

The Guide's Forecast - volume 13 issue number 5

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 4th – February 10th, 2011**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

An EXCELLENT steelhead season clearly lies ahead. With great catches anticipated well into spring, pro guide Bob Rees (503) 812-9036 currently has just 2 openings for the rest of February. Call Bob now or email him at brees@pacifier.com to book a day for north coast steelhead. Choose either February 26th or 28th for your outing!



The much anticipated **size 5 FATAL FLASH** spinner blades are now on the market!
All the same hot colors but in the size most spring chinook and coho want to see!

Visit pro guide Andy Betnar (503) 791-4094 at the Pacific Northwest Sportsman Show running from February 9th – 13th at the expo center. **Andy is in booth #366.**

Willamette Valley/Metro- The Bonneville Pool remains the best prospect for winter keeper sturgeon. East winds may hamper effort but as the water temperature warms, so will the bite.

Several spring chinook were taken in last weeks commercial opener. Motivated anglers may luck into one of these quality fish if you focus your efforts downstream of St. Helens or in the Multnomah Channel itself.

With the flow moderates at Willamette Falls, winter steelhead counts are picking up. The

sturgeon retention season originally scheduled for January 1st, will be announced this week. Expect a short season.

Plunkers at Meldrum Bar are scoring some steelhead in the clearing Willamette. No sign of early spring chinook yet but they are likely present. It's likely a few spring chinook will fall at Sellwood Bridge before the Sportsman Show gets underway. Use green label herring trolled near the bottom.

McKenzie River level and flow have returned to normal for this time of year. Trout fishing here would be an option this week.

Fishing has been fair but pressure by bank and boat steelheaders is high on the Clackamas. A good portion of the steelhead being caught right now are wild but quality broodstock catches are expected anytime now.

Steelheading has been fair to good as conditions improve on the Sandy. Oxbow and the stretch below Cedar Creek have been productive. Sand has once again modified the lower reaches.

E. E. Wilson Pond, Junction City Pond, Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake are scheduled to be stocked with trout.

Northwest – Steelheaders working the north coast systems are finding fair success on the consistent flows of the larger rivers. The Wilson and Nestucca are the best prospects as they harbor fresh run hatchery fish well into April. The lower reaches of these rivers are producing the best catches and incoming tide can have a positive impact on a days success.

Most other north coast systems are filled with spawned-out early run steelhead with later running wild fish waiting for the next rain freshet.

The mainstem Nehalem should be a good option this weekend as high, colored water has kept this system from fishing following the January flood. It will primarily be a wild fish show on this system.

Sturgeon anglers have been putting in time on Tillamook Bay this week. Favorable tides and mild weather has produced fair catches for anglers using sand shrimp for bait. Bay City and the West Channel have been primary areas to target.

A calming ocean may offer up some good fishing and crabbing opportunities over the weekend. Recent east winds have dropped the westerly swell. Bottomfishing should be excellent with ling cod and rockfish readily available. Ocean crab should be in prime shape for weekend festivities but use extreme caution when venturing out.

Southwest – Following the announcement of a 12% increase in the halibut quota, anglers are anxious for officials to determine dates for fishing.

Charter boats targeting ling cod off the central Oregon coast have been returning to port with limits.

Crabbing has continued to improve in Winchester Bay. North Umpqua steelheaders have been hitting some nice fish as water level and condition improved with dry weather. Steelheading on the South Umpqua has been productive over the past week.

Coquille steelheaders took some decent steelhead from the Coquille on jigs over the past

weekend.

Boaters launching out of Charleston have been making good catches of nearshore rockfish. Ling cod catches are improving. Crabbing has been good in Coos Bay.

Showers over the past weekend were insufficient to improve the low, clear water conditions on the Elk and Sixes rivers.

Rogue levels have remained high due to snowmelt over the past week although winter steelhead have been taken by plunkers, side drifters and anchor fishers. Water levels are now dropping on the lower Rogue and fishing is expected to improve. The middle river has been productive and should continue to do so along with water levels and conditions.

