

The Guide's Forecast - volume 13 issue number 10

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **March 11th – March 17th, 2011**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro - Salmon fishing effort is picking up on the lower Columbia where boats fishing above the influence of the Willamette River are intercepting fair numbers of fish for this early in the season. Larger, 5-year old fish make up a significant portion of the catch this time of year with a few fish over 20 pounds reported recently. As water temperatures warm, so should the bite. Effort will likely intensify as well as the season is forecasted to only last through April 4th.

Just as the waters of the lower Willamette had started to clear early this week, additional rainfall will roil it yet again. Good for sturgeon fishing but not so much for springers. An alternate quarry might be catfish, however, as a 30 pound channel cat was landed last week.

Sturgeon anglers on the lower Willamette tallied 137 keepers in the last 3-day retention period. Approximately another 500 keepers remain before the 2,550 guideline is reached. It likely won't last into April.

Willamette Valley rivers will be on the rise this week, the least desirable situation for steelheading. This is a good time to prepare tackle, sharpen hooks and hone a good game plan to implement when the local waters begin to clear. With such a prolonged period of high water, fishing should be fantastic when systems do drop.

The 2011 Northwest Fly Tyer & Fly Fishing Expo will take place March 11th & 12th at the Linn County Expo Center in Albany, Oregon.

High water is a good time to take the kids (or yourself) trout fishing. St. Paul Ponds are producing limits and Henry Hagg Lake opened for the season on Saturday, March 5th.

Also scheduled for stocking this week are Alton Baker Canal, Cottage Grove Reservoir and Creswell Pond.

Northwest – Wilson River anglers experienced epic fishing on Saturday with many boats posting double-digit results for late run steelhead. It was the first opportunity in several days for anglers to fish ideal conditions when the run is in its peak.

The Nestucca also fished well early in the week but another round of rain is expected to take these two most productive hatchery steelhead streams out of commission in the coming days. They may fish again by the weekend, barring any large amounts of precipitation.

Wild fish catches on smaller streams should produce fair results until the larger systems come into shape. The mainstem Nehalem should be peaking this month as well but given the immense size of the watershed, it's been running silty with little exception.

Sturgeon effort remains light on Tillamook Bay but fair morning tides may produce some catches in the West Channel and at Bay City.

Reports of good crabbing are still coming from the lower Columbia River. A soft afternoon incoming tide should produce good catches through the weekend.

Combined seas will likely keep ocean going vessels in port through the weekend. Bottomfishing should be good when conditions allow.

Southwest – South coast beaches are producing fair to good surf perch numbers with catches improving through March.

Offshore bottom fishers are not restricted by depth limits through March but restrictions will begin once again on April 1st.

Crabbing is fair to good in Winchester Bay. Spring chinook will soon be in catches here. The best chance for winter steelhead will be on the South Umpqua although the predicted stellar returns of hatchery fish have yet to materialize.

While the Coquille has been crowded at times this season, winter steelhead catches have made the effort worthwhile. Look for this one to continue producing when the water drops and clears.

Pro guide Curtis Palmer (541-870-9451) reports the Coquille as having provided and excellent fishery this season.

The Elk and Sixes rivers have been productive whenever levels are falling and water is sufficiently clear for steelhead to see offerings.

Plug-pullers have taken fair catches of winter steelhead on the lower Rogue in marginal water conditions. Four spring chinook were confirmed over the past week. The middle river has been most consistent but storms moving through will create challenging conditions. The upper river is slow.

Nearshore fishing out of the Port of Brookings is producing good catches of rockfish and ling cod. Forecasts for the coming week look too rough for crossing the bar, however. The Chetco level is forecast to be fluctuating over the coming week, a less than optimum situation for fishing success. Plunkers will do best as it drops between storm fronts.

Dave Pitts (Salmon Trout and Steelhead.com) reports, "Once again it held true, within five weeks of the Blue Backs showing the Chetco season is slowly coming to an end.

Eastern – Pro Guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688) reports, "The cold and ice have cleared out of the Grande Ronde River, the water level has stabilized this week and steelhead fishing is excellent."

While the Deschutes is producing reddsides all day long, mid-day remains most productive. Results are fair with caddis and Blue-Winged-Olives the patterns of note but March Browns will start appearing soon.

Late season steelheading on the Umatilla, Grande Ronde and Imnaha Rivers has been good lately. Anglers also averaged 4.1 hours per steelhead on the Wallowa River over the weekend.

SW Washington – Steelhead catches on the Cowlitz and Kalama Rivers did improve as flows dropped but district rivers are forecasted to rise again this week, further putting systems out of reach until late in the weekend.

Overall, steelhead action has been fair at best with most anglers concentrating on spring chinook in the Vancouver area. Spring chinook will start to show in greater numbers by early April on the Cowlitz, Kalama and Lewis systems.

Anglers should note several stream closures on March 15th including the Washougal and East Fork Lewis to protect late run wild fish.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Most salmon reports are pointing to a slow down in activity for the anglers fishing what should be the most productive stretch of the lower Columbia river now. **Pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)** cancelled trips recently due to slow fishing. He primarily targets Davis Bar and the I-5 reach/airport and reported action had dramatically slowed since the original flurry over a week ago. There is still some effort however and the lucky anglers are taking some quality fish.

Troutdale anglers tallied some fair results last weekend with 51 boats reporting 11 hatchery fish and 3 wild ones released. Anglers here troll herring near Camas with pretty consistent results. Most recently however, as in downriver fisheries, action has slowed.

Bank anglers have fair opportunity in the Bonneville stretch but with cold water and higher flows, fish are slow to make their way upstream. As of March 8th, 30 spring chinook have bypassed Bonneville Dam so far with the bulk of those likely to be larger 5-year old fish. Bank anglers obviously do stand a chance at an early-run spring chinook but their chances are few and far between this early in the run. High water however should help concentrate fish closer to the bank where bank anglers stand a better chance.

