

The Guide's Forecast - volume 13 issue number 4

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 28<sup>th</sup> – February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro** - Although sturgeon fishing in the gorge remains poor, anglers working the Bonneville Pool continue to post remarkable catches of keepers. Warming weather contributed to a promising creel check with 63 keepers kept for 45 boats over the weekend. Bank anglers did well also.

Still no word of the season's first spring chinook but if the weather pattern continues as predicted, the prized salmon could fall at Sellwood Bridge in the coming days. Anglers troll herring close to the bottom to take fish, with last year being one of the better early seasons in recent memory.

Water flow is moderating over Willamette Falls although winter steelhead passage remains low. Catch-and-release sturgeon fishing is fair in the lower river.

Sea lions are feeding in the Clackamas. Water levels are dropping, clearing and is fishable although Eagle Creek has been slow.

Water clarity has been a problem on the Santiam system. As of Tuesday this week, it had not yet cleared.

The Sandy River has yet to sufficiently drop and clear to provide decent fishing conditions.

While primarily a catch-and-release fishery for natives, steelheading is improving on the Molalla River.

"Share your passion, bring a friend!" is the theme for the 2011 Northwest Fly Tyer and Fly Fishing Expo to be held March 11th and 12th at the Linn County Fairground and Expo Center in Albany, Oregon.

**Northwest** – A flurry of good steelheading took place on the north coast last week. As is often the case following a flood event, a prolonged period of high water is often followed by great fishing.

Smaller streams harboring early returning steelhead realized great action but predictably, the majority of fish were spawned out, providing good action but poor tablefare. The North Fork Nehalem and Necanicum were particularly productive.

A slide near Kilchis River Park has rendered that boat ramp useless. With the recent series of storms, anglers need to use extra caution when floating coastal systems. The Wilson just above Mills Bridge has a large fir tree blocking safe downstream passage. At least one boater flipped this week and with dropping flows, that stretch of river will only become more hazardous.

Larger systems such as the Wilson, Trask and Nestucca produced excellent results over the weekend with quality broodstock and wild fish coming from most systems. It's clear now that the north coast is in for a productive steelhead season with the peak still several weeks away.

The mainstem Nehalem River has been muddy all season but may begin to fish soon with the native run just getting underway. It too peaks in February and March.

Sturgeon anglers working Tillamook Bay have finally had cooperative weather to work with. Minus tides through the weekend should yield good results.

Although a moderating weather pattern should tame winds for some of the weekend, a large swell is still predicted keeping most recreational craft working inland waters. Bountiful bottomfishing and productive crabbing still await anglers when the weather allows.

**Southwest –** Storms battering the coast are a recent memory yet day after day of bluebird weather has many southwest streams and rivers in need of rain.

Crabbing is improving in district estuaries as the break in precipitation allows salinity levels to return to normal.

Winchester Bay is producing decent catches of crab. South jetty rock fishers are doing well when ocean conditions allow. South Umpqua steelheaders have been catching good numbers of mostly wild fish. North Umpqua results have also been good.

Crabbing is improving in Coos Bay.

Steelheaders on the South Fork Coquille are taking good numbers of hatchery steelhead although it has been crowded at times.

Dry weather this week has the Elk River predictably low and clear. Chinook retention is no longer allowed as these fish are spawning now.

The Rogue River is in good shape and color for winter steelheading. Results have been good in the lower and middle river this week. Summer steelheading on the upper Rogue is about wrapped up. Boaters are advised that Jan. 31 is the last day for a permit to float the wild section of the Rogue River this year. Call 541-479-3735 for information.

Offshore rock fishing has been worthwhile out of the Port of Brookings when boats have been able to get out.

The Chetco, where anglers can keep one wild steelhead per day up to five per year, has been under tremendous pressure at times recently. The river is low and will not fish well late this week.

**Eastern –** The middle and lower Deschutes remains very high.

Metolius anglers have been enjoying good results with Blue-Winged-Olives on the hatch.

Nearly full, Lake Billy Chinook is providing fair action to trollers pursuing bull trout.

Green Peter Reservoir has yet to clear. Fishing is slow.