Brookings bottom fishers scored limits of rockfish and enjoyed fair results for ling cod. Ocean crabbing has been fair to good. Area beaches have been producing limits of surf perch. Low water conditions have created challenging fishing conditions on the Chetco but the sheer number of winter steelhead available have allowed anglers with good technique to take fish. Indicators point to the season winding down here.

Cooper Creek Reservoir is scheduled to be planted with trout.

Eastern – Lake Billy Chinook is putting out some bull trout and is providing fair to good fishing for kokanee averaging 10 inches.

Green Peter is low but is clearing and should fish in the next week or so.

Eastern Oregon streams such as the Umatilla, Imnaha and the Grande Ronde are forecasted to have favorable flows for steelheaders over the next several days. If temperatures remain stable, good afternoon fishing is likely.

SW Washington – District rivers have finally healed from the recent flooding and are providing good action for steelheaders.

The Kalama has been holding its water and is a stand-out this season with good catches coming from throughout the system.

The Lewis has been producing fair catches up to the hatchery but the East Fork has been slow.

The Cowlitz has seen a nice early surge of fish but action will only get better as the season goes on. Late season broodstock peaks later in the month and early March.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Although the first spring chinook of the season was reported from the Willamette at Sellwood Bridge, no angler has a confirmed catch from the mainstem Columbia at the time of this writing but one springer has already crossed Bonneville Dam. It may be a matter of days however although effort is likely to remain the most heavy at Sellwood Bridge.

Meanwhile, mainstem anglers remain focused on Bonneville Pool sturgeon where good numbers of keepers continue to fall. Boat anglers continue to fare the best with exactly a keeper per boat tallied in the weekend creel check. Exact numbers were these, copied from ODF&W's weekly report:

Weekly checking showed three legal white sturgeon kept, plus one legal and 12 sublegal sturgeon released for 51 bank anglers; and 51 legal white sturgeon kept, plus four legal and 298 sublegal sturgeon released for 51 boats (134 anglers).

As predicted, this fishery only improves in warmer water conditions, and that's what we're getting right now.

Here's some great smelt video taped on the banks of the Cowlitz River on Tuesday. Hopefully this is the start to lots of good things for this species:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2RuHfdmAR24>

Sturgeon anglers fishing the Portland to Longview stretch also found a few keepers in their creel although not nearly as good as Bonneville Pool anglers. Anglers averaged a keeper for every 10 boats in this stretch.

The Guide's Forecast – It's pretty simple math; if you seek spring chinook, target these fish in the Willamette, not Columbia. The bulk of any concentrations of fish will be in the Willamette right now, especially near Sellwood Bridge. If you're going to target sturgeon, go above Bonneville Dam. The fishing doesn't ever get much better than what we're experiencing right now in that reach.

No, you can't dip smelt on the Cowlitz or on the mainstem Columbia, or anywhere for that matter. Pray for continued good returns for this critter and we can talk about harvest opportunities in about another decade.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Winter steelhead counts have continued to improve to triple digits daily as water flow has moderated and with clarity over two feet. Over 2,100 winters are currently upstream with the bulk of the run yet to come. A projection of the 2010-2011 winter steelhead run has yet to be made.

While a few springers have been taken by plunkers fishing the banks of the Willamette below the mouth of the Clackamas River, the first verified (and photographed) hatchery spring Chinook was taken by John Shmilenko on Groundhog Day this week. Shmilenko was trolling a Green Label herring near the Sellwood Bridge when the 18-pounder was hooked.

As mentioned in the Fisheries Forecast, a meeting of the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission on Friday, February 4th, will determine the days and season for sturgeon retention on the lower Willamette will be set on February 8th. ODFW biologist delayed the opener, originally scheduled for January 1, 2011, due to a limited number of keeper-sized sturgeon between Willamette Falls and Bonneville Dam on the Columbia. There are an estimated maximum of 17,000 keepers available this season compared to roughly 40,000 in 2009.

