

The Guide's Forecast - volume 13 issue number 2

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 14th – January 20th, 2011**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro - Bonneville Pool anglers are scoring good catches of keepers right now. Weekend anglers tallied an average of 3 keepers per boat in this under-the-radar fishery. Success should stay consistent as long as the season remains open.

Although only a few serious anglers will participate, early spring chinook catches on the mainstem Columbia below I-5 are not unprecedented. With a good Willamette run in the forecast, a January salmon is a possibility. Fish downstream of the Multnomah Channel at St. Helens for your best opportunity.

Steelhead passage over Willamette Falls has been in the single digits daily since the first of the year. Plunking is slow at Meldrum Bar.

Santiam River levels will be high this week. With just over 1,100 fish passing Willamette Falls, fishing will be fair at best.

Bobber and jigs have been effective for steelhead on the Clackamas. The lower reaches of the Clackamas are likely to produce the best results when flows are down. Eagle Creek has been producing winters but can be crowded when the fish are in.

The Sandy River is in good shape for winter steelheading although catches have been slow to fair recently. Natives and broodstock fish should begin to make a stronger showing later this month. Low, clear water conditions call for early morning starts and small baits and drift bobbers.

Huddelston Pond, Junction City Pond, Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake are scheduled to be planted with trout.

Northwest – A cease in precipitation has slowed steelheading on the north coast. Good catches were reported in the middle of last week but tapered by the weekend when most of the angler effort took place. Larger systems such as the Wilson and Nestucca bore the bulk of the effort and fishing was fair, even with some heavy pressure.

Smaller streams remained slow with low, clear water conditions putting fish down. Fair concentrations of fish are said to remain in the lower stretches of some of these rivers however, giving additional hope to those waiting the next rain freshet to hit.

Weather systems modeled through the week should improve fishing conditions on all north coast systems, beginning with the smaller systems when flows are predicted to subside by the weekend. A mix of a few fresh steelhead and numerous spawned out fish will likely be available.

A brief window of opportunity existed for anglers seeking bottomfish and crab offshore on the central and north coasts. Ling cod action was reported as good but crabbing was surprisingly poor. The lower Columbia River however continues to put out good catches of keeper dungeness.

Good tides will occur again over the weekend for Tillamook Bay sturgeon fishers. Coinciding with these tides is good clamming opportunities. Success for diggers largely depends on surf conditions and the combined sea forecast does not look conducive to high success rates.

Southwest – While there are few days during winter when ocean conditions allow recreational boats to fish, ling cod and rockfish catches are excellent at this time of year. Rockfishing is currently open at all depths and cabezon may once again be taken as part of the seven-fish limit.

Rockfishing has been good off the South Jetty at Winchester Bay when it hasn't been stormy. Umpqua steelheaders have been putting in long days with spotty results. The majority of winter steelhead in the system are wild, which may not be retained here. Fishing has been best at the confluence and into the South Umpqua.

Coos Bay crabbers are taking good numbers of dungeness following the stretch of dry weather. Steelhead catches have been good in the river.

The Coquille River has been producing good catches of winter steelhead.

Elk and Sixes Rivers were low and clear on Tuesday this week but rain is in the forecast and steelheading will be good whenever the water is dropping and clearing following precipitation.

Steelheading has been very good on the lower Rogue. While most of the fish taken here are wild, one unclipped fish over 24 inches may be retained anywhere below the Hog Creek Boat Ramp, up to five per year as of January 1st. Winter steelhead are in the middle Rogue as well where catches have been fair to good. The upper Rogue has been slow with the water low and clear.

The Chetco was producing winter steelhead very well last week as it was dropping. There was a great deal of boat and bank pressure but plenty of hatchery fish were caught. Over the past weekend it fell below optimum level and as of January 11th, was too low and clear to fish at its best. Wild steelhead may be kept on the Chetco with the same restrictions as the Rogue.

Eastern – Trollers working the Columbia mainstem reservoirs have been doing fair for steelhead. The Dalles and John Day Pools will remain the top prospects.

Steelheaders on the Grande Ronde, Wallowa and Imnaha Rivers have poor river conditions to contend with. Ice formation limits angling days but action could pick up with a warming trend.

