill Bridge downstream remains open through January.
- **Swift Reservoir** - Closed to fishing.

Meanwhile, a **razor clam** dig has been approved early this month at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks and Kalaloch. No digging will be allowed on any of those beaches before noon.

Opening dates and evening low tides are:

- Dec. 3, Fri. - 4:43 p.m., (-0.8 ft.), Twin Harbors
- Dec. 4, Sat. - 5:29 p.m., (-1.2 ft.), Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Dec. 5, Sun. - 6:14 p.m., (-1.3 ft.), Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Dec. 6, Mon. - 6:56 p.m., (-1.2 ft.), Twin Harbors

WDFW has also scheduled a second dig this month, subject to the results of another round of marine toxin tests. Tentative opening dates and evening low tides for that dig are:

- Dec. 31, Fri. - 3:40 p.m., (0 ft.), Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Jan. 1, Sat. - 4:31 p.m., (-0.4 ft.), Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks, Kalaloch
- Jan. 2, Sun. - 5:18 p.m., (-0.7 ft.), Twin Harbors

Rather catch a **sturgeon**? Winter conditions have chilled catch rates from Bonneville Dam downriver to the Wauna power lines, but new seasons will open Jan. 1 from Bonneville to McNary Dam.

Fishery managers from Washington and Oregon will seek public comments on issues affecting Columbia River white sturgeon management and fisheries at meetings in early December in Longview and two locations in Oregon. The three meetings are designed to share information on developments that will shape sturgeon management starting next year. The meetings are scheduled at the following times and locations:

- **Longview:** Dec. 6, 6 - 8:30 p.m. Cowlitz Co. Public Utility District, 961 12th Ave.
- **Clackamas:** Dec. 7, 6 - 8:30 p.m. ODFW Northwest Region Headquarters, 17330 S.E. Evelyn St.
- **Astoria:** Dec. 9, 6 - 8:30 p.m. Holiday Inn Express, 204 West Marine Dr.

The news for **trout** anglers is that WDFW plans to plant thousands of rainbows averaging a half-pound apiece in five area lakes this month - weather permitting.

In Clark County, LaCamas Lake is scheduled to receive 8,000 fish early this month; Battleground Lake, 5,000, in the middle of the month; and Kline Pond, 5,000, distributed between the middle and end of the month. Icehouse Lake in Skamania County will also receive 1,500 fish in the middle of the month.

Anglers should also be aware that Merwin Park and the Yale Park boat ramp will be closed through December while PacifiCorp stabilizes the shoreline and extends the boat ramp at Yale Park. Additional docks will also be installed at Yale Park and the parking area will be reconfigured to include a route for the disabled.

Eastern Washington

The region's four winter-only **rainbow trout** lakes open to fishing Dec. 1 and WDFW fish biologists say they all are at top production. "Catch rates in our pre-season test fisheries averaged greater than five fish per hour," said central district fish biologist Chris Donley. "That means there are thousands of eager biters in all of these winter lakes."

Southwest Spokane County's Hog Canyon Lake, 10 miles northeast of Sprague, has rainbows ranging from 10 to 15 inches, with most around 12 to 13 inches. Hog Canyon was treated in the fall of 2009 to rid the lake of tench and brown bullhead, and re-stocked this spring with 10,000 catchable-size rainbows and 5,000 rainbow fry. "Fishers need to remember the catch limits at both Hog Canyon and Fourth of July lakes," said WDFW Enforcement Sergeant Dan Rahn. "They can have a total of five trout, but only two can be over 14 inches."

Compliance with that rule will be especially critical at Fourth of July Lake, two miles south of Sprague in Lincoln County, where Donley reports the bulk of the fish are running 12 to 15 inches, with several up to 17 inches. Fourth of July Lake was also rehabilitated in the fall of 2009 to rid it of fathead minnows. The lake was restocked with 15,000 catchable rainbows and 40,000 rainbow fry.