The Stocking of hatchery trout on the McKenzie will resume in April.

As winter steelhead passage improves over Willamette Falls, so will hookups on the Molalla. A few have been hooked, but the Molalla is catch-and-release only, even for the rare hatchery fish which will occasional stray in.

With Detroit Reservoir above the North Santiam and Green Peter at the top of the South Santiam nearly full, river levels will be subject to change from precipitation only. Without rainfall, the

rivers are gradually dropping into shape although boaters should be cautious as recent high water has filled channels with trees and root wads.

Anglers may be interested in a couple of bills before the Oregon Legislature. (HB 2338) would ban the use or sale of felt-soled waders or shoes after January 1, 2015, following a Trout Unlimited study indicating the possibility that this type of shoe may spread disease among fish populations.

A wild card bill (HB 2632) would **prohibit** the ODFW from setting bag and size limits or enhancing or protecting fish such as largemouth and smallmouth bass, walleyes and panfish. This would have multiple impacts on the future of fishing in Oregon, including but not limited to higher fees when warm-water anglers hanging up their rods forever once populations are decimated. In fairness, anglers thinking this would protect 'native' species favor this bill.

If you have an opinion on the one or both of these bills, take steps to be heard.

The Guide's Forecast – The forecast for spring Chinook on the Willamette is 104,000 for the 2011 season and many of these are expected to be larger fish. It's shaping up to be a decent year for springers providing the weather doesn't screw it up for all of us.

Although the McKenzie level and flow have returned to seasonal normal, the water temperature has been on the drop and is currently about 40 degrees and dropping. This will cause trout to be lethargic and reduce feeding frequency so try nymphs during the warmest part of the day. This is the program which has produced reddsides on the lower McKenzie this week.

As additional steelhead cross the Falls, numbers of fish in the Molalla system will improve.

Counts at Willamette Falls remain too low to provide good catch-and-release results on the Santiams for wild winter steelhead. Prospects will improve in late February into March.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Clackamas levels and flow have come down and allowed steelheaders fair to good success last week although pressure was also up considerably. As crowds reached season-level highs over the past weekend, success rates dropped off. High water has pushed debris downstream so be cognizant of new snags and obstructions.

Expect to find many changes in the configuration of the Sandy River in addition to trees in the water and you won't be surprised or disappointed. Fishing has been slow this week, however. The boat ramp at Dabney has been cleared of sand and debris and is now useable. Regular users will want to buy an annual pass and can do so online here: <http://www.metro-region.org/index.cfm/go/by.web/id=160>

The Guide's Forecast – Steelheaders with the ability to get out during the week still stand a fair to good chance of connecting with a winter steelhead but avoid the weekend if possible. Crowds are a sure thing this coming Friday and Saturday and will likely have a negative effect on catches. Winters are available in Eagle Creek but dry weather has created low, clear water conditions.

Despite reconfiguration of the Sandy River due to the recent storm and near-record high water, the level and flow have dropped and, most importantly, the water has cleared sufficiently to appeal to steelheaders. Catching them is another challenge altogether; it has been slow but is expected to improve over the next couple of weeks.

North Coast Fishing Report – With stabilized flows, it's been ho-hum fishing for most Tillamook County streams. As we've mentioned in the previous few weeks, smaller streams are carrying mostly spawned-out kelts right now, on their way back to the sea. The Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem, Three Rivers, the Highway 30 streams and to a lesser extent, the Wilson, Trask, Nestucca and Kilchis Rivers all have fair numbers of these low-grade fish available for sport. The Wilson and Nestucca offer the best opportunities for quality hatchery broodstock steelhead.

Most recently fair catches have come from the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers with fish reported into the mid-teens for some lucky anglers. Although the catches are not wide open by any stretch of the imagination, persistent anglers are coming up with action almost daily. We've also mentioned more than once that as indicated by the good early season catches of wild and broodstock steelhead, we are clearly in the making for a great steelhead season.