The river downstream of the mouth of the Willamette remains colored and current weather conditions dictate that it will stay that way for a while longer.

Sturgeon effort on the Columbia remains subdued with only a few boats attempting in the Portland to Longview stretch. These boats continue to report very sporadic action. This will remain the case for several more months.

Reports of good crabbing continue to come from the lower river out of Hammond. Crab seem to remain in good shape and the action is as good as one can hope for. Although flows are higher than usual for this time of year, they will get higher as court-ordered flow and spill send smolts downstream in the near future. This should put a damper on the crab fishery but crabbers should still take advantage of it while its good.

Just outside of the mouth, bottomfishing remains good when conditions allow. High surf and swell will keep boats from this fishery for the next several days at least. Fish are willing and ready when the sea calms down however.

The Guide's Forecast – More high water is in the forecast, which will make for challenging fishing conditions for anglers working the Columbia River downstream of Troutdale. High flows tend to send fish upstream at a faster rate, putting them off the bite for herring trollers.

The stretch from Davis Bar upstream will remain the best bet for anglers with the cleaner water coming from above the influence of the Willamette River. Slow trolled herring will be the ticket for these colder flows but it may be difficult to troll down when the river is screaming so hard. Wherever you fish, you will have to keep your baits fishing close to the bottom for the best chance. These fish will be bottom hugging in these conditions.

Don't look for bank angling to pick up anytime soon. Although higher flows are conducive to better bank angling, it's simply still early in the run. Action should get better later into the month and of course you still stand a chance at a bank caught fish. If the water is colored where you

fish, don't hesitate to fish even closer to the rivers edge. We've had success in as little as 2.5 foot of water.

Sturgeon fishing should be off the table for right now. If you have an itch for sturgeon, you should be focusing your efforts on the Willamette River and wait for this system to warm up a bunch.

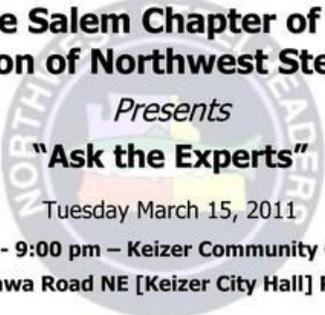
Don't overlook crabbing however. Soft afternoon tides should produce good catches if the weather permits. Significant south winds are in the forecast over the weekend which may be ok if you're hugging the Oregon shore. Fresh bait always produces the best catches but may be hard to come by this time of year.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – The lower Willamette had been dropping until Thursday this week when it began to rise and is forecast to continue to swell through the weekend. This is likely to muddy up the water as well which won't effect sturgeon fishing but will do nothing positive for springer results. inter steelhead counts have been ramping up over the past few days with YTD totals topping 4,000. Sturgeon retention will be allowed Thursday, Friday and Saturday this week but will probably close for the year thereafter. With only 500 or remaining available, this week's take is expected to fill the 2,550-fish quota. Spring Chinook catches have been poor recently, due primarily to muddy water.

Keep an eye out for a downed trees which bank-to-bank on the North Santiam above the confluence. There are a couple of these, one of which caused a capsizing over the past weekend. Both require portaging and exploration before drifting this stretch. Or just skip it 'til it's clear; that strategy really is the smartest decision. The entire Santiam system is on the rise although forecast to be dropping late in the weekend.

Fishing at Hagg has been slow to fair with bank anglers faring better than trollers, indicating the fish are holding in shallow water. Water is murky to muddy with debris in places. About 16,000 eight to 10-inch trout were planted last week and brood trout to 12 pounds were stocked earlier this year. These fish, along with holdovers, will provide a good fishery when the bite turns on here.

The public is invited to this FREE opportunity for expert advice on fishing:



**The Salem Chapter of the
Association of Northwest Steelheaders**

Presents
"Ask the Experts"

Tuesday March 15, 2011

**7:00 - 9:00 pm – Keizer Community Center
930 Chemawa Road NE [Keizer City Hall] Park in back.**

Join the Salem Chapter of the Northwest Steelheaders for our annual 'Ask the Experts' night. We will have tables set up so you can circulate and talk with the people who know **WHAT** to use, **HOW** to use it, and **WHEN** to use it – to catch fish and navigate some of the most productive local rivers in the state.

The Experts

- **Bill Sanderson** – River Guide and long time fisherman on the North Santiam River will be discussing Drift Boat and Rafting Techniques, the use of divers, plugs, and live bait.
- **Thom Kaffun** – Fishing Guide and program coordinator will be discussing and demonstrating Kokanee fishing, spinners, proper rigging and use of Herring Rigs and Egg Loops and Springer fishing for Chinook.
- **Wayne Parker** – "Good Day Fishing", will be discussing how to make and fish with spinners and his latest equipment.
- **Jim Johnson** – Experienced Local Fisherman will talk about halibut rigging and fishing. Check his photo on the poster board.
- **Matt Halseth** – Experienced Local Fisherman will be discussing Steelhead, side drifting, bobber and jig, rigging roads, boat set up. He will demonstrate how to make "Yarnies".
- **Dennis Fletcher** – Experienced local fisherman will be discussing "Fishing on the Upper Nestucca". Dennis will have lots of good hints on how to improve your chances to get a big one.
- **Dave Hopfer** – Our chapter videographer will have DVD's of the chapter outings and other activities available, and will be videotaping the evening's presentations.