The other two winter season trout lakes are in Stevens County - Hatch Lake, about five miles southeast of Colville, and Williams Lake, which is 14 miles north of Colville. Both were treated in the fall of 2008 to eliminate yellow perch (and goldfish in Williams), and both were restocked this past spring and in 2009.

Hatch Lake received 850 catchable rainbows and 10,000 rainbow fry in 2009, and 6,000 catchable rainbows this year. Those fish are now ranging in size from 10 to 16 inches, with most 12 to 14 inches. Williams Lake received 950 catchable rainbows and 20,000 rainbow fry in 2009, and 10,000 rainbow fry this year. They now range from 10 to 14 inches, with the bulk of the fish around 11 to 13 inches.

Whether any of the four winter trout lakes will provide safe ice-fishing early in the season depends on the weather. According to U.S. Coast Guard guidelines, no one should venture onto lake ice unless it is at least four inches thick, clear and solid. As much as nine inches may be needed to safely support snowmobiles or other vehicles. Such ice depths can form after at least a week of below freezing temperatures, both day and night.

Ice depths vary throughout a waterway due to underwater structures, springs, geothermal activity, and water movement caused by flows, wind, or waterfowl use. Rivers and streams rarely have safe ice because of constant currents. Thawing and re-freezing can create air pockets that leave ice "honeycombed" or porous and significantly weakened.

Drilling a hole in the ice from a safe, near-shore location can give anglers an idea of ice depth. However, drilling only provides an estimate of the ice depth because shallow water near shore freezes quicker than deeper water in the middle of a lake, where springs may slow the freezing process.

WDFW does not measure ice on fishing lakes and cannot guarantee ice fishing safety. But here are a few tips to help keep an outing safe:

- Don't fish alone. Let others know exactly where you and your fishing partners are going and when you plan to return.
- Keep fishing holes small and few. When drilling fishing holes with an ice auger, keep the diameter under eight inches. Bigger holes are not necessary to land fish and can create a safety hazard for others.
- Watch your step. Avoid ice fishing near feeder streams or known springs; brush, logs, plants or docks; multiple ice cracks or ice that is popping or otherwise audible; and dark-colored ice that may be weak.
- Spread out. Too many people congregated in one area may be more than the ice can safely support. Disperse weight and fishing holes.
- Be prepared for weather conditions. Dress in layers and wear thermal underwear, fleece or wool, and wind and waterproof outerwear, especially for feet, hands and head. Take extra clothes, food, water, sand for on-ice traction, and a sled for easy on-ice transport of all equipment.
- Be prepared for emergencies. Carry equipment such as ice picks or awls, rope, and personal flotation devices. Also pack a first-aid kit and matches for starting a fire.

Donley says there's also good trout fishing opportunities through the winter at several large year-round waters, including Rock, Sprague and Waitts lakes. Net-pen-reared rainbows are usually a good bet at Lake Roosevelt, the huge reservoir off Grand Coulee Dam.

Northcentral Washington

Three Okanogan County **rainbow trout** lakes switch from catch-and-release fishing to catch-and-keep fishing on Dec. 1. WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff says Big Green, Little Green, and Rat lakes offer a daily trout catch limit of five fish that can be caught on bait.

Jateff notes that year-round Patterson Lake near Winthrop can be good for **yellow perch** during the winter. Bait can be used and there is no daily limit on perch. "In fact, anglers are encouraged to retain as many perch as possible regardless of size in order to better balance the fish populations in the lake," he said. Jateff reminds anglers using the Patterson Lake access site to have a valid WDFW vehicle permit displayed.

Fish and Roses lakes in Chelan County provide good fishing during December and throughout the winter. Yellow perch and trout are the main species in Fish Lake and trout is the main species in Roses.

Jateff cautions anglers at any fishing lakes about ice that is just starting to form during the month of December. According to U.S. Coast Guard guidelines, no one should venture onto lake ice unless it is at least four inches thick, clear and solid. As much as nine inches may be needed to safely support snowmobiles or other vehicles. Such ice depths can form after at least a week of below freezing temperatures, both day and night.