Crescent trollers made good catches of Mackinaw over the past weekend.

SW Washington – Persistent anglers are catching fair numbers of steelhead on the Kalama and Lewis Rivers with hatchery returns near identical with last year's returns. Plugs and sidedrifted are accounting for the bulk of the catch.

The Cowlitz is also a good option although action has tapered from previous success rates.

Battleground Lake was recently planted with 3,000 half-pound trout and numerous other district lakes were recently planted with 4 to 8-pound broodstock fish.

Columbia River Fishing Report – With the exception of pools upriver of Bonneville Dam, action remains non-existent downstream on the mainstem Columbia. With the run prediction on the books, it probably won't be long before the first spring Chinook of the season is caught. It likely won't be until February however.

Upstream of Bonneville, sturgeon anglers are doing good in the Bonneville Pool itself. The keeper per boat ratio is as good as it gets anywhere, anytime on any part of the Columbia River. Effort remained low, likely due to inclement weather but die-hards are scoring good results.

Steelhead trollers are also doing fair to good in the Dalles and John Day Pools and if the weather continues to moderate, fishing should stay fair. Trolling can be especially good after a cool stretch of weather, when it re-warms up again. Although this fishery is well past peak, it will likely continue to produce into the spring months. The quality of fish will continue to go downhill however.

Recent crabbing reports from the lower Columbia indicate there are still some good catches to be had. The size of the crab has gone down, as expected with the commercial opener, but the quality is reported as good and limits can be had if you have decent bait and working the peak part of the tide. People have been pleased with their success.

The Guide's Forecast – Unless you have plans on fishing above Bonneville Dam, don't bother putting in too much time in pursuit of sturgeon or salmon on the mainstem Columbia. If you do go upstream however, the warming trend following the mid-week freeze should prove productive.

Steelheaders should also realize some improvement in catch rates but don't count on catching a boatload of quality fish. The John Day Pool may prove the most productive but be conscious of warm weather trends that will raise water levels on the John Day River itself as it turns the water off-color due to excessive snow melt.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – With the Willamette flow moderating earlier this week, winter steelhead passage started to improve at the Falls. About 1,300 winters are upstream. Another deluge this week is likely to slow passage once again.

Levels at the North Santiam remain high but fishable. Drift boats should be cautious in higher flows.

Huddelston Pond is scheduled to be planted with 350 legal-sized trout this week. Junction City Pond should have received 350 pounders while Walling Pond is to have received 400 legal rainbows and 50 foot-long.

The Salem chapter of the Association of Northwest Steelheaders is hosting a free steelhead seminar on Tuesday, January 18th at 7 PM at the Keizer City Hall located at 930 Chemawa Rd. N.E. in Salem. Chris Nordling is scheduled to speak.

The Portland Boat show continues through Sunday, January 16th at the Expo Center.

The Guide's Forecast – With improving water conditions and better movement of winter steelhead in the lower Willamette, catches by plunkers along the bank below the mouth of the Clackamas should improve although this is a game for the patient angler. Catch-and-release sturgeon fishing is fair to good. A February retention date should be announced soon.

The North Santiam provides a good catch-and-release fishery for wild winter steelhead but numbers won't be high enough to provide action until February and into March.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – The Clackamas is in good fishing condition at this writing. Winter steelhead catches picked up over the past weekend with fish scattered throughout the system and fresh steelies entering daily.

Figure on hooking greater numbers of native steelhead at this time of year. Wild fish must be released unharmed on the Sandy.

The Guide's Forecast – Winter steelheading on the Clackamas is a good prospect for the coming weekend barring heavy precipitation. Spinners and bobber & jig rigs are getting strikes here. A little rain will improve low, clear water conditions on Eagle Creek where steelhead have started entering. It's still early for Cedar Creek to be productive. On the other hand, without many fish in the creek, the banks are yet to be jammed with winter steelhead hopefuls.

Catches of winter steelhead improved this week but the river will roil when the freezing level rises. Steelhead are well distributed from the mouth up to Cedar Creek.