**SW Washington –** District streams cleared this week, allowing anglers to access fair numbers of fish on the Cowlitz, Kalama and Lewis Rivers. Although some spawned out fish exist, fresh fish, including quality broodstock steelhead were available on these systems.

The North Fork Lewis should begin to produce fair catches of natives and a few hatchery fish. As flows drop, plugs should become more effective.

Despite good tides, recreational clamming may not open until mid-February along SW Washington beaches.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – With little exception, there isn't much going on in the mainstem Columbia. The Bonneville Pool however, sturgeon fishing continues to be very good for boaters and bank anglers, especially those pursuing keeper sized fish.

Creel checks indicate better than a fish per boat average. The actual boat check was showed 13 legal white sturgeon kept, plus two legal and 36 sublegal sturgeon released for 87 bank anglers; and 63 legal white sturgeon kept, plus six legal and 196 sublegal sturgeon released for 45 boats (138 anglers). The catch guideline is 1,400 fish which may not last long if catch rates like this continue.

Steelheaders upriver are still catching some fish in The Dalles and John Day Pools but success rates continue to taper and will continue to do so into early spring.

No sport or commercial harvest of smelt will take place this year and for anglers wanting to know more about the stock status and biological attributes of smelt and white sturgeon, a real interesting read is the Joint State Stock Status Report published by WDF&W located here: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/pub.php?id=01155>.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Avid anglers should still be seeking Bonneville Pool keepers if you're serious about your sturgeon fishing. There may be a few fish fall in the Portland to Longview stretch but it will be hunt and peck throughout the spring.

If the weather trend continues as predicted, water conditions on the lower Columbia may ripen for enthused anglers to pursue an early spring chinook in this section. Target the water below St. Helens as early fish are sure to be present that are destined for the Willamette River in the coming weeks. One lucky angler has to break the silence with the seasons first spring chinook; they are likely already plying Oregon waters. Will it be the lower Columbia or the Willamette producing the season's first catch?

Crabbing is becoming a poorer option on the lower Columbia, especially given the amount of freshwater coming from upstream with the latest round of pineapple express. Limits will be harder to come by in the coming months.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – As of January 25th, counts of winter steelhead at Willamette Falls remained stalled at single digits daily. The flow is gradually moderating but remains higher than normal with a visibility of about one foot. Once the level drops and visibility improves, steelhead will resume their upstream migration.

The Santiam system has remained very high since the storm dropped heavy precipitation on much of the state of Oregon.

It's rare for a hatchery fish to enter the Molalla system but some natives have been caught and released recently.

**ODFW sez:** "Seventy-five large brood trout will be released at EE Wilson for its fishing season opener on Feb. 1. Additionally, three other Willamette Valley lakes and ponds received similarly sized rainbow trout this last week. The big rainbows were released Jan. 21 at St. Louis Pond #6, Sheridan Pond and Walter Wirth Lake. These fish average about three pounds apiece."

**The Guide's Forecast** – As bank space has become available on the lower Willamette below the mouth of the Clackamas, plunking has resumed. This is an endeavor for those with patience as hookups are few and far between but winter steelhead will take Spin 'N' Glos on this stretch. A wild springer was released at Meldrum Bar on Tuesday this week and more are sure to follow. Until an opening day is set for sturgeon retention (supposedly sometime in February), catch-and-release fishing will yield fair to good results.

While the North Santiam is forecast to start dropping today, January 17th, a high freezing level will dump snowmelt into Detroit at the headwaters and, in turn, the reservoir will dump water into the river. Steelheaders are advised to skip this one in the coming weekend. There are better prospects.

Counts of winter steelhead at Willamette Falls remain too low for decent numbers to show in any upstream tributaries. As these numbers ramp up, look to the Molalla to provide worthwhile, albeit catch-and-release, fishing opportunities.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – Clackamas levels remain a bit high but the color is quite good. Pressure is increasing on Eagle Creek along with catches. Earlier this week, the hatchery reported receiving over 100 winter steelhead.