In addition, Chapter President Jim Zelenka and Board Members David Gray, Ben Light and other Salem Chapter members will be on hand to address activities within the Steelheaders Association and the Salem Chapter. We will also be talking about the upcoming "Learn the River Trips" planned for the North Santiam and as always, we will draw for the evening door prizes and a Fishing Rod. *Come and join us for a fun informative evening.*

The Guide's Forecast – Sturgeon fishing is expected to be fair to good with most anglers required to release of many 'shorts' in order to find a fish or two large enough to keep (39 to 54 inches nose to tail fork). Anchovies have been the bait of choice. Results for spring Chinook are expected to improve as the water clears in the lower Willamette and Multnomah Channel. At this time of year, troll plug-cut herring. Lures will come into play when the water temperature rises with spring-like temperatures. It may be a while ...

The McKenzie will fish once the river recovers from rain this week which has pushed it out of shape.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Clackamas water levels are on the rise at this

writing on Thursday, March 10th. Steelheaders will want to keep an eye on levels and catch it when it's dropping and clearing for the best chance of a hookup. While there are a few diehards trying Eagle Creek, the hatchery run here is essentially over for the year with broodstock fish headed fro Dog Creek.

Sandy River flows are increasing this week, from 2,500 cfs at Sandy on March 9th to over 7,000 cfs mid-day on the 10th. Cedar Creek produced fish prior to the latest freshet.

The Guide's Forecast – Even when water conditions have been decent at the Clackamas, results this season have been slow to fair. A few have been taken over the past week but the broodstock run occurs through March so there may yet be hope.

The Sandy River is considered to be one of the best bets in the Willamette Valley for winter steelhead. With broodstock returning now, it's well worth a try as the water starts to drop.

North Coast Fishing Report – Recent weather conditions are keeping steelheaders from having access to good systems during peak season for steelhead. Anglers do have several choices on the north coast but larger systems with hatchery opportunities will once again be out under the current weather scheme. With significant amounts of snow still in the coast range, the current warm weather system will exacerbate the melt-off and keep rivers high and colored as we near the weekend. Under the current weather model, the Wilson and Nestucca may fish again by Sunday but anyone will tell you, it's way too far out there to be predictable on that model.

And how has the season been going? TGF has consistently reported good catches of winter steelhead this season. Saturday saw the first good river conditions following significant precipitation after a prolonged dry spell. Couple this with the fact we're in peak season for steelhead and it added up to awesome fishing on Saturday. Reports of double-digit or near double-digit opportunities came from anglers working the Wilson River on Saturday. Side-drifters did best as is often the case in higher flows. Fish were well distributed throughout the lower reach, making all pockets viable haunts for fish to lay in wait.

Most recently, after the initial push of fish under the last ideal conditions, action had slowed. There was such a large push of fish over the weekend, even when anglers found good water conditions following another rise in water levels, fish were hard to come by. The Kilchis, even in prime condition, gave up little to experienced anglers.

Good reports came from the lower end of the Wilson as early as Tuesday, with one boater reporting 9 fish sidedrifted downstream of Sollie Smith Bridge. Conditions were ideal on Tuesday but a fast spike put the river back out and in the conditions we're seeing right now by Wednesday afternoon. By Thursday, all north coast streams were not options but smaller systems could be back in play by the weekend.

On another front, sturgeon effort remains light and high winds and rain kept anglers from recreating despite fair tides at mid-week. Ocean opportunities as well as bay crabbing is also treacherous under the current weather condition.

Several north coast lakes are scheduled for stocking this week and next. A complete guide to north coast systems for stocking can be found here:
http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/trout_stocking_schedules/2011/northwest/north_coast.asp

The Guide's Forecast – We're in full bloom of a good steelhead season. Unfortunately, water conditions won't be working for anglers for some of the weekend, at least not on the districts most popular streams.

If water prediction models come to fruition, Saturday may be a stretch for the larger, more popular destinations such as the Wilson and Nestucca River. The upper reaches may be a good bet however with the Wilson most accessible to bank anglers and experienced boaters only doing 6th Bridge to 4th or 1st Bridge. It's still likely to be high however so fish will be spread out across the tailouts and hidden in pockets as shallow as 2 foot deep. This is the water type that you leave no rock, tailout or riverbank unmolested.

A surer bet, even prior to the weekend will be smaller systems such as the Necanicum or Kilchis, both which bode decent wild steelhead returns. Other systems will be options as well but wild runs aren't nearly as predominate. Those systems are ones we talked about a lot in earlier editions when early hatchery returns were more prevalent. Those would be Three Rivers, the North Fork Nehalem and Highway 30 systems. Again, if weather models are accurate, by late in the weekend, these systems may already be too low and clear to produce measurable results.

By Sunday or early next week, the Wilson and Nestucca should be back on-line and producing good catches of steelhead throughout the systems. Wild fish are clearly running strong this season and broodstock numbers are coming back nice too but do count on a higher rate of natives in your catch. As we often state, bigger, brighter baits and driftbobbers in higher flows and drop down to more subtle colors as flows lessen.

Good tides for sturgeon this weekend but look at this weather (printed Wednesday for this weeks edition):

Fri...S wind 20 to 25 kt with gusts to 30 kt. Wind waves 6 ft. W swell 11 ft. Chance of showers.

Fri Night...S wind 20 to 25 kt with gusts to 35 kt. Wind waves 6 ft. W swell 13 ft. Rain.

Sat...S wind 20 to 25 kt. Wind waves 5 ft. W swell 14 ft.

Sat Night...S wind 20 to 25 kt with gusts to 35 kt. Wind waves 6 ft. W swell 16 ft.

Sun...S wind 30 to 35 kt. Combined seas 20 ft.

Mon...SW wind 25 to 30 kt. Wind waves 7 ft. W swell 19 ft.

From this, you should be able to tell that ocean recreation is out for a while too. But for this time of year, that's not all that much of a surprise.

Central & South Coast Reports – The recreational ocean salmon season will open March 15th from Cape Falcon south to the California border and will end sometime in September or October, the date yet to be determined.

Boats out of Depoe Bay are making fair catches of rockfish and barely legal ling cod just outside of port, limits of rocks and larger lings further out. With ling cod moving into shallow water to spawn, nearshore catches are improving as are results for rock and jetty fishers.