North Coast Fishing Report – After a productive week coming off the last rain freshet, steelheading dropped off noticeably when flows stabilized. Despite good color and flow, the simple fact of the matter is, the fish took advantage of higher flows and headed upstream to find suitable habitat that doesn't exist in the lower river where all the boat effort takes place. The good news is, bank anglers have good access to fair numbers of early returning hatchery fish, including some quality broodstock steelhead, depending on what river system you're spending your time on.

Smaller systems have been out of play for some time but anglers are reporting good numbers of fish in the lower reaches of such systems as the North Fork Nehalem. Although the early runs on these smaller systems are past their peak, there should be another small push of fish on some of these systems although these fish, whatever few will be "fresh", will be anxious to spawn and won't be in the best shape of their lifecycle.

Weekend fishing was less than impressive although persistent anglers did have opportunities. In our case, we fished the upper Wilson (Siskeyville to Sollie Smith) having 4 bites, landing 2 fish, one spent hatchery steelhead and a dark wild coho. Three of our 4 bites took place sidedrifting, 2 on real eggs and one on EZ eggs behind yarnballs. Day 2, we floated the Trask River, putting in at Cedar Creek and drifting down to the Highway 101 takeout. It was even more barren over there as we pulled plugs and sidedrifted eggs on this system as well. Only given 2 chances on plugs and missing them both, we left the river quite discouraged.

Other reports we received from anglers were equally discouraging. Most reported the best results about 3 days before the weekend. Coming off a big freshet like we did, you can't expect good fishing for more than a few days after the river clears, especially this early in the season.

Currently, all north coast systems are high and muddy. Totally unfishable, making the most current fishing reports outdated by now.

Crabbing has been best in Netarts Bay but not as good as it was in the fall. Numbers aren't as consistent but what crab people are catching seem to be in good shape. Other estuaries began to improve prior to the current rain freshet we're now experiencing.

The Guide's Forecast – Another round of good fishing is likely to take the north coast when the high water subsides. There will be a mix of some quality fish available but a large portion of the fish in the north coast systems will likely be spent early run hatchery fish with a smaller percentage of spent wild fish. These spent early run fish will be especially prevalent on the smaller systems such as the Highway 30 streams, the Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem and Three Rivers. The Nestucca and Wilson will also have a few of these fish.

Quality broodstock fish should be available in the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers but those rivers may not fish until well after the weekend if hydrological models are correct. This may leave only the smaller streams for anglers to take advantage of or the extreme upper reaches of some of the larger systems. The mainstem Nehalem often becomes an option this time of year but that will remain off the table for a while longer.

Make no mistake however, the smaller systems should be productive to fish but don't count on a high percentage of quality take-home fish this time of year but an angler can certainly get lucky. With the positive results we've already seen this early in the season, there are surely more fresh hatchery fish to come.

And as usual, bigger, brighter baits in higher flows. Don't hesitate to anchor in strategic runs and tailouts in the higher flows. Fewer anglers are likely to fish when this technique is productive and fish are more likely to move in these prime plunking conditions. Don't anchor when the water clears as fish hold more in the defined water and more anglers are going to want to take advantage of productive water.

Better tides are on the way for those interested in sturgeon fishing on Tillamook Bay. The only problem is, you have to put up with the weather over open water, it won't be friendly. The fish should be there but little effort has taken place in this fishery to date.

If the surf cooperates, razor clam digging could be productive along Clatsop Beaches on the coming tide, due to start the minus tide series on the weekend. If you have any faith in that forecast however, don't look for optimum conditions.

Central & South Coast Reports – Now through February is considered prime time for catching ling cod off rocks and jetties as these fish move into shallow water to spawn. Keep a close eye on weather forecasts as well as wind and wave action.

The Siletz was rising and muddy mid-week. It'll depend on rain events as to whether it will fish by the weekend.

Boats launching out of Newport this week braved cold weather to make good catches of ling cod and rockfish. Ocean crabbing has been slow.

A few steelhead are being taken on the Alsea but catches are expected to improve through January.