In the lower flows, both plugs and small sidedrifted baits have been producing good catches in the lower reaches of these systems. Although fish are well distributed throughout the system, the fish that have been in the river for a while are a bit less likely to bite than those that are fresh run from the tidewater stretches. For this reason, tides do play an important role in the your success over the course of the day.

The mainstem Nehalem River is also an option as the river cleared enough to fish this week. Although it's still carrying a bit of color, this only gives waiting steelhead more confidence when a bright bait goes floating by. Like other systems, fish should be well distributed but the lower reaches, such as the Beaver Slide to Mohler Sand and Gravel, offer up some good opportunities under these conditions. This river hasn't been effectively fished for the entire season and it's coming into prime time.

There was a pretty big sturgeon focus on Tillamook Bay over the weekend. With moderate weather and wind and quality tides, effort was running higher than normal for the estuary, which should have had fair numbers of fish present. And that's what anglers reported, just fair fishing. The bulk of the effort took place in the west channel but the middle channel and Bay City were also fished with some regularity. Sand shrimp is a must for the serious estuary angler.

A very brief window of opportunity existed early in the week for saltwater recreationalists. Ling cod fishers and rockfish fishers ventured out and scored fair to good results for these species. Not much reporting on crabbing however as many sportanglers feel the commercial fleet "has the floor". Crabbing should be good however. It is on the lower Columbia as limits have been reported as of late with crab in great conditions, just not a lot of big ones.

The Guide's Forecast – Steelheaders need to be prepared to fish another week of low water conditions with small baits and plugs working the best. The lower reaches will continue to produce the best results but tides moderate over the weekend which may keep heavier concentrations of fish in the estuary or ocean. None-the-less, fish should be available on most systems with the Wilson and Nestucca remaining the top prospects for quality hatchery fish.

A slight rise in water levels is predicted for Friday but it shouldn't be big enough to impact district streams negatively or positively. The Nehalem should also remain a good option, just use larger, brighter baits and offerings in this big water.

It's peak spawned out steelhead season for the smaller streams. The Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem and Three Rivers are top prospects for these less desirables. Bait should provide ample

sport. The North Fork Nehalem hatchery reports that Longview Fiber will close the Soapstone Mainline during the week due to log truck traffic but the road should remain open for the weekends.

Not a great week to target sturgeon as the tide series wanes. It should be good for crabbers however, especially after the weekend. The lower Columbia should remain a good option.

The weekend currently looks promising for offshore recreation but this time of year, that prediction is a long ways off. Be sure to check bar and ocean conditions before you head down to the coast. Ling cod, bottomfishing and crabbing should all be productive.

Central & South Coast Reports – Most southwest river and streams are low and clear due to dry weather conditions. Light showers forecast for the coming weekend will offer little respite from these conditions so anglers who have their low-water game together are the ones who will succeed. Incidentally, odds should be better on this coming Sunday as Super Bowl will surely have some would-be competition following the game rather than fishing the rivers.

Ling cod fishing has been excellent offshore out of Depoe Bay this week. Ocean anglers have also taken some large rockfish.

The Alsea produced some bright winter steelhead over the past weekend although overall hooking up has been a challenge here.

Steelhead catches are expected to improve into the weekend on the Siuslaw with the water dropping and clearing. Winchester Bay crabbing has been slow to fair. The South Jetty has continued to provide decent catches of rockfish when wave action has allowed safe access. South Umpqua water flow has dropped to less than 900 cfs which makes boating difficult. A variety of lures and jigs have taken steelhead here but the action has been hot or cold. Only fin-clipped steelhead maybe kept on the entire Umpqua system. The springer watch has started in hopes of an early Chinook arrival. Expect crowds this weekend with the fish enhancement derby taking place.

Crabbing has been good for boaters in Coos Bay. A few steelhead are being taken on single corkies or dome-sized clusters of roe from the low, clear waters of the Coos system. Spinners have taken a few fish but are less effective in these water conditions. Bobber and jig is a better bet to tempt low water metalheads.