The Sandy is still murky but is gradually showing signs of recover. With the freezing level at 11,000 feet, snowmelt will contribute to river flow this week.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Late January and early February is considered the peak of the winter steelhead season on the Clackamas river. Weekend river forecasts indicate excellent water conditions. This is the angling equivalent of the stars aligning. Now would be the time to give the Clack a try. With steelhead well distributed, anywhere from the mouth of the Clack to Eagle Creek will be a possibility. Conditions look good on Eagle Creek as well.

There's a remote chance the Sandy River may fish by the coming weekend, but those who would rather play better odds might consider a different river.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – Most of us knew the fishing would be good following the drop from many days of downpours. Well, it was really good for those able to take advantage of the weekend; and there were a lot of you.

As predicted, smaller streams, notably the Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem produced good catches but by far, the bulk of the catch was spawned-out, early run fish headed back to the ocean. They were snapping good however with some anglers reporting double-digit results on the Necanicum recently. North Fork anglers have been somewhat disappointed, knowing that there are good numbers of fish present but not so willing to bite. Like the Necanicum, most will be down-streamers and not fit for tablefare or even the smoker for that matter.

And speaking of smaller systems, more dynamic hydraulics take place, making them more challenging to drift. No navigational hazards are reported as of late but the Kilchis River Park Ramp is out of commission as a slide has the road blocked to the popular launch. County crews have stated clearing this road is a low priority but it shouldn't take too much longer before it's open again.

Larger systems produced good catches with some anglers also reporting double-digit success on the Wilson as soon as the water cleared enough to gain confidence. As is typical, sidedrifters ruled the roost with small clusters of eggs producing the best results in the clearing system. By early in the week, plugs were becoming effective when fish began to slow up producing a mix of fresh and spent steelhead with a rare chinook still falling on this system. The Trask and Nestucca produced similar results on their respective drops.

Most recently, boaters struggled on the Wilson but one guide reported hooking 5 and landing 4 very fresh fish the old fashioned way, driftfishing from the boat. Other boats reported poor catch statistics on Tuesday but this guide just sat down on some good looking water and worked it with bait. Fish are less likely to move in the lower flows, especially during the bulk of the daylight hours. Anglers need to be aware of a log-jam blocking the river a little ways upstream of Mills Bridge. One boat was lost recently and as flows drop, this bottleneck only becomes more treacherous.

Anglers fishing the Trask most recently have come up with some fair results. During the higher flows, the upper reaches fished well for boaters and bank anglers but now with the dropping flows, the lower reaches are the better bet. A rare broodstock stray is in the mix, mostly natives over there.

The mainstem Nehalem is beginning to fall into shape and should have fish present but reports are sparse from this system.

Sturgeon effort is picking up in Tillamook Bay with anglers working all three major slots in the middle estuary. Bay City is getting some attention but the bulk of the effort and catch remains in the West Channel. Fresh sand shrimp will produce the best results.

Crabbing remains poor in most north coast estuaries and is only slightly better in Netarts Bay.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Moderating weather systems will keep flows stable in the coming week, keeping interest in steelhead in the lower drifts. Although fish should be well distributed throughout all NW Oregon systems, bank anglers will have the best access in the higher reaches.

As we've mentioned in previous weeks, smaller systems will continue to boot "boots" primarily. By "boots" we mean spent steelhead working their way back downstream to the ocean. It will become even more clear that north coast streams experienced a good return as catches of these less than desirable fish should be quite good. Boot fishing should be good on the North Fork Nehalem, Necanicum, Three Rivers and Highway 30 streams. The mainstems of the Wilson and Nestucca should also harbor these fish but most likely in the lower reaches.

Fresh fish, including some quality broodstock and natives should be available on the Wilson, Nestucca and Siletz Rivers. With the lower flows however, the most productive reaches should remain in the lower drifts for those that have access to boats. Smaller baits and more subdued colors should produce better results. Plugs should become more effective as well.

The mainstem Nehalem should begin to fish this weekend. The river will still likely have some color but use big, bright baits and lures and you'll have to cover a lot of water in this big system if you want to score results.

Good sturgeon tides for Tillamook Bay anglers this weekend. Use sand shrimp in the well defined channels, targeting the last half of outgoing tide and the first part of incoming. Don't spend time in the same place on the tide change unless you had good fishing on the outgoing tide in that same location.