Crabbing has been worthwhile in Winchester Bay whenever the Umpqua isn't running silty. Rockfishing has been good off the South Jetty. The mainstem Umpqua was not yet effected by rainfall as of mid-day on January 13th. Steelheading has been spotty, best at the forks. Fishing has been fair in the fly water stretch of the North Umpqua but the south Umpqua holds promise with a strong return of winters expected this season.

Coquille steelheaders have been doing very well this season. The South Fork looks to be the best bet for the coming weekend.

Rain this week has raised the water level of the Coos River. Steelheading should pick up on whenever there's enough of a break in the precipitation for the water level to be on the drop.

Tenmile Creek has been productive and should fish well over the coming week for winter steelhead.

The Elk River remained low, clear and cold mid-day Thursday this week. Rain is in the forecast and this small ocean tributary will recover quickly following a downpour and will fish well for winter steelhead.

While boat and bank anglers have been taking fresh winter steelhead from the lower Rogue, rain late this week is likely to raise and roil the water. Winters are well into the middle Rogue but this stretch will be effected by heavy precipitation. There are still a few summers on the upper river but numbers and interest are on the wane.

It's a plunker's show on the Chetco with the flow more than doubling to over 4,000 cfs at Brookings on Wednesday this week. Steelheading will be good as the river starts to drop and clear. Prior to the latest freshet, steelhead was very good with over 50% of the fish taken of hatchery origin although one wild steelhead (up to five for the season) may be retained here. Best results have come on small baits of eggs with Pautzke's cure a favorite. When the water is up, plunk a #2 or #4 Spin 'N' Glo.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Fishing is fair for straggler summer steelhead on the Deschutes around Maupin. Long-rodders are hooking up by swinging flies in this stretch.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and Oregon 4-H staffers are combining forces to hold a free angler and aquatic education instructor training seminar on January 22nd from 8:30 AM to 4 PM at the Deschutes County Fairgrounds & Expo Center at 3800 SW Airport Way in Redmond. The purpose is to train interested anglers who will be teaching kids about fishing. Lunch will be provided. Interested parties must register by January 19th either by calling David White at (541) 548-6088, Ext. 7953 or E-mailing David.White@oregonstate.edu.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report for January 2011

North Puget Sound

In January, weather conditions often dictate where an angler chooses to fish. "If the rivers are in shape, steelheading is a good bet," said Steve Thiesfeld, salmon manager for WDFW. "But if the rivers are blown out, blackmouth salmon fishing in the marine areas of Puget Sound is probably a better option."

Areas currently open for salmon fishing include 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). Anglers fishing those marine areas have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook salmon.

Thiesfeld said anglers should focus on the San Juan Islands, where fishing for blackmouth traditionally has been decent this time of year. Later in the month, anglers also might want to consider fishing Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet), which opens for salmon Jan. 16. "It's been slow in other areas of central Puget Sound - marine areas 10 and 11 - during the last weeks of December," he said. "But hopefully the fish will be there mid-January and the fishery will start strong."

Meanwhile, the **Puget Sound crab fishery** is winding down. The fishery closes at sunset on Jan. 2, and crabbers are reminded that they are required to report their winter catch to WDFW by Feb. 1. Reports are due for the season running Sept. 7 to Jan. 2, whether or not crabbers actually fished or caught crab. To submit catch reports, crabbers may send their catch record card to WDFW by mail or file their report on the department's licensing website. The mailing address is WDFW CRC Unit, 600 Capitol Way N., Olympia, WA 98501-1091. The online reporting system is available Jan. 3-Feb. 1 at https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/wdfw/puget_sound_crab_catch.html.

Winter is prime time to jig 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 **hatchery steelhead** fishing, including the Skagit, Stillaguamish, Snohomish, Skykomish and Snoqualmie. "As long as the weather cooperates and the rivers stay fishable, anglers should have some good opportunities to hook a hatchery steelhead," said Bob Leland, WDFW's steelhead program manager.

Freshwater anglers also might want to try fishing for **perch, cutthroat** and **smallmouth bass** at Lake Washington or Lake Sammamish. Anglers targeting perch should fish near deep ledges between 60 and 100 feet, 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 the same depth with hard baits near the bottom or around schools of smelt. "Anglers will likely have to put in some time to hook a smallmouth this time of year, but the bass that are caught are often trophy-sized fish," Garrett said.