Elk and Sixes rivers remain low and clear due to lack of rain and long-range weather forecasts indicate no respite in the near future.

Rogue levels are down to about 4.8 feet and 5,390 cfs at Agness as of the morning of Thursday this week but water color is good with the temperature holding at 45 degrees and steelhead continue to be taken by both bank and boat anglers. As the water has cleared in the middle Rogue, results for winter steelhead have improved with all variety of baits and lures effective. Flows on the upper river have moderated but the water is off color. Winter steelhead have yet to arrive and with little here of interest to anglers, there are few trying on this stretch.

Low clear water at the Chetco River has dome little to moderate pressure. Anglers employing long, light leaders and small baits or lures have been catching some scattered winter steelhead. Chetco water flow at Brookings was less than 1,500 cfs as of the morning of February 3rd.

Central and Eastern Oregon – The lower Deschutes, while still a bit swift, has dropped into fishable condition and is exhibiting good color. Dark gray caddis and Blue-Winged-Olives are hatching but be aware the this is occurring early in the afternoon and is usually a brief event in the winter. Be observant and give them what they want.

The Grande Ronde is dropping and while still a little off-color, is clearing up this week. Mornings have been bone-chilling with residual ice in the river.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report for February 2011

North Puget Sound

With fishing for steelhead and other game fish scheduled to close early on several rivers in the region, the focus is shifting on the marine areas where blackmouth salmon fisheries are under way.

"The San Juan Islands are the best bet for **salmon** anglers as we head into February," said Steve Thiesfeld, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "Fishing has been good for blackmouth in the San Juans, and hopefully that will continue throughout the month."

Anglers fishing Marine Area 7 (San Juan Islands) - as well as marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) and 9 (Admiralty Inlet) - have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook salmon. Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) is only open for salmon through Jan. 31.

Thiesfeld said there also have been reports of some nice-size blackmouth caught in Marine Area 9, especially around Possession Bar off the southern tip of Whidbey Island.

Another option is jigging for **squid** . Winter is prime time to fish 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/> .

Fishing for **steelhead and other game fish** is closing early in several river systems in Puget Sound and along the Strait of Juan de Fuca to protect wild steelhead. The early closures will affect the Nooksack, Snohomish, Stillaguamish and Skagit river systems, as well as several streams along the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Most rivers will close Feb. 1, although some waters near WDFW fish hatcheries will remain open through Feb. 15 to provide anglers an opportunity to catch and keep hatchery steelhead. "We're closing these rivers early because of conservation concerns," said Jim Scott, assistant director for WDFW's Fish Program. "With low numbers of wild steelhead expected back, we need to take this action to protect those wild fish that do return."

Anglers are reminded that the lower Green River (King County) and the White, Carbon and upper Puyallup rivers closed to fishing for steelhead and other game fish Jan. 16. The upper Green River closes Feb. 1. For more information on all the closures, check the emergency rule changes on WDFW's website at <http://bit.ly/eWIYg3> .

With several of the region's rivers scheduled to close, freshwater anglers might turn their attention to local lakes. Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish are good spots to fish for **perch**,

cutthroat and **smallmouth bass** , said WDFW fisheries biologist Danny Garrett. "Lake Sammamish has been producing consistent angling action for cutthroat trout that range from 14-18 inches," he 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/>.

The **Puget Sound crab** fishery is now closed, 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.

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

Several areas of Puget Sound open to blackmouth salmon fishing in February, more wild steelhead are moving into coastal rivers and another razor clam dig is tentatively scheduled for mid-month.

If tests are favorable, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) will proceed with an evening **razor clam** dig at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks and Kalaloch.