Razor clam digging may be pretty good on this tide series along Clatsop Beaches and for other species of clams in our coastal estuaries.

Crabbing should pick up in several estuaries as well but Netarts will likely remain one of the better bets.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – Offshore conditions are mixed for the coming weekend. Conditions are predicted to moderate off the central Oregon coast on Saturday with wind and wave action increasing on Sunday. When conditions have allowed, catches of rockfish and ling cod have been good.

Siletz River steelheaders are experiencing slow to fair results for very bright steelhead. The river is at decent level and is in very good color.

Cured roe has been effective in catching winter steelhead on the Alsea River. These should be drifted naturally without using excessive weight.

The Siuslaw dropped this week and while still murky, is clear enough to fish. Dredging corkies was the key to hooking up as the river provided fair to good fishing mid-week. Pressure has been extremely heavy at times. Whitaker Creek has been productive for steelhead this week.

Tenmile Creek has remained productive with bobber and jig and effective method for taking winter steelhead.

Winchester Bay has been slow to spotty for crabbing. South jetty rock fishers have been successful when the ocean has laid down sufficiently to allow safe access. Expect to see additional pressure on the river during the Umpqua Fishery Enhancement Derby which will take place on Friday and Saturday, February 4th and 5th. The mainstem Umpqua is on excellent shape for steelheading. With the exception of showers over the coming weekend, dry weather is in the forecast so decent fishing conditions should continue. Winter steelhead are well-distributed throughout the mainstem Umpqua. Conditions on the North Umpqua are fair to good and improving.

Steelheading has been good on the South Umpqua and will only get better with a good return of hatchery fish expected and numbers improving into February. No wild steelhead may be kept anywhere on the Umpqua system.

Crabbing has improved in Coos bay and is fair to good for those pursuing Dungeness from boats. Clamming in the bay should be worthwhile during low tides afternoons this coming weekend. Coos River steelheaders are catching fresh bright steelhead along with a few that are showing some color. Jigs, corkies and cured eggs are all effective at times. While the South Fork Coos and East Fork Millacoma are still in decent condition, the West Fork Millacoma is too low and clear to fish well.

The Coquille has been producing fresh winter steelhead for anglers drifting good-quality eggs or corkies and yarn.

Although the Elk and Sixes are currently very low and clear, there may be sufficient precipitation late this week to put steelheaders into another round of action.

Flows and water color are good on the lower Rogue. As of January 27th, the level at Agness was 6.5 feet with the flow 9,380 cfs. Steelhead are being taken by both boat and bank fishers. While the middle river is still a bit high, anglers are taking winters on baits and lures. Due to strong releases on the upper Rogue, the level is high and with summer steelhead few and far between, there is little of interest to steelheaders in this stretch.

Skinny, clear water has created difficult steelheading conditions on the Chetco. As of Thursday this week, the river was flowing at 1,730 cfs. Bear in mind that around 2,000 cfs is considered the minimum for fishing. Winter steelhead are scattered but hunkered down and skittish in these water conditions. Try the smallest baits and lures fished on light leaders or seek a larger river.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – With the Deschutes high, it has been a rather unpleasant challenge to fish. Recovery should occur over the coming week so postponing until the first weekend in February is advised.

It should be a good weekend for Metolius fly fishers. Expect to see some October Caddis along with the more prolific Blue-Winged-Olives on the water. Whitefish and bull trout will be feeding.

The Wallowa is still running very high and has been slow to recover. When the river drops and clears, it has historically offered good results during February.

### **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](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](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](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.
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- 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**

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#### **Random Links**

Walleye Message Central:

<http://www.walleyecentral.com/forums/index.php>

St. Louis Ponds map:

[http://stream-flow.allaboutrivers.com/Oregon/river\\_flow-sOR.html#23](http://stream-flow.allaboutrivers.com/Oregon/river_flow-sOR.html#23)

**So is there an actual formula for wind chill?** You bet. Just in case you ever find yourself with a calculator, thermometer, and anemometer but without access to The Weather Channel, the Fahrenheit version of the equation looks like this:  $Wind\ Chill = 35.74 + 0.6215T - 35.75(V^{0.16}) + 0.4275T(V^{0.16})$

**GOOD LUCK!**