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

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

Winter has arrived, but area anglers can still catch hatchery steelhead on several coastal streams, salmon in Puget Sound and razor clams on five ocean beaches.

A **razor clam** dig has been approved at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks and Kalaloch. Opening dates and evening low tides 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 hatchery steelhead** fisheries are in full swing at a number of the region's streams. "If the weather cooperates, steelhead fishing should be good throughout January," said Kirt Hughes, regional fishery manager for WDFW.

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. Hughes reminds anglers that they will not be allowed to catch and keep **wild steelhead** on eight Olympic Peninsula rivers until mid-February. In early 2010, the annual opening date for wild steelhead retention was changed from Dec. 1 to Feb. 16 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, adopted by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission last February, was made to protect the early portion of the run, said Hughes. He noted, however, that anglers will still have an opportunity to catch and keep a wild fish during the peak of the return.

Freshwater anglers looking to hook salmon also have opportunities in January. Anglers can find **late-run coho** salmon in some of the region's rivers, including the Humptulips, Naselle, Satsop and Willapa, said Hughes. "The Skookumchuck also is a good bet for anglers fishing for late-run coho, as well as steelhead," he said.

For **winter chum** salmon, anglers should try fishing the Nisqually.

On Puget Sound, Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound) remains open for **salmon**. However, regulations for Marine Area 13 change Jan. 1, when anglers will have a daily limit of one salmon. Anglers should be aware that salmon fisheries in marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon Island) and 12 (Hood Canal) close Jan. 1. Before heading out on the Sound, anglers should check the regulations on WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/>.

The **Puget Sound crab fishery** closes at sunset on Jan. 2, and crabbers are reminded that they are required to report their winter catch to WDFW by Feb. 1. Reports are due for the season running Sept. 7 to Jan. 2, whether or not crabbers actually fished or caught Dungeness crab. To submit catch reports, crabbers may send their catch record card to WDFW by mail or file their report on the department's licensing website. The mailing address is WDFW CRC Unit, 600 Capitol Way N., Olympia, WA 98501-1091. The online reporting system is available Jan. 3-Feb. 1 at https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/wdfw/puget_sound_crab_catch.html.

Opportunities to dig **clams** at Hood Canal increase Jan. 1, when Belfair State Park in Mason County opens for littleneck, butter, manila and other clams. Recent surveys indicate that the clam population will support a fishery at the park. For more information on clam-digging opportunities in Hood Canal and elsewhere, visit WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/shellfish/beaches/>.

Southwest Washington

Winter steelhead are still the name of the game in the Columbia River Basin, although several other fisheries are beginning to compete for anglers' attention. **Sturgeon** fishing reopens Jan. 1 from the mouth of the Columbia to McNary Dam, and state hatchery workers have begun planting dozens of regional lakes with thousands of **rainbow trout**.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has also scheduled an evening **razor-clam** dig to run over New Year's weekend. Digging will be allowed after noon on Dec. 31 and

Jan. 1 at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks and Kalaloch. On Jan. 2, digging will be allowed at Twin Harbors only.

Meanwhile, anglers continue to reel in adult hatchery-reared **winter steelhead** - along with some late-run **coho salmon** - from a number of Columbia River tributaries. The Cowlitz River is still the best bet for steelhead, although the Lewis, Kalama, Grays, Washougal, Elochoman and White Salmon rivers, and Salmon Creek in Clark County are also producing fish, said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist.

"As usual, river conditions basically determine success at this time of year," Hymer said. "Most anglers do best when water levels are rising or dropping. It's a lot harder to catch steelhead in the peaks and troughs."

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. The daily limit on all area rivers is two hatchery steelhead.

Starting Jan. 1, anglers may also retain up to two adult hatchery **chinook salmon** per day on the mainstem Columbia from the I-5 Bridge downstream and in the Cowlitz and Deep rivers. The daily limit is one chinook per day in the Lewis and Kalama rivers. While the bulk of the spring chinook run isn't expect to arrive until March, Hymer said some lucky anglers will likely start catching early-arriving fish by late January or early February.