Tentative opening dates and evening low tides are:

- Feb. 17, Thursday - 5:53 p.m. (-0.9 ft.); Twin Harbors
- Feb. 18, Friday - 6:33 p.m. (-0.9 ft.); Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks and Kalaloch
- Feb. 19, Saturday - 7:13 p.m. (-0.5 ft.); Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks and Kalaloch

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, anglers can find **hatchery steelhead** at some of the region's rivers. "Fishing for hatchery steelhead is winding down in the north coast streams, but anglers should continue to find fish in the Chehalis River Basin," said Kirt Hughes, regional fishery manager for WDFW, who recommends the Satsop, Skookumchuck and Wynoochee rivers.

Beginning Feb. 16, **wild steelhead-retention rules** go into effect 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. Anglers will be allowed to retain one wild steelhead per license year on one of the eight rivers.

For more information on steelhead fishing regulations, check the *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/>.

Elsewhere, fishing for **steelhead and other game fish** will close early in several river systems in Puget Sound and along the Strait of Juan de Fuca to protect wild steelhead. The early closures will affect the Nooksack, Snohomish, Stillaguamish and Skagit river systems, as well as several streams along the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

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On the other hand, saltwater **salmon** fishing opportunities will expand Feb. 1, with the opening of marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon) and 12 (Hood Canal). In addition, salmon fisheries also get under way in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, where marine areas 5 (Sekiu) and 6 (eastern Strait) open Feb. 16.

Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist, recommends trolling Coyote Bank, located about 13 miles north of the Washington shore between Port Angeles and Dungeness Spit. "Coyote was one of the more consistent producers last year, and hopefully that will continue this season," he said. "But make sure you keep your eye on the weather if you're heading out that way."

Salmon fishing is already under way in Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound), where anglers have had some success hooking resident coho. Best bets include the Tacoma Narrows, the Squaxin Island area and in Eld Inlet off Evergreen Beach, said Larry Phillips, regional fish biologist for WDFW.

Anglers should check the regulations for salmon fisheries on WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/>.

Looking for some competition? Anglers can take part in the **Olympic Peninsula Salmon Derby** over Presidents' Day Weekend near Sequim. Prizes include \$10,000 for the largest fish, \$5,000 for second place and \$1,500 for third place. Details are available at <http://gardinersalmonderby.org/>.

Puget Sound 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.

Southwest Washington

Ocean bright **spring chinook salmon** will be moving into the Columbia River in increasing numbers in the weeks ahead, setting the stage for one of the state's most popular fisheries. Anglers typically start landing early-returning "springers" in early February, but the fishery usually doesn't catch fire until March.

"This is a good time to dust off your gear, prepare your boat and maybe do a little prospecting," said Joe Hymer, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "You want to be ready to go when the bulk of the run arrives."

According to the pre-season forecast, a total of 198,400 upriver spring chinook will return to the Columbia River Basin this year - well below last year's run of 315,345, but close to the 10-year average. Then again, 40,000 of this year's fish are expected to be five-year-olds, compared to 7,855 last year. In addition, 62,400 of the 104,000 fish headed back to the Willamette River are projected to be five-year-olds.

"We're definitely expecting more big fish this year," Hymer said. "Five-year-olds can run from 18 to 30 pounds apiece."

Fishery managers from Washington and Oregon are scheduled to meet Feb. 8 to work out fishing seasons and regulations for both the spring chinook fishery and white sturgeon fishery below Bonneville Dam. In the meantime, seasons and regulations listed in the 2010-11 *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/>) will remain in effect.

As in previous years, only hatchery-reared fish marked with a clipped adipose fin and a healed scar may be retained. All wild spring chinook, identifiable by an intact adipose fin, must be released unharmed.

Fishing for spring chinook is currently open on the Columbia River below the Interstate 5 Bridge, where the limit is two adult fish per day. Anglers may also retain two adult springers per day on the Cowlitz and Deep rivers, but are limited to one adult fish a day on the Lewis and Kalama rivers.