Siuslaw steelheaders have been scoring chrome by drifting yarn/egg combos although the fish have been on the small side.

Winchester Bay crabbing has come to a standstill as the recent freshet has lowered salinity levels and washed mud into the estuary. Storm fronts moving through this coming week are expected to keep the Umpqua high and the water level fluctuating - not a good scenario for steelheaders or springer hopefuls.

Pro guide Curtis Palmer (541-870-9451) reports from various south coast locations for the first week of March:

“Umpqua River; Elkton, Oregon-

Reports of the first Spring Chinook are traveling through the fishing community. I have not found a confirmation at this time, but I believe that by this time of the year if one angler says he caught a Springer, then there is most likely another old timer that has caught a couple already this year and doesn't want the news to spread yet. Farther up the river near Tyee the fishing for Steelhead has been tough when the river is low enough to drift. I have felt fortunate on the days that I have been on the river to find 3-5 fish that want to test their acrobatic nature to our skills on the rod.

“Umpqua River, North Fork; Roseburg, Oregon-

The current Winter Steelhead count as of Feb.8, 2011 over the Winchester Dam is 2,726. This is not far behind the Winter Steelhead count for the same date in 2010. Which was 3,059 Steelhead threw the counting station at Winchester Dam on the North Umpqua River. Even though the amount of Steelhead is not that different between the last two years, the amount of fish being caught is as different as black and white. I have no answers for why this majestic river is not producing the double digit catches that we have become spoiled from, but it is spitting out a couple of the nicest Steelhead an angler can find anywhere on most full days of fishing. The colder the water is the more I have been using hardware like Little Cleo or my favorite Brad's Wiggler's. The fish have not been moving to pick up the bait, but seem to still want to crash the plugs of yesterday hard as they ever have. Running plugs is a lot of work, but it could make the difference between catching fish and going home skunked.

“Umpqua River, South Fork; Canyonville, Oregon-

Thursday the 3rd of March had smiles on the faces of several anglers' in the Stanton Park area of the S. Umpqua River. Finally there was some hatchery Steelhead for anglers to harvest. Most of the fish were what I would describe as Brat's, but a couple reports came in of fish around the 10 pound range. Saturday morning the river was off colored and rising fast, but still fishable above Cow Creek. During the two hours I fished behind the Casino we saw 3 Steelhead caught and was told of two others that were out of my sight of view. Large Yarn Balls, the size of a half dollar and Pink Worms appeared to be the magic ticket on that day. The end of the week was encouraging and I am hoping that it remains this good when the river falls back into shape after these storms pass.

“Coquille River, South Fork; Powers, Oregon-

I have to put a big blue ribbon on this river for the season. It started out strong with Steelhead around every corner and laying on every flat. It may be crowded on some days, but it sure seems to have enough fish for everyone on those days. The river was either extremely low or extremely high this past week, so fishing pressure was light. I see no reason why the fishing would not continue to be as fabulous when it comes back into shape as it has been all season. If you have been thinking about visiting this wonderful coastal stream, I suggest the next time the water level drops down to 3.5 feet to be on the river drifting Yarn Balls or Roe.”

High water has been a problem this week on the Coos River. Then it has been fishable, a preponderance of colored fish and downrunners have made up catches. While a few bright fish

will be entering, the winter steelhead season is winding down here. This is the time of year when sturgeon fishing generally starts to pick up, however. When the river has been fishable, the flies-only stretch of the North Umpqua has been slow to fair while the South Umpqua has been most productive.

The Coquille is on a similar schedule as the Coos with catch reports much the same. Local anglers are secretive about the striped bass fishery which starts up about this time of year and continues through springtime but we'll try to score some reports.

The lower Rogue produced a mix of steelhead and spring Chinook over the past weekend, demonstrating how it earned a reputation as a world-class fishery. Springers must be fin-clipped to retain on the Rogue. The lower Rogue is high this week and will be out of shape through this coming weekend. As levels drop and the water clears, spring Chinook season should be underway. Steelheading has been fair on the middle Rogue but it's high and off-color this week. Fishing will resume when the river recovers but that won't happen for at least the next several days. Winter steelhead are into the upper Rogue although few have been trying for them and results have been spotty at best.

The Chetco was raging at 15,400 cgs at mid-day on March 10th. It will be several days before it will fish.

Dave Pitts (Salmon Trout and Steelhead.com) reports, "Once again it held true, within five weeks of the Blue Backs showing the Chetco season is slowly coming to an end. When March swings in it usually means one of two things, extremely high waters or the total opposite low clear waters with low fish numbers of which most are setting on redds and should be left alone.

"This past week on the Chetco has been blown out due to heavy rains inland pushing the CFS value past 12,000 CFS. No steelhead were confirmed.

"Anglers focus shifts from the Chetco to the Rogue from March through October as Spring kings begin their yearly run fresh out of the sea. Last season there was a shortage of anchovies; Jim Carey of The Rogue Outdoor Store in Gold Beach stated he geared up well in advance and has both 5 ½ and 6 inch fresh vacuum packed anchovies ready to roll.

"With several confirmed spring kings already caught this season anglers should expect the Rogue get better as April comes into view. As a general rule of thumb from the 3rd week in April to Mays end has always been the hottest Month to fish.

"Some anglers prefer a drill bit spin others like that wobble, Prawns also is another well kept secret many anglers on Southern Oregon Rivers refuse to use. Many beliefs are if they use it on Northern Rivers it will not work on those in the South.

"Areas most successful for Spring Salmon on the Rogue River are the old Mill site off of the South Bank of the Rogue River, fishing the Willow Bar just above this launch, down river at Elephant rock, The Birthday Hole, The Point Beaver slide and below at the Fence Line and Wheaton.