Ice depths vary throughout a waterway due to underwater structures, springs, geothermal activity, and water movement caused by flows, wind, or waterfowl use. Rivers and streams rarely have safe ice because of constant currents. Thawing and re-freezing can create air pockets that leave ice "honeycombed" or porous and significantly weakened.

Drilling a hole in the ice from a safe, near-shore location can give anglers an idea of ice depth. However, drilling only provides an estimate of the ice depth because shallow water near shore freezes quicker than deeper water in the middle of a lake where springs may slow the freezing process.

WDFW does not measure ice on fishing lakes and cannot guarantee ice fishing safety. But here are a few tips to help keep an outing safe:

- Don't fish alone. Let others know exactly where you and your fishing partners are going and when you plan to return.
- Keep fishing holes small and few. When drilling fishing holes with an ice auger, keep the diameter under eight inches. Bigger holes are not necessary to land fish and can create a safety hazard for others.
- Watch your step. Avoid ice fishing near feeder streams or known springs; brush, logs, plants or docks; multiple ice cracks or ice that is popping or otherwise audible; and dark-colored ice that may be weak.
- Spread out. Too many people congregated in one area may be more than the ice can safely support. Disperse weight and fishing holes.
- Be prepared for weather conditions. Dress in layers and wear thermal underwear, fleece or wool, and wind and waterproof outerwear, especially for feet, hands and head. Take extra clothes, food, water, sand for on-ice traction, and a sled for easy on-ice transport of all equipment.
- Be prepared for emergencies. Carry equipment such as ice picks or awls, rope, and personal flotation devices. Also pack a first-aid kit and matches for starting a fire.

Jateff said that **steelhead** fishing in the upper Columbia River tributaries slows down as air temperatures continue to drop during December. However, boat anglers on the mainstem Columbia above Wells Dam should have better success on the open water. Areas to try would be just upstream of Wells Dam and at the mouth of the Methow River in Pateros. Selective gear rules are in effect, except bait is allowed in the mainstem. There is a mandatory retention on adipose-fin-clipped hatchery steelhead, and a night closure.

Steelhead fishing on the mainstem Columbia picked up at the end of November with reports of fish being caught below Wells Dam, at the mouth of the Entiat River, and in the area across from the Eastbank Hatchery. Selective gear rules are in effect for the mainstem and bait is allowed.

Southcentral Washington

Catch rates for **hatchery steelhead** have picked up in the Hanford Reach, and should stay on course through the month of December, said Paul Hoffarth, a regional fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). The question, though, is whether anglers will brave the elements to catch those fish as they move upriver.

"Angler participation definitely drops off as we head into the winter months," Hoffarth said. "Also fishing tends to get spotty - good one day, bad the next. But the fish are still out there for those who want to catch some."

As with all area steelhead fisheries, only hatchery fish with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar may be retained. All wild steelhead must be released.

The Yakima River Basin is closed to steelhead fishing, but the **whitefish** season opens Dec. 1 on both the Yakima and Naches rivers. As before, the catch limit is 15 fish per day, but anglers are required to use one single-point hook, measuring no more than 3/16 inch from point to shank (hook size 14).

Anglers fishing the Yakima River above Roza Dam may use bait, as noted in the Fishing in Washington rules pamphlet. Trout fishing is catch-and-release.

Trout anglers should be aware that Mattoon Lake got 120 broodstock rainbows in late November, as did Fio Rito Lake. But WDFW fish biologist Jim Cummins cautions against trying to

fish through the ice on any lake in the region in the coming weeks. "It's not safe," he said. "Most lakes are only partially frozen and the chances of falling through the ice are just too great."

TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail

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

Angler's 405-pound yellow fin tuna is heaviest on record:

<http://www.grindtv.com/outdoor/blog/22650/anglers+405-pound+yellowfin+tuna+is+heaviest+on+record/>

Annual Christmas Party at The Caddis Fly. 168 West 6th Avenue in Eugene, December 17th 2010, 4-8pm:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/24255759@N04/5230510228/lightbox/>

GOOD LUCK!