"It's a good to keep the chinook regulations in mind, even if you're fishing for steelhead," he said. "Somebody has to catch the first springer of the year, and it could be you."

WDFW recently released preliminary forecasts of Columbia River salmon and steelhead returns for 2011, predicting an upriver run of 198,400 adult spring chinook compared to an actual return of 315,300 last spring. However, the upper Columbia summer chinook run is expected to be significantly higher than in 2010.

The preliminary forecasts, along with currently anticipated fishing seasons, are posted on WDFW's website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/reports_plants.html . Current fishing rules are described in 2010-11 **Fishing in Washington** pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/>) and the Northwest River Forecast is available at <http://www.nwrfc.noaa.gov/> .

Ready to catch some **sturgeon** ? All fishing areas will open to anglers Jan. 1 from the mouth of the Columbia River to McNary Dam, except for a small area in Sand Island slough upstream from Beacon Rock as outlined in the current regulation pamphlet. Fishery managers from Washington and Oregon are scheduled to meet Feb. 8 to consider changes to current catch quotas, but Hymer said that won't affect the fishery until later in the season.

"The main concern right now is the cold weather," Hymer said. "A warming trend would likely improve the bite when the season gets under way."

But there will be no fishing of any kind for **eulachon smelt** this year, he said. Once abundant in the Columbia River Basin, eulachon were listed for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act last May. Since then, Washington and Oregon have closed all sport and commercial dipping in the Columbia River system. In addition, Washington has closed all marine and freshwater areas statewide for eulachon smelt.

Anglers can, however, still use any frozen smelt they have in their freezer as bait, said Capt. Murray Schlenker, WDFW enforcement chief for southwest Washington. "There's no law about possession," he said. "You just can't fish for them."

As an alternative, anglers might consider spending a winter's day fishing for **trout** on a local lake. Throughout January, WDFW plans to stock more than two-dozen lakes in southwest Washington with thousands of rainbow trout ranging from 8-12 inch "catchables" to 5-8 pound broodstock.

"There's a lot of interest in trout fishing in winter," said John Weinheimer, another WDFW fish biologist. "During breaks in the weather, people come out to fish for them like crazy." The timing of the fish plants will vary according to the weather and the availability of tanker trucks, but Weinheimer said last year's stocking plan is a good indication of which lakes will fish. That stocking plan is posted at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/plants/region5/> on WDFW's website. "All of these lakes are ice-free in winter," he said. "Given weather conditions, we don't encourage anyone to fish through the ice in southwest Washington. It just isn't safe."

Eastern Washington

Lake Roosevelt is the region's hot spot for January fishing, says WDFW eastern regional fish program manager John Whalen. The huge Columbia River reservoir off Grand Coulee Dam provides winter fishing opportunities for big net-pen-reared **rainbow trout**. Boat and shore anglers can take up to five trout a day, although only two over 20 inches can be retained. Roosevelt also has **kokanee, walleye, smallmouth bass, burbot, lake whitefish** and **yellow perch**, but the **rainbows** star at this time of year.

Four winter-only rainbow trout lakes - Stevens County's Williams and Hatch and Spokane County's Fourth-of-July and Hog Canyon - have been producing well since opening Dec. 1. Access and style of fishing, through the ice or open water by boat or from shore, vary with winter conditions.

No agency or organization is responsible for measuring ice thickness on area lakes, so there are no guarantees that fishing through the ice is safe, said WDFW central district fish biologist Chris Donley. 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.

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. Ice depths vary throughout a waterway due to underwater structures, springs, geothermal activity and water movement.

Donley suggests following these winter fishing tips:

- Don't fish alone. Let others know 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. Also, avoid dark-colored ice; it may be weak.

- Spread out. Too many people congregated in one area may be too much for the ice to 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 opportunity through the winter at several large year-round waters, including Rock in Whitman County, Sprague Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line, and Waitts Lake in Stevens County.

In Lincoln County, WDFW Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area manager Juli Anderson reports shoreside openings in Z Lake, thanks to an aeration system. "I don't know how many folks are trekking in to Z Lake to fish those rainbow trout, but they're available," she said.