"Anglers should also note, water temps between 52 and 56 degrees are prime."

Scheduled for trout planting this week are Ben Irving Reservoir, Cooper Cr. Reservoir Galesville Reservoir Herberts Pond, Loon Lake, Marie Lake and Plat I Reservoir.

Central and Eastern Oregon – A few March Browns are hatching on the Deschutes below

Maupin but trout are yet to key on them. Nymphing has been most productive for reddsides although results are only fair at best. Spring Chinook retention is allowed starting April 15th.

Lake Billy Chinook has been slow for kokanee but is providing a fair fishery for bull trout. Results for kokanee will improve into spring as there is a good population here.

Lake trout fishing is slow at Crescent Lake but trollers are picking up one or two large fish per day. The weather has been variable from sunshine to snow flurries.

Having recovered from a recent freshet, the Wallowa River is fishing well now for steelhead. water color is good and the temperature optimum at 40 degrees.

Steelheading is good on the Grande Ronde despite water levels that are a little high and the river is showing some color. Fly casters are hooking numbers of steelhead on articulated leeches.

Pro Guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688) reports, "The cold and ice have cleared out of the Grande Ronde River, the water level has stabilized this week and steelhead fishing is excellent.

"The catch rate from the state creel survey shows catch rates considerably below 10 hours per fish and there is a good representation of 10 pound or slightly larger fish in this spring's run. An interesting side note is a spring Chinook that was landed last weekend. This in an early arrival for these fish There is about six weeks of great fishing left this season. Give me a call for some fun on the river."

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report for March 2011

North Puget Sound

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

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

While there have been a few reports of anglers hauling in some nice blackmouth, salmon fishing in Puget Sound has been slow the last couple of weeks of February. "Anglers that have put in their time on the water have been most successful," said Steve Thiesfeld, fish biologist with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "It looks like that will continue to be the case as we head into March. But hopefully fishing will improve as spring approaches."

Anglers looking for some competition might want to participate in the **Everett Blackmouth Derby** on March 19. Prizes include \$3,000 for the largest fish, \$1,500 for second place and \$500 for third place. For details, visit the [derby's website](#).

Meanwhile, numerous rivers are closed to fishing for **steelhead** and other game fish, including the Skagit, Sauk and Samish. The three rivers, usually open in March, closed early to protect wild steelhead that are returning in low numbers this year.

Freshwater anglers, however, can wet a line at some 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 Washington and Lake Sammamish continue to produce 14-18 inch cutthroat trout with the occasional lunker over 20 inches," he said. "Fishing for bass, perch, and **crappie** in all lakes should improve in March as water temperatures increase and fish move shallower."

Looking forward to the **summer salmon fishing** season? There's still time to provide input on proposals for this year's fisheries. Several public meetings have been scheduled throughout March as fishery managers continue to develop the 2011 salmon seasons, which will be finalized in mid-April. For more information on the meetings, visit WDFW's [North of Falcon website](#).

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

More wild steelhead are moving into rivers on the Olympic Peninsula, blackmouth salmon fisheries are under way in Puget Sound and the lingcod season opens March 12 in ocean areas south of Cape Alava.

In addition, WDFW plans to open several ocean beaches for a razor clam dig in March if marine toxin tests show the clams are safe to eat. The results of those tests will be announced about a week before the dig is scheduled to start.

The dig is tentatively scheduled to get under way after noon Saturday, March 19, then switch to morning hours March 20-22. Under that plan, digging will be allowed at four beaches – Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis and Mocrocks – March 19-20, then continue at two beaches – Long Beach and Twin Harbors – March 21-22.

No digging will be allowed before noon March 19 or after noon March 20-22.

"We're planning this opening at the time of year when the best tides for digging razor clams switch from the evening to the morning," said Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager. "It's a little tricky from a scheduling standpoint, but it does provide an opportunity for back-to-back digs the evening of Saturday, March 19, and the morning of Sunday, March 20."

The fifth annual Ocean Shores Razor Clam Festival, which includes a chowder cook-off, is also scheduled March 19. Information on the festival is available at <http://www.2011clams.com/>.

Wild Steelhead fishing on the northern peninsula is a good bet right now, said Kirt Hughes, regional fishery manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "This is peak season for wild steelhead," he said. "Anglers need to keep an eye on river conditions, but fishing is good right now."

As in years past, anglers may retain only one wild steelhead per license year on the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Quillayute, Quinalt and Sol Duc rivers. On all other rivers, anglers may retain only hatchery-reared steelhead marked with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar.

Anglers looking to hook a **hatchery steelhead** should try fishing rivers in the Chehalis River Basin. "During the last weeks of February, fishing slowed in the basin," Hughes said. "But the Satsop, Skookumchuck and Wynoochee rivers still offer the best opportunities for hatchery steelhead in March."

For more information on steelhead fishing regulations, check the [Fishing in Washington pamphlet](#).

As water temperatures begin to warm, freshwater anglers also might want to try fishing at one of the region's lakes. Popular lakes open year-round include Thurston County's Saint Clair Lake for

rainbow and **brown trout**, American Lake in Pierce County for **kokanee** and Kitsap Lake in Kitsap County for rainbow trout.

Rather catch a **blackmouth salmon**? Several areas of Puget Sound are open to fishing for resident chinook. Anglers fishing marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon) and 12 (Hood Canal) have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook.

Those fishing the Strait of Juan de Fuca – marine areas 5 (Sekiu) and 6 (eastern Strait) – have a daily limit of one salmon. “During the last weekend of February, anglers fishing for blackmouth at Coyote and Partridge banks in the eastern Strait had success,” said Steve Thiesfeld, Puget Sound salmon manager for WDFW.