"The Cowlitz River and waters near the Willamette River are probably the best bets early in the season, because spring chinook usually start showing up there first," Hymer said. Meanwhile, anglers continue to reel in **hatchery steelhead** from waters ranging from the Cowlitz River to the John Day Pool and beyond. In general, the steelhead in the lower tributaries are winter-run fish, while those above Bonneville Dam are left over from last year's summer run, Hymer said.

"Hatchery-reared late-run winter steelhead are still moving up the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers and should be available to anglers for weeks to come," he said.

Columbia River anglers can also retain one **sturgeon** per day in the lower Columbia below the Wauna powerlines or in the Bonneville, The Dalles or John Day pools. Anglers can also retain a fish per day Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays from the Wauna powerlines to Bonneville Dam. Fishing strategies vary from area to area. Hymer said boat anglers fishing the Bonneville Pool have done well by anchoring above the deeper holes and plunking with smelt, squid, sand shrimp, or roll-top herring. In the lower river, anglers have had some success fishing for sturgeon that gravitate toward the warmer waters flowing from the Willamette River. Fishing for smelt (eulachon) is closed to humans, but sturgeon still follow them up the Cowlitz River as far as Castle Rock, where anglers are waiting for them.

Fishery managers are scheduled to set new seasons for sturgeon Feb. 8. Until then, most seasons and regulations listed in the 2010-11 Fishing in Washington pamphlet will remain in effect until then. The exception is that angling is closed on the mainstem Columbia at Sand Island near Rooster Rock State Park through April 30. Until then, all angling is prohibited from a line between the upstream end of Sand Island to a marker on the Oregon shore, downstream to a line between the lower end of Sand Island and a marker on the Oregon shore.

Trout anglers should be aware that Battle Ground Lake and Kline Pond are both scheduled to be stocked with 2,000 half-pound rainbows from Vancouver Hatchery in February. But fishing could be just as good on 13 other regional lakes that were stocked with tens of thousands of trout in January.

"Those fish - particularly the bigger ones - tend to stick around for a while when the weather is cold and anglers don't spend as much time on the water," Hymer said. "That will change once the weather breaks and fishing picks up."

The weekly trout-stocking schedule is available on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/plants/weekly/>.

Eastern Washington

Of all the mid-winter fishing opportunities now available in the region, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) fish biologist Chris Donley recommends fishing Lake Roosevelt - the huge Columbia River reservoir off Grand Coulee Dam.

"Lake Roosevelt's **kokanee** fishery is usually pretty good at this time of year," Donley said. "Large kokanee, measuring 20 inches and more, are caught near the surface by trolling small flies and plugs in four-to-six feet of water. It's also the start of the lake's fishing season for **walleye**, which are starting to stage at the mouth of the Spokane River to make their annual spawning run up the river."

Anglers also continue to pull **rainbow trout** out of Lake Roosevelt, Donley said. Night fishing for Roosevelt's three-to-five-pound **burbot** should be productive, too.

Even bigger burbot, up to 10 pounds, can be caught in Sullivan Lake in Pend Oreille County. Burbot are nocturnal predators, so night fishing is most effective, said Donley, noting that burbot are now gathering to spawn. "If you find one you usually find others," he said.

Depending on temperature fluctuations, ice fishing should remain good at several winter-season or year-round fisheries in the region. Spokane County's Hog Canyon Lake and Stevens County's Hatch and Williams lakes should continue to provide **rainbow trout** catches through the ice. Action at Lincoln County's Fourth of July Lake seems to have slowed, and ice conditions may be questionable.

Yellow perch fishing through the ice should continue to be good at Spokane County's year-round Eloika and Silver lakes and Stevens County's Waitts Lake, which closes Feb. 28. Sprague Lake might be a good bet for rainbows, but reported "iffy" ice conditions in late January are a reminder that anglers need to be cautious. Look for ice-fishing safety tips at http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/ice_fishing/. Whitman County's Rock Lake provides open water fishing on rainbow and **brown trout** for the hearty angler who can brave the wind chill. Snake River tributaries, like the Grand Ronde, Tucannon, and Touchet rivers, are usually the place to target **steelhead** in February. Joe Bumgarner, WDFW fish biologist, said the Grand Ronde in particular is improving, although more creel checks will just be getting under way during the month of February to determine actual catch rates.

