

The Guide's Forecast - volume 14 issue number 1

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 30th – January 5th, 2012**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Don't forget to purchase your new 2012 angling licenses and tags. Also return your 2011 tags whether you punched a keeper or not.

Smelt often make a showing in the lower Columbia River on a weather system such as what we are experiencing. This may stimulate the bite in the St. Helens area and downstream but the regions smelt population is currently listed and unlawful to harvest by either sport or commercial fishers.

The Willamette is high and roiled this week. The 2012 lower Willamette sturgeon retention fishery will be decided in January, open in February and may be only two weekends in duration due to a shortage of keeper-sized fish.

Rain this week has the McKenzie out of shape but the level is predicted to be dropping in the coming week.

The Santiam system is high and angry this week.

Clackamas water levels are forecast to rise nearly six feet at Estacada but will be dropping through the New Year's weekend. Steelhead will enter with the freshet. Although there aren't as many steelhead on Eagle Creek as there used to be, recent precipitation should flood the system with fresh fish headed for the hatchery.

Steelheading has been fair on the Sandy. This glacial river will experience a moderate impact from rain this week with levels dependent on freezing levels on Mount Hood.

Northwest – Steelhead angler's long awaited rain freshet is now pounding coastal systems, with water conditions less than ideal until we near the New Year. If weather models remain accurate, smaller systems like the Highway 30 streams, the Necanicum and Kilchis may offer some opportunities. The North Fork Nehalem and Three Rivers will be outstanding options however once they clear and that may be as early as Friday.

Larger systems such as the Wilson, Trask and Nestucca are further off and may not fish until early of next week. When those systems do clear, the Wilson will be a top bet for hatchery and wild fish with excellent opportunities for bank fishers at the Dam Hole on the Trask, even in high water.

Plunkers will be the first to produce measureable results, targeting moving fish in the shallow water not far from shore. Steelhead will be moving in the slower flows close to the bank to avoid burning valuable calories on their upstream migration. Large colored lures like the spin-n-glo, tipped with eggs should produce fair results for systems with heavier concentrations of fish.

When flows subside to "steelhead green", side-drifters will score the best results with the upper reaches of these systems producing the best early and the lower reaches as flows continue to subside.

As we enter what appears to be the authentic Oregon winter weather pattern, steelheaders may find that they only have short windows of opportunity between systems. High winds will put large trees down, making all systems potentially dangerous at any river level. This is the time of year

to proceed with extreme caution.

Sturgeon anglers found good success in Tillamook Bay prior to the holiday. The west channel of Tillamook Bay produced the most consistent catches for anglers using sand shrimp. The middle of next week may produce the next such opportunity for anglers working the late outgoing tide.

Southwest – Ocean crabbing, open north of Gold Beach, has been slow to fair while results in bays and estuaries have been good. Offshore crabbing opens south of Gold Beach on January 15th.

On rare winter days when boats have been able to get out on the ocean, lingcod fishing has been very good while rockfish catches have been spotty.

Early winter steelhead results have been slow on the Coos and Coquille but precipitation this week should turn things around as water levels start to drop.

Winter steelhead are scattered on the Umpqua mainstem but catches have been spotty. Fishing has remained slow on the North Umpqua. Rain this week should finally move winter steelhead into the South Umpqua which opened the 1st of December but has had no winters available.

Steelheading in the low, clear waters of the Chetco was surprisingly good over the past weekend. Once the river recovers from rain this week it should be excellent.

There is very little action on the lower Rogue at this time but the freshet this week should rejuvenate winter steelheading. Reports indicate only a few steelhead and half-pounders in the Agness stretch with the middle Rogue producing the occasional winter fish. Summer steelheading has been fair but steady on the upper Rogue for smoker-quality fish.

Rain this week is putting much-needed water in the Elk and Sixes rivers. Fresh fish will enter but early chinook are already spawning. It might be time to think winter steelhead here.

Eastern – Results on the Deschutes have been spotty for steelheaders. There are a few fish around but they have obviously been in fresh water for a while.

Deep trolled jigs and large plugs are taking fair to good catches of lake trout at Crescent Lake.

Steelheaders working the John Day area are starting to see their fishery begin to fade.