Anglers fishing for salmon in Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound) continue to have success hooking resident **coho**, said Larry Phillips, regional fish biologist for WDFW. Best bets include the Tacoma Narrows, the Squaxin Island area and in Eld Inlet off Evergreen Beach. Anglers fishing Marine Area 13 have daily limit of one salmon.

Another option is **lingcod** fishing, which gets under way March 12 in marine areas 1-3, south of Cape Alava. The minimum size for lingcod in these areas is 22 inches, with a daily limit of two fish per angler. For lingcod fishing regulations, check the [Fishing in Washington pamphlet](#). Looking forward to the **summer salmon fishing** season? There's still time to provide input on proposals for this year's fisheries. Several public meetings have been scheduled throughout March as fishery managers continue to develop the 2011 salmon seasons, which will be finalized in mid-April. For more information on the meetings, visit WDFW's [North of Falcon website](#).

Southwest Washington

Spring chinook fever is beginning to take hold on the Columbia River. More than 50 boats were counted on the lower river one day in mid February when only a few fish had been counted at Bonneville Dam. By late March – when the bulk of the run is expected to arrive – that number is expected to grow to nearly 2,000 per day.

“At first, the fish usually arrive in fits and starts, then eventually start moving upriver in a steady flow,” said Joe Hymer, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). “Through March, we expect to see the number of boat and bank anglers on the river to increase week by week.”

According to the pre-season forecast, 198,400 upriver spring chinook will return to the Columbia River this year, close to the 10-year average. While that prediction is well below last year's banner run of 315,345 fish, the number of large five-year-old chinook is expected to be up significantly over last year.

The forecast anticipates the return of more than 100,000 five-year-old fish to the upper Columbia and Willamette River this year, Hymer said. By comparison, only about 26,000 of the fish that returned last year were in that age class.

“We're already seeing a high number of large fish in the early catch,” Hymer said. “Those five-year-olds generally run 18 to 30 pounds apiece.”

Through Feb. 28, spring chinook fishing is open to boat and bank anglers on a daily basis from Buoy 10 near the mouth of the Columbia River upstream to the Interstate 5 Bridge under rules described in the 2010-11 *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet.

From March 1 through April 4, the fishery will be expanded 22 miles upriver to Rooster Rock, under new rules approved by fishery managers in Washington and Oregon. Bank anglers will also be allowed to fish from Rooster Rock up to the fishing boundary below Bonneville Dam during that time.

Above Bonneville Dam, the fishery will be open to boat and bank anglers on a daily basis from March 16 through April 24 between the Tower Island powerlines six miles below The Dalles Dam and the Washington/Oregon state line, 17 miles upriver from McNary Dam. Bank anglers can also fish from Bonneville Dam upriver to the powerlines during that time.

As in years past, anglers may retain only hatchery-reared fish, marked with a clipped adipose fin. All unmarked wild spring chinook must be released unharmed.

Anglers fishing downriver from Bonneville Dam may retain one hatchery-reared adult chinook per day as part of their catch limit. Above the dam, anglers can keep two marked hatchery chinook per day.

To guard against overestimating the run, the states will manage the fishery with a 30 percent buffer until the forecast is updated in late April or early May, said Cindy LeFleur, Columbia River policy coordinator for WDFW. "If the fish return at or above expectations, we will look toward providing additional days of fishing on the river later in spring," she said.

Initial seasons announced today allocate 7,750 upper river spring chinook to the sport fishery below Bonneville Dam, 1,650 to anglers fishing above Bonneville and 2,100 to the commercial fleet. Those guidelines do not include the catch of spring chinook returning to tributaries flowing into the Columbia River below Bonneville Dam or into the Bonneville Pool.

The Cowlitz River is currently open to fishing for spring chinook, with a daily limit of two adult chinook salmon. On the Kalama and Lewis rivers, the limit is one adult chinook salmon per day. Above Bonneville, the Wind River and Drano Lake are scheduled to open for spring chinook March 16 with a limit of two chinook per day.

All of those rivers are also open to fishing for **hatchery steelhead** under rules outlined in the 2010-11 [Fishing in Washington](#) pamphlet. Hymer said fishing for late-run hatchery steelhead is still going strong, particularly on the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers, noting that summer-run steelhead will start coming in right behind them later in the month. Although spring chinook start arriving on the Cowlitz in early March, hatchery steelhead usually make up the bulk of the catch until later in the month, he said.

In other waters, anglers should be aware that March 15 is the last day to fish for steelhead on Abernathy, Cedar (Clark Co.), Germany, Mill (Cowlitz Co.), Rock (Skamania Co.), Salmon (Clark Co.) creeks and on the Coweeman, Elochoman, Grays, East Fork Lewis and Washougal rivers. **Sturgeon** anglers should also be aware of new joint fishing seasons and catch guidelines established for 2011. Concerned about the decline of legal-size sturgeon in the lower Columbia River, fishery managers from Washington and Oregon agreed to reduce this year's total catch by 30 percent. As in years past, 80 percent of the allowable catch will be allocated to the sport fishery and 20 percent to the commercial fishery.

"In practical terms, this year's action is expected to reduce the amount of time sturgeon fisheries in the lower Columbia River will be open at the end of the season," said Brad James, another WDFW fish biologist.

Fishing seasons approved for 2011 in the lower Columbia River are as follows:

- **Buoy 10 to the Wauna powerlines:** Retention of white sturgeon is allowed daily from Jan. 1 to April 30; May 14 through June 26; and July 1-4. From Jan. 1 to April 30, sturgeon must measure between 38 inches and 54 inches (fork length) to be retained. From May 14 through the end of the season they must measure 41 inches to 54 inches (fork length) to be retained. Catch-and-release fishing is allowed on days when retention is prohibited.
- **Wauna powerlines to Bonneville Dam:** Retention of white sturgeon is allowed three days per week (Thursday through Saturday) from Jan. 1 through July 31 and from Oct. 8 until Dec. 31. Sturgeon must measure between 38 inches and 54 inches (fork length) to be retained. Catch-and-release fishing is allowed on days when retention is prohibited. All fishing for sturgeon will be closed from May 1 through Aug. 31 in the sturgeon sanctuary downriver from Bonneville Dam described in the *Fishing in Washington* rules pamphlet.