The Snake River **steelhead** catch season continues, but according to WDFW fish biologist Joe Bumgarner, it's been one of the slowest in the past decade. He guessed that those who brave the elements on the river will likely average no better than 25 hours of fishing per steelhead caught. "Lately angler effort has been so low, and checked fish so few and far between, that it's really hard to say what an average catch rate is," Bumgarner said.

Northcentral Washington

WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff of Twisp says **steelhead** fishing in the upper Columbia River is usually slow at this time of the year, but there are exceptions. "There have been reports of fish being caught within the mainstem Columbia, as well as the Okanogan and Methow rivers," Jateff said. Anglers should keep a close eye on air temperatures, because anything over 32 degrees keeps the rivers fishable and free of ice."

Jateff reminds anglers of the mandatory retention of adipose-clipped hatchery steelhead from Priest Rapids Dam upstream including the Wenatchee, Entiat, Methow, Okanogan, and Similkameen rivers.

As a change of pace from steelheading, Jateff suggests that anglers try fishing the Methow River for its sizeable population of **mountain whitefish**. "These fish can be caught readily on flies," he said. The daily limit is 15 whitefish, no minimum size, with selective gear rules in effect for whitefish in all areas that are currently open for steelhead.

Winter **rainbow trout** lakes in the Okanogan are usually in good shape for ice fishing in January. Jateff recommends Davis Lake in the Winthrop area, Big and Little Green lakes in the Omak area, and Rat Lake near Brewster. For anglers seeking **yellow perch**, Patterson Lake near Winthrop has a good population of six to 10-inch perch, as well as a few **kokanee** and **rainbow trout**.

Other popular ice fishing lakes in Okanogan County are Sidley, located east of Oroville, and Bonaparte, located east of Tonasket. Sidley has rainbow trout and Bonaparte has **eastern brook trout** and kokanee.

Jateff warns anglers to be aware that ice conditions can change at any time and become unsafe. 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. The ice can reach these standards 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. 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, this approach provides only 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 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. Also, avoid dark-colored ice; it may be weak.
- Spread out. Too many people congregated in one area may be too much for the ice to 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.

Southcentral Washington

Anglers continue to reel in hatchery **steelhead** from portions of the Columbia and Snake Rivers, although the lure of bigger fish will undoubtedly prompt some to switch gears. Starting Jan. 1, Lake Umatilla - also known as the John Day Pool - will reopen for retention of **white sturgeon** that measure 43 to 54 inches from their snout to the fork in their tail.

Anglers planning on taking part in the fishery should be aware that the annual sturgeon quota for Lake Umatilla is 165 fish, said Paul Hoffarth, a regional fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "In recent years, the quota has been reached in a couple of months, so I'd advise anglers to get out early if they want to take a sturgeon home for dinner," he said.

Another option is Lake Wallula (McNary Pool), including the Snake River below Ice Harbor Dam, which will reopen for sturgeon retention Feb. 1.

Meanwhile, **steelhead** fishing has been up and down, typical of the winter fishery, said Hoffarth, who noted that some of the best catches on the Columbia River have been reported in the Ringold area. In the Tri-Cities area, the fishery is open for retention of hatchery steelhead from John Day Dam upstream to the wooden power line towers at the old Hanford town site through March 31, 2011.

Another section of the Hanford Reach is open to fishing for hatchery steelhead from the Highway 24 bridge (Vernita Bridge) upstream to Priest Rapids Dam. Fishing in that area, which opened Dec. 8, is one of a number of angling opportunities funded by the Columbia River Salmon and Steelhead Endorsement Fee.

The lower Snake River is also open for the retention of hatchery steelhead through March 31. The daily limit in the Snake River is three hatchery steelhead and barbless hooks are required. **Walleye** fishing can get slow in winter, but there's always a chance of catching a lunker. Hoffarth said some of the largest walleye of the year are boated during the winter months near the Tri-Cities - including the 19.3-pound state record taken in Lake Wallula in 2007.

TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com

Michael Teague: Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com

Random Links

Jet-propelled calamari:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-1338220/Graham-Ekins-Japanese-squid-photos-leap-air-dodge-predators.html>

GOOD LUCK!