SW Washington – With district streams headed to the high water mark, steelheaders will be sidelined for several days. Plunkers can do well on the Cowlitz and Lewis but these rivers should be on the drop for action to be had. Fish close to shore with large spin-n-glos and shrimp or eggs for bait.

The Cowlitz is likely to produce the best results as it is getting a great return this year. The Lewis and Kalama Rivers will also likely be out through the weekend with boaters anxious to get back into fishable conditions after the long dry spell.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Sturgeon fishing remains as expected and should continue that way for several more months. 2012 sturgeon seasons are scheduled to be set at the January 26th compact hearing along with spring chinook. It's official, the 2012 spring chinook run is

forecasted to be 314,200 adults. More details on the breakdown can be found here: http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/forecasts/columbia_river/2012_spring_forecasts.pdf.

As we've previously reported, sturgeon numbers continue to decline so in theory, sturgeon action shouldn't be as good as it was last year but that didn't pan out for last year's summer fishery. Most would agree that even though numbers were down, the fishing was better last year than we've seen in the last several. More will be revealed...

The Guide's Forecast – Steelheaders still have a chance at a keeper or a wild one in the John Day Pool or the John Day arm. Trollers will still take fish in the mainstem while bobber and jig fishers will successfully work the mainstem John Day itself.

We still have a long wait before action gets good here again.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – The Willamette has just started reacting to rainfall as of Thursday this week but that means it will be slower to rise than smaller rivers and will take longer to recover.

It will probably come as no surprise that the McKenzie will be too high to fish this coming weekend.

The Santiam system will be a torrent until the middle of next week at which time prospects will start to improve.

The Guide's Forecast – There have been a few winters taken by plunkers in the Meldrum Bar stretch over the past couple of weeks but prospects will improve when the river drops and numbers improve. Once the upper Willamette water drops and clears, winter fly fishing will resume below Dexter Dam and on the Middle Fork.

As the lower McKenzie drops back into shape in the coming week, trout fishing should be worthwhile as Blue-Winged-Olives resume hatching from mid-day to late afternoon.

The upper North Santiam will still offer late summer steelhead opportunities as these fish won't get into spawning mode until later in January and into February. Spinners or bobber and jig will tempt them. Winters will be available later in the year as numbers increase but they'll all be wild, suitable for catch-and-release action.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Although a few winters were taken over the past weekend, Clackamas water levels took a serious hit overnight on December 28th and the 'two' of this one-two punch is due in New Year's Eve, pushing flows over the level known as the "Historical Maximum." That's way high in fish-speak, as in from 11 feet at Estacada to over 20 this weekend.

The Sandy was up eight feet at Bull Run and the town of Sandy as of Midnight on December 28th. As we are experiencing a high freezing level with rain on Mt. Hood, the water is predictably muddy as hell. It's a mess today, December 29th.

The Guide's Forecast – The Clackamas will be dropping on Sunday but is unlikely to fish well until mid-week or later as it drops and clears. The good news is that this is just the kick-start winter steelheading needed on the Clack. Try drifting small baits of good-quality cured eggs or

jigs under a bobber. Barton to carver should be good along with the area at the mouth of Eagle Creek.

Freezing levels (as well as water levels) are forecast to drop over the weekend and into the week to come. The increase in water level on the Sandy is sure to draw fresh, chrome winter steelhead into the system and, as the level continues to drop in the week to come, there is reason for optimism despite this being only the beginning of the broodstock run.

North Coast Fishing Report – Reports of success were not widespread prior to the current rain freshet we're now on. Anglers that took our advice and worked the lower stretches or tidewater areas of north coast streams did find limited success. Probably the most successful anglers were working the lower Wilson and Nestucca Rivers where fish were still staging in the deeper haunts. Effort remained low however.

Currently, every steelheader knows what's going on. The rivers are rising, rising, rising. And although this is a welcome change from most of the month of December, options are very limited right now and no new reports are coming in for obvious reasons. For that reason alone, we'll spend most of our focus on action that lies ahead and you'll see a similarity to last week's forecast since we didn't get any new rain until recently.