At a previous joint state hearing, the two states took action to close the Sand Island Slough near Rooster Rock to fishing at least through April 30.

Bucking the trend in the lower river, monitoring and fishery data show that sturgeon populations are growing above Bonneville Dam, James said. In response, catch guidelines were increased from 1,400 fish to 2,000 fish in the Bonneville Pool and from 165 fish to 500 fish in the John Day Pool. The 300-fish guideline in The Dalles Pool remains unchanged.

Despite the higher quota, the Bonneville Pool was closed to sturgeon retention at the end of the day Feb. 18. Anglers are advised to watch the [WDFW website](#) for updates on The Dalles Pool and the John Day Pool.

While sturgeon fishing has been slow in the lower river, the **walleye** fishery has been picking up above Bonneville Dam. By mid February, boat anglers fishing The Dalles Pool were averaging a walleye per rod.

Rather catch **trout**? WDFW plans to plant a total of 10,000 half-pound rainbows in Kline Pond, Battle Ground Lake and Lacamas Lake – all in Clark County – in March. In addition, Lacamas Lake is expected to receive 5,000 browns of similar size. Anglers fishing Kline Pond averaged nearly two fish apiece in mid February after a previous trout plant. See the [trout-stocking schedule](#) on the WDFW website for more information on winter trout stocking.

Eastern Washington

March may start off a bit slow for fishing in the region with the recent return of wintery weather and iced-over waters that will keep anglers home, limit their access, or slow fish stocking.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Lyons Ferry and Tucannon fish hatchery crews have been working to get "catchable" size (about one-third pound) and "jumbo" size (one-plus pound) **rainbow trout** stocked in several lakes and ponds in the southeast end of the region that open to fishing March 1 or are open year-round.

Six of the seven March 1-opening impoundments off the Tucannon River on WDFW's Wooten Wildlife Area in Columbia County are getting some of their annual allotment of hatchery rainbows, with others stocked later in the season. Big Four Lake is scheduled to receive a total of 2,000 catchables and 300 jumbos; Blue Lake will receive 23,000 catchables and 400 jumbos; Deer Lake gets 3,400 catchables and 50 jumbos; Rainbow Lake gets 15,000 catchables and 325 jumbos; Spring Lake gets 11,000 catchables and 325 jumbos; and Watson Lake gets 21,300 catchables and 325 jumbos. Beaver Lake has water depth and quality issues that preclude it from viable fish stocking this year.

Also opening March 1 for stocked rainbow fishing is Fishhook Pond in Walla Walla County, which is scheduled to receive a total of 5,000 catchables and 150 jumbos this season, and Pampa Pond in Whitman County, which will receive a total of 6,000 catchables and 200 jumbos.

Two year-round-open small impoundments off the Snake River near the bottom of Alpowa Grade west of Clarkston in Asotin County are also being stocked at this time. Golf Course Pond will get a total of 22,000 catchables and 475 jumbos, and West Evans Ponds will get a total of 22,000 catchables and 475 jumbos.

Orchard Pond, a year-round impoundment off the Snake River in Columbia County, will receive a total of 2,000 catchables and 50 jumbos.

In Walla Walla County, two year-round fisheries are scheduled to receive some of their annual allotment of trout – Quarry Pond will get a total of 25,000 catchables and 400 jumbos, and Bennington Lake will get a total of 20,500 catchables and 625 jumbos.

Anglers can check [Catchable Trout Plant Reports](#) to see when WDFW hatchery crews will complete trout stocking.

Other waters opening March 1 in the region will likely provide action on a variety of fish later in the month when ice melts and access is easier. Most of these waters are not dependent on catchable fish stocking, but have fish populations that carry over through the winter.

Chris Donley, WDFW central district fish biologist, said that Liberty Lake, in eastern Spokane County, will be “fantastic” for carryover **brown trout** that run 16 to 25 inches. Liberty will also yield some of the earliest **yellow perch** and **crappie**, he says, “but not on the first of March this year.”

When warmer weather returns, Downs Lake in southwest Spokane County might be the best place in the region for the first **smallmouth bass**. Downs also has yellow perch, crappie, and carryover rainbow trout. Medical Lake, near the town of the same name in southwest Spokane County, has brown and rainbow trout.

Amber Lake in southwest Spokane County opens for catch-and-release of rainbow and **cutthroat trout** on March 1. Coffeepot Lake in Lincoln County opens on the first, under selective gear rules, for rainbows, perch and crappie. When conditions improve, both of these special rule fisheries should provide excellent fly-fishing opportunities.

Bill Baker, WDFW northeast district fish biologist, reports Deer Lake in southern Stevens County is still iced over. “If anglers attempt to fish it on the March 1 opener they need to be very cautious about safe ice depth,” he said. Deer Lake has bass, crappie, perch, rainbow and **lake trout**, and **kokanee**.

Baker also notes that northern Stevens County’s two winter-season rainbow trout lakes – Williams and Hatch – are still producing catches of fish measuring 13 to 14 inches. “The bite seems to be best in the early morning,” he said. Both lakes remain open through the month of March, but Baker warns anglers to be cautious about quickly changing ice conditions this late in the season.

WDFW police Sgt. Dan Rahn said fishing action has slowed at the central district’s two winter-season (December through March) lakes – Hog Canyon in Spokane County and Fourth of July in

Lincoln County. In February, many anglers checked were taking limits of rainbows, he notes, but changing conditions may be keeping anglers at home. "There's still plenty of nice fish to be caught at these lakes," he said. "But anglers do need to be careful about marginally safe ice." Baker also said Lake Roosevelt kokanee and rainbow trout fishing has been good and should continue through March. In the Spring Canyon area of the big Columbia River reservoir, both species are being caught near the surface.