WDFW fish hatchery crews are gearing up to get catchable **rainbow trout** stocked this month in waters that open March 1, mostly in the southeast corner of the region.

Northcentral Washington

With warming air and water temperatures, **steelhead** fishing picks up a bit at this time of year on the upper Columbia River, said Bob Jateff, a district fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Most of that action is above Wells Dam on the mainstem Columbia River and in sections of the Methow River.

Steelheading also picks up with warming trends on the Entiat River, where a few fish are usually caught at the mouth. The Wenatchee River has been slow, but fish can still be caught in the mainstem Columbia River between Rock Island and Rocky Reach dams.

Fishing for **whitefish** on both the Similkameen and Methow rivers also can be good, said Jateff, noting that fly anglers using small weighted nymphs under a strike indicator seem to do best. The whitefish daily limit is 15 with no minimum size requirement. Selective gear rules are in effect for whitefish in areas that are currently open for steelhead.

Ice fishing for **rainbow trout** has been good at several Okanogan County lakes, including Big and Little Green, Davis, Rat, and Sidley.

Sidley Lake, near Molson and the Canada border, is the scene of the 7th annual **Northwest Ice Fishing Festival** on Feb. 19. The day-long event is hosted by Molson Grange and sponsored by the Oroville Chamber of Commerce. Ice fishing is conducted from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., with registration fees of \$20 per adult and \$10 for youth 14 years of age and under. Prizes are awarded for biggest and heaviest fish caught. Food, music, skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling and dog sledding are also available. For more information contact Robin Stice at Eden Valley Guest Ranch, (509) 485-4002, or info@edenvalleyranch.net.

Another popular ice-fishing spot in Okanogan County is Patterson Lake near Winthrop, where anglers can hook rainbow trout and **yellow perch**. Palmer Lake north of Loomis is producing 10-14-inch perch through the ice with an occasional kokanee or rainbow in catches. In Chelan County, ice fishing for rainbows, perch and other fish at Roses Lake near Manson was good earlier in the winter but warming trends have reduced ice thickness and safety.

Chad Jackson, WDFW Columbia Basin district fish biologist, said most lakes in the south end of the region that are open were either treated last fall and have no fish in them yet, or are covered with unsafe ice. "Stay tuned for more fishing coming to the Basin in March," Jackson said.

Southcentral Washington

Anglers continue to reel in hatchery **steelhead** from portions of the Columbia and Snake Rivers, although the prospect of catching **sturgeon** close to home will undoubtedly prompt some to switch gears. Starting Feb. 1, the McNary Pool - also known as Lake Wallula - will reopen for retention of white sturgeon that measure 43 to 54 inches from their snout to the fork in their tail. Centered near the Tri-Cities, it draws anglers from throughout the region, said Paul Hoffarth, a regional fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Open waters extend from McNary Dam to Priest Rapids Dam, and into the lower Snake River upstream to Ice Harbor Dam.

"From the Tri-Cities, you can reach the fishery in 20 minutes in either direction," he said. Hoffarth said the opening at Lake Wallula should take some pressure off the fishery under way at Lake Umatilla (John Day Pool), where anglers have been chiseling away at a 165-fish annual quota. "That quota has been reached very early in recent years, so anglers should go soon - and keep an eye out for updates - if they plan to fish Lake Umatilla."

For additional information, see the 2010-11 *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet, available online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/>.

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

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 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.

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Random Links

Oregon's Ocean Fisheries: A Conservation Story film wraps:

http://www.newportnewstimes.com/v2_news_articles.php?heading=0&page=72&story_id=26454

Information on the Saltwater Sportsmen's Show March 19th:

<http://oceaned.org/news.html>

GOOD LUCK!