Sturgeon anglers working the west channel did find some keepers on the last tide series. Sand shrimp is the obvious go-to bait, that won't change. Anglers intimately familiar with Tillamook Bay are likely to find success in any one of the intricate channels that weave through the estuary, targeting the fish when they're most likely to be utilizing this network; the last half of outgoing tide.

Anglers weren't able to get offshore either; weather was rough and tides were extreme. We have much to look forward to if you're a steelheader...

The Guide's Forecast – Steelheaders finally got their wish, maybe too many of us were asking for rain, we got a lot of it and more to come in the next several hours. None-the-less, this should make for some pretty good opportunity in the coming days with lot of options on the table when flows begin to subside.

Smaller rivers will fish best and although fish will already be working their way to the upper reaches under these conditions, more will come when the water clears. Once these systems start to drop, the action should be good for those employing techniques that target moving fish and later, anglers that have to hunt out their prey once the flows settle down to respectable levels. Each region will have their own opportunities:

Here's the run-down from north to south:

Highway 30 streams (Klaskanine, Big Creek, Gnat Creek)- With the rain filling the banks, all sections and all water should be fished for migrating fish. They will make hay to the hatcheries so find soft water to intercept them in. It's still important to camouflage up on these small systems but steelhead will clearly respond better in the higher, more off-color conditions we're likely to witness into the weekend. Bait will work best; shrimp or eggs. Private land is the lay of the land here so watch your step as landowners can get justifiably angry.

Necanicum River- With the river swollen, fish are sure to follow! Fish will hold in every kind of water and should be pretty receptive to shrimp or eggs. Driftboaters have to watch for downed trees however, especially because of the wind associated with the current rain event. Bank

anglers will have the best access above Klootch Creek while boaters will do best downstream of that. This river doesn't fish well for driftboats when the flows start to subside so there will only be a small window of opportunity, say about Friday, Saturday and maybe Sunday. Under these favorable high water conditions, there couldn't be a better time to put into practice the end of drift scenario, where you let your bait drift into the slow water at the bottom of your run. Believe it, moving steelhead will be on the side of the hard water, where they expend fewer calories on their way upstream.

North Fork Nehalem – The hatchery received numerous fish on Wednesday and fish will likely continue to pour into the hatchery trap with the prolonged high water. The closer you fish to the hatchery, the higher the concentration of fish will be. Like most systems, bait will work best but since you'll have a lot of competition, you need to bring your "A" game if you plan on meeting your expectations. Did I mention you won't be the only one there?

This fishery should remain strong for the next week and anglers should begin fishing the rivers edge once the river starts dropping. Don't be afraid to plunk a gob of eggs just a few feet offshore, especially if the water remains colored up. Fish will be on the move for the next several days and hopefully, hatchery personnel will be recycling fish because there should be a lot of them present.

Mainstem Nehalem – Occasionally gets stray hatchery fish but wild fish make up the bulk of this catch. This system fishes best when other north coast streams are low and clear but that clearly isn't now. This river will be out of reach for a long while now.

Kilchis River – Is still likely to get some hatchery fish back to it but hatchery plants have slowly been going down over the last few years. Unfortunately, it's not a river that has a lot of bank access and in low water, it's even hard to get a boat down in low flows. The hatchery plants in this river are a fraction of what they used to be but there should still be catchable numbers present from Kilchis Park downstream. Some stretches near the park are vulnerable to downed trees so come prepared and scout ahead to make sure this river remains floatable. Wear your life jackets, I've seen anglers dump their boats in even the lowest of flows.

Wilson River – When flows subside, it will be game on for steelhead on the Wilson River. Although chinook retention will remain open through Saturday, the river likely won't come back into shape by then. When flows do subside enough to fish the river, plugs such as tadpolly's or small Flatfish or Kwikfish will find biters. Target steelhead in shallower drifts and leave no pocket un-picked using egg clusters for bait. Steelhead should be keyed into spawning chinook (and their future offspring). It may be a few days after the New Year but steelhead will respond to plugs better in the lower flows. Broodstock steelhead should begin to make a show but anglers are more likely to find the less motivated Alsea stock steelhead which should be best acclimated to the lower reaches (downstream of Mills Bridge).

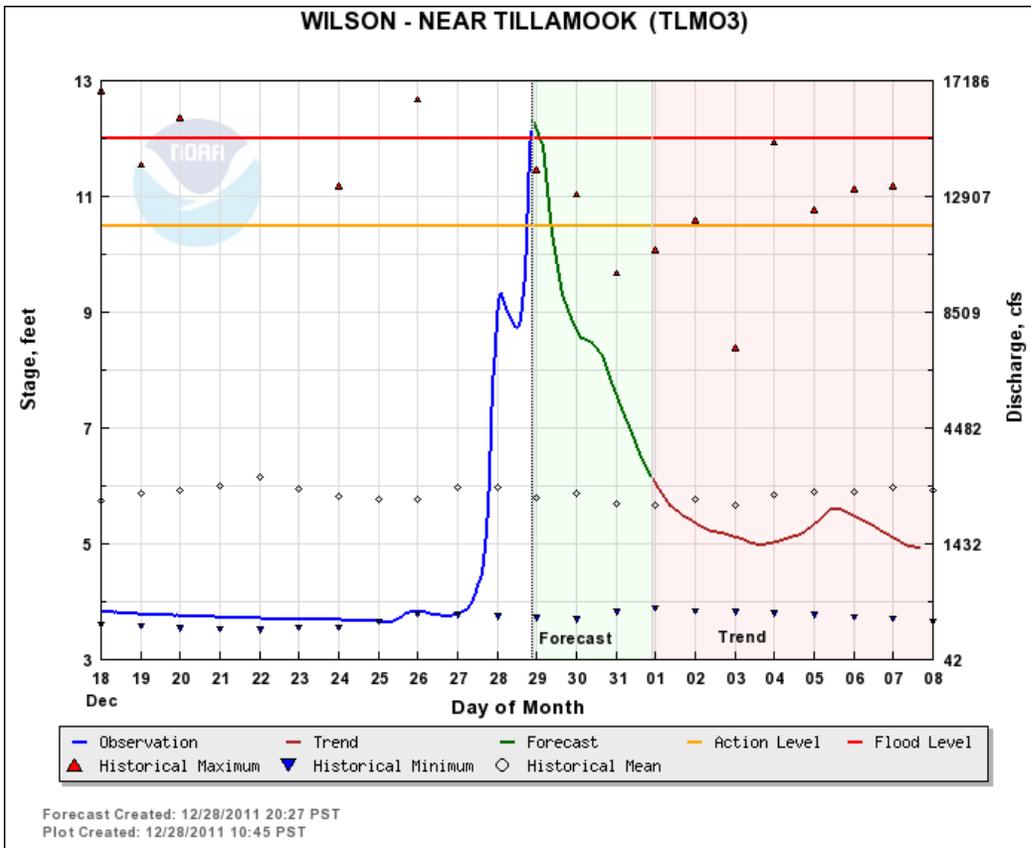
Trask River – Mostly wild fish this time of year, there should also be a few hatchery strays here and far less people fishing. The upper drifts may be a bit barren of good numbers of fish but adventuresome boaters and bank anglers still stand a chance at a good fish above the hatchery. The Dam Hole should hold fair numbers of biters, especially when the water first begins to clear. You don't need high visibility to find fish at the Dam Hole, if you can see 8 or 10 inches into the water, you're in 'em.

Three Rivers/Nestucca system – Three Rivers should be a prime spot this week, especially when the flows subside. Like other systems, you don't need excellent visibility here because the fish will be present in high quantities. Bait will produce best near the hatchery where you will be joined

by 50 of your favorite friends. There should be good opportunity downstream of the hatchery too, with good bank access available on the highway side of the river.

Although action is likely to pick up significantly in Three Rivers and downstream of its mouth on the mainstem Nestucca, the mainstem Nestucca itself won't likely see a significant improvement until later in January and late February when broodstock returns hit the river. Wild fish should make up a significant component of the catch as well this time of year. It's all a Three Rivers show in the early part of the season here and it should be a pretty good show. Catches on the mainstem were fair for a few veteran boats prior to the high water however.

Here's the hydrograph model for the Wilson River this week, plan your outing accordingly:



Although sturgeon can be an option in muddy waters, the tides aren't too favorable (not to mention the wind and wave action) for good gator action this week. There are better tides ahead in the middle of next week, I wonder how the weather will be. It's pretty challenging to detect a sturgeon bite when your rod tip is hurdling from side to side.

Crabbing? Why? The lower Columbia may still be an option; in between hurricanes that is.

Combined seas to nearly 20 feet over the weekend. It's a good week not to be an ocean going fish....

Central & South Coast Reports – While some angling regulations change on January 1st, the retention of cabezon by boaters isn't one of them, They must be released until April 1, 2012. Shore-bound fishers can continue to keep them as part of their rockfish limit.

The deluge falling on the southwest Oregon coast is forefront in the brain-pans of those of us who have fishing on our minds most of the time. Today (Thursday, December 29th) will produce the greatest volume of precipitation with as many as two or three inches of water falling from the sky according to meteorological prognosticators. That's a bunch and is bound to have a profound negative result with an equally positive effect as the skies clear starting Saturday, the Eve of 2012.

Crabbing has been excellent in coastal bays and estuaries, particularly in Winchester and Coos bays. Both of these are deepwater bays which are effected to a lesser degree by a freshet than their smaller counterparts.

Local reports indicate the Alsea is high and muddy. The popular North Fork won't be fishable for a while.

While the Umpqua system is blown out this weekend, once the water drops and clears, winter steelhead will be in the South Umpqua and it will only get better through January and into February.

Steelheading has been very slow in the Coos and Coquille but the freshet this wee will bring fresh fish in to these rivers.

The Rogue will swell to nearly 14,000 cfs as it increases five feet in depth at Agness. Recovery will be rapid with the dry weekend forecast and fishing should resume early next week. While it's still early in the winter steelhead run here, results are expected to be good for adult and half-pounders in the lower river. Yes, rain this week will invigorate winter steelheading on the lower river but it is also likely a death-knell for extended summer-in-winter fishing on the upper Rogue. On the other hand, wit the exception if Mark Freeman, few are bemoaning the end of an extended season on the high end of the Rogue.

There will be no more singin' the steelhead blues over low, clear water on the Chetco River. While levels over 15 feet at Brookings and flows greater than 30,000 cfs are not fishing-friendly numbers, that's the forecast for New Year's Eve. Recovery will be rapid, however, and fresh, chrome winter steelhead will rush in with the freshet and are expected to provide some great action for fishers long about Monday and into the week to come.

As rains hit the southwest coast starting Wednesday this week and Elk and Sixes river levels have been on the rise since. One report indicated hundreds of winter steelhead filling the fish ladder on the Elk. Steelheading will be good when river levels improve but keep in mind that opportunities on these diminutive rivers are of short duration and plan accordingly. Chinook fishing will officially close here on the last day of December.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Winter trout fishing is fair to good on Fall River with BWO predictably the major hatch of interest.

Crescent Lake will remain a good prospect for mackinaw as long as boats are equipped with downriggers to reach these large trout.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report for January 2012

North Puget Sound

Winter has arrived, but anglers still have opportunities to hook hatchery steelhead on several streams and blackmouth salmon in Puget Sound.

Of course, weather can be a factor in making decisions on where to fish. "Hatchery steelhead fishing should continue to be decent in early January," said John Long, statewide salmon manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "But if the rivers are out of shape, anglers might want to head out onto Puget Sound and fish for blackmouth salmon."

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

Long recommends fishing the waters around the San Juan Islands, where catch rates traditionally are some of the highest during the winter. Later in the month, anglers also might want to consider fishing Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet), which opens for salmon Jan. 16.

Before heading out, anglers can check [creel reports](#) for information on catch and effort in Puget Sound. Recreational fishery samplers with WDFW collect the information each week at fishing access sites throughout Puget Sound.

The **Puget Sound crab fishery** closes at sunset on Dec. 31, and crabbers are reminded that they are required to report their winter catch to WDFW by Feb. 1. Reports are due for the winter season, 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. 1-Feb. 1. For more information on catch record cards, visit WDFW's [catch record card webpage](#).

Winter is prime time to jig for **squid** in Puget Sound. Good spots include the Elliott Bay Pier in Seattle and the Edmonds Pier. More information is available on the department's [squid fishing webpage](#). Information on fishing piers is available [here](#).

In freshwater, several rivers are open for **hatchery steelhead** fishing, including the Skagit, Stillaguamish, Snohomish, Skykomish and Snoqualmie. "Fishing for hatchery steelhead should continue to be decent in early January," said Bob Leland, steelhead program manager for WDFW. "Anglers usually find bright fish through the month."

Before heading out, anglers should check [WDFW's sportfishing regulations pamphlet](#) for details on all fisheries.

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

Winter fisheries are under way in the region, where anglers have opportunities to hook salmon in Puget Sound and reel in hatchery steelhead on several coastal streams.

This time of year, weather conditions will often dictate where an angler chooses to fish, said Kirt Hughes, regional fishery manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "If the rivers are blown out, salmon fishing in Puget Sound is probably your best bet," he said. "But, if the weather cooperates and the rivers are in shape, anglers might want to try fishing for hatchery steelhead."

Anglers fishing the Quillayute and portions of the Bogachiel, Calawah, Hoh, and Sol Duc rivers have a daily limit of three **hatchery steelhead**. In the Grays Harbor area, anglers fishing the Chehalis, Humptulips, Satsop and Wynoochee have a daily limit of two hatchery steelhead. Information on weekly steelhead catches in the Quillayute River system and the Hoh River are available on [WDFW's website](#).

Hughes reminds anglers that they will not be allowed to catch and keep **wild steelhead** on eight Olympic Peninsula rivers until mid-February. The annual opening date for wild steelhead retention is Feb. 16 on the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc rivers. Those eight rivers are the only waters in Washington where wild steelhead retention is allowed.

Freshwater anglers looking to hook salmon also have opportunities in January. Anglers can find **late-run hatchery coho** salmon in some of the region's rivers, including the Humptulips, Satsop and Willapa, said Hughes.

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

On Puget Sound, Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound) remains open for **salmon**. However, regulations for Marine Area 13 change Jan. 1, when anglers will have a daily limit of one salmon. Anglers should be aware that salmon fisheries in marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon Island) and 12 (Hood Canal) close Jan. 1. Before heading out, anglers should check [WDFW's sportfishing regulations pamphlet](#) for details.

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Southwest Washington

Winter steelhead are still the name of the game in the Columbia River Basin, although several other fisheries are beginning to compete for anglers' attention.

Sturgeon fishing reopens Jan. 1 from the mouth of the Columbia to McNary Dam, and more than a dozen lakes and ponds are scheduled to receive an infusion of 38,000 catchable-size rainbow trout by the end of the month.

Those **trout** were raised at state hatcheries in Goldendale and Aberdeen with the specific intent of providing winter fishing opportunities in the southwest region, said John Weinheimer, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

"We want to give area anglers a chance to get outdoors in the wintertime and catch some fish," Weinheimer said. "All of these waters can be fished from shore, so you don't need a boat and a lot of gear to get in on the action."

Waters scheduled to receive fish in January include Fort Borst Park Pond (3,000) in Lewis County; Silver Lake (5,000), Sacajawea Lake (3,000), Horseshoe Lake (3,000) and Kress Lake (3,000) in Cowlitz County; Battleground Lake (8,000) and Kline Pond (6,000) in Clark County; Icehouse Lake (1,000) and Little Ash Lake (1,000) in Skamania County; plus Rowland Lake (3,000), Spearfish Lake (1,800) and Maryhill Pond (500) in Klickitat County.

For **steelhead**, the Cowlitz River is still the best bet, although the Lewis, Kalama, Grays, Washougal, Elochoman rivers – and Salmon Creek in Clark County – are also producing fish, said Joe Hymer, another WDFW fish biologist based in Vancouver.

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

Hymer also reminds anglers that the White Salmon River is closed to all fishing until further notice and that fishing on the lower Klickitat River is limited to the period from one hour before official sunrise to one hour after official sunset.

As with all steelhead fisheries in southwest Washington, only hatchery fish with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar may be retained. All wild steelhead must be released. The daily limit on all area rivers is two marked, hatchery-reared steelhead.

Starting Jan. 1, anglers may also retain up to two adult hatchery **chinook salmon** per day on the mainstem Columbia from the I-5 Bridge downstream and in the Cowlitz and Deep rivers. On the Lewis and Kalama rivers, the daily limit is one chinook per day.

While the bulk of the spring chinook run isn’t expect to arrive until March, Hymer said anglers will likely start catching early-arriving fish by late January or early February.

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

WDFW recently released preliminary forecasts of Columbia River salmon and steelhead returns for 2012, predicting an upriver run of 314,200 adult spring chinook compared to a return of 221,200 last spring. In addition, 462,000 sockeye and 91,200 summer chinook are expected to return during the coming season, which would set records for both species. The outlook for fall chinook is similar to last year’s robust return of 600,000 adults.

The preliminary forecasts, along with anticipated fishing seasons, are posted on [WDFW’s website](#). Current fishing rules are described in 2011-12 [Fishing in Washington](#) pamphlet and river conditions are available from the [Northwest River Forecast](#).

Ready to catch some **sturgeon**? All fishing areas will open to anglers Jan. 1 from the mouth of the Columbia River to McNary Dam. From the Wauna powerlines upstream to Bonneville Dam (including all adjacent Washington tributaries), white sturgeon may be retained Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays only.

“The main concern right now is the cold water temperatures,” Hymer said. “A warming trend would likely improve the bite when the season gets under way.” He noted that fishery managers from Washington and Oregon are scheduled to meet Jan. 26 to consider changes to current catch quotas and mainstem fisheries.

But when it comes to **eulachon smelt**, Hymer said there will be no fishing of any kind this year. Once abundant in the Columbia River Basin, eulachon were listed for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act in May 2010. Since then, Washington and Oregon have closed all sport and commercial dipping in the Columbia River system. All marine and freshwater areas in Washington are also closed to fishing for eulachon smelt.

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

Eastern Washington

Most catches at the region's four winter-only **rainbow trout** lakes are now through the ice, but that ice cover could be hazardous if warmer weather continues.

Hog Canyon Lake, 10 miles northeast of Sprague, and Fourth of July Lake, two miles south of Sprague, have been giving up some nice trout 12 to 24 inches in length.

Both lakes have a daily catch limit of five trout, but only two can be over 14 inches.

The other two winter season trout lakes are Hatch Lake, about five miles southeast of Colville, and Williams Lake, 14 miles north of Colville. Good fishing has been reported at Hatch Lake where the rainbows run about 13 to 16 inches. Anglers have also been catching some fish in that range at Williams Lake.

Bill Baker, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), reminds anglers to be careful on and near ice that may be melting somewhat during the day and re-freezing at night, creating air pockets that leave ice "honeycombed" or porous and significantly weakened. WDFW does not measure ice on fishing lakes and cannot guarantee ice fishing safety. But here are a few tips to help keep an outing safe:

- Don't fish alone. Let others know where you and your fishing partners are going and when you plan to return.
- Keep fishing holes small and few. When drilling fishing holes with an ice auger, keep the diameter under eight inches. Bigger holes are not necessary to land fish and can create a safety hazard for others.
- Watch your step. Avoid ice fishing near feeder streams or known springs; brush, logs, plants or docks; multiple ice cracks or ice that is popping or otherwise audible; and dark-colored ice that may be weak.
- Spread out. Too many people congregated in one area may be more than the ice can safely support. Disperse weight and fishing holes.

Be prepared for weather conditions and emergencies. Dress in layers and wear thermal underwear, fleece or wool, and wind and waterproof outerwear, especially for feet, hands and head. Take extra clothes, food, water, sand for on-ice traction, and a sled for easy on-ice transport of all equipment. Carry equipment such as ice picks or awls, rope, and personal flotation devices. Also pack a first-aid kit and matches for starting a fire.

But anglers don't necessarily have to fish at winter-only lakes to catch fish. There can also be good winter trout-fishing opportunities at several large year-round waters, including Rock Lake in Whitman County, Sprague Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line, and Waitts Lake in Stevens County.

WDFW Enforcement Officer Don Weatherman recently patrolled Lake Roosevelt on the Stevens-Ferry county line, where anglers are after **bignet-pen-reared rainbows**. He also checked fish on the Pend Oreille River, where anglers are targeting **northern pike**.

January can also be a good time for Snake River system **steelheading**, depending on water temperatures and flows with rain and snow. The best fishing has been reported on the Tucannon River