Other year-round fisheries in the region that continue to provide good fishing include Sprague Lake for rainbows, and Rock Lake for rainbow and brown trout.

Another kind of fishing is available at the Inland Northwest Wildlife Council's 51st annual [Big Horn Outdoor Adventure Show](#), March 17-20, at the Spokane County Fair and Expo Center. Some 5,000 trout are stocked in three huge indoor lakes for kids to catch at "Fishing World," and there's a "Virtual Reality Fishing Simulator," fishing demonstration tank, lots of fishing seminars by experts, and hundreds of fishing equipment and charter service vendors. The show also offers a rifle range, archery range, laser shot shooting simulators, and of course the origins of the event – "Trophy Territory," where hundreds of hunter-harvested antlered and horned animals are displayed and judged by Boone and Crocket scorers.

Northcentral Washington

At least 18 **rainbow trout**-stocked waters in the northcentral region open to fishing on March 1, but only a few will likely be fishable early in the season. Only two lakes in Grant County – Martha Lake just east of the town of George and Upper Caliche Lake just west of George – were at least half-open from ice, reports Chad Jackson, a district fishing biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

"Fishing at Martha Lake should be good for 11 to 13-inch trout that were stocked late last fall," Jackson said. "There is also a good number of catchables at least 14 inches to be caught in Martha."

"Upper Caliche Lake will fish well, too, but the trout will be smaller, running eight to ten inches," he said. "We were unable to plant fish late last fall when the lake was iced over with that early winter weather in November."

Two other popular March 1-opening waters – Quincy and Burke lakes on WDFW's Quincy Wildlife Area southwest of the town of Quincy – were mostly iced over and unfishable at last check.

"When they do open up, I expect them to fish well since they received pretty hefty catchable plants last spring and fall," Jackson said. Burke Lake was stocked with 18,000 rainbows weigh a third of a pound and Quincy received 16,000.

Other Columbia Basin lakes opening March 1 on the Quincy Wildlife Area include Upper, Lower and West Caliche lakes, southwest of George; Dusty Lake, a selective gear rule fishery south of Quincy; and several small "walk-in" lakes, including Cascade, Cliff, Crystal, Cup, Dot, George and Spring.

Three other lakes – Lenice, Nunnally and Merry on WDFW's Crab Creek Wildlife Area in southwest Grant County just east of Beverly – open under selective gear rules March 1. Lake Lenore, north of the town of Soap Lake in Grant County, opens for catch-and-release trout fishing March 1. The fishery there for two to four-pound **Lahontan cutthroat trout** usually catches fire there by April.

In Okanogan County, lake fishing is an option on several stocked year-round waters, including Patterson Lake near Winthrop and Sidley Lake near Oroville. **Yellow perch** are usually caught at Patterson and rainbow trout are the predominant species at Sidley.

WDFW Okanogan district fish biologist Bob Jateff reminds **steelhead** anglers fishing the upper Columbia River and its tributaries that they are required to retain any hatchery-origin adipose-fin-clipped steelhead they catch up to the limit of four fish per day. The Wenatchee and Icicle rivers remain open to steelhead fishing until further notice. Anglers may retain hatchery steelhead with a clipped adipose fin and a circular (hole) punch in their caudal (tail) fin on the Wenatchee and Icicle rivers, along with other waterways in the upper Columbia.

Southcentral Washington

Spring chinook salmon are moving up the Columbia River and steelhead fishing should pick up soon, but **trout** fishing in area lakes is probably best bet for catching fish over the next few weeks.

"We start stocking year-round lakes in late February and continue right through June," said Eric Anderson, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "This fishery is really our bread and butter, and anglers look forward to it all year."

By mid-March, about a dozen lakes and ponds in Yakima, Kittitas, Franklin and Benton counties are scheduled to receive thousands of "catchable size" rainbow trout, along with hundreds of jumbos and triploids. For a complete list, see the [stocking schedule](#) for southcentral Washington on the WDFW website.

But anglers should also be aware that **steelhead** fishing usually picks up in March on the Columbia River and its tributaries. Paul Hoffarth, another WDFW fish biologist, notes that some of the highest catches of the season occur in March near the Ringold Springs Hatchery.

"A lot of steelhead that have been hanging out all winter will make their final spawning runs," Hoffarth said. "That's when catch rates start rising again."

The daily limit is four hatchery steelhead per day from the Columbia River from Priest Rapids to Chief Joseph Dam and all tributaries in between. Under rules now in effect, anglers are required to retain the first four adipose-fin-clipped steelhead they catch. See the WDFW [fishing rule](#) issued Feb. 9 for details on that rule and other new regulations.

Meanwhile, the **spring chinook** fishery opens March 1 above Bonneville Dam with a two-chinook daily limit. The area open for spring chinook fishing has been extended upstream of McNary Dam to the Washington-Oregon border, 17 miles upstream from the dam.

Spring chinook probably won't start showing up in the catch that far upriver until mid April, while walleye are already starting to make a good showing, Hoffarth said. "We're are starting to see a few walleye in the creel, including some good-size fish running over 10 pounds. Walleye fishing should continue to improve for the next few weeks as these fish get ready for their early spring spawn."

White sturgeon are also still an option. The sturgeon fishery above McNary Dam (Lake Wallula) is scheduled to run through July 31, and the catch guideline for the John Day Pool (Lake Umatilla) was recently increased from 165 to 500 fish. "That increase should allow us to keep the fishery open for retention on into March," Hoffarth said.

TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail

Write to the TGF staff:

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Random Links

Free burlap bags - Damascus:

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How to Rig a Cut Plug Herring (video):

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GOOD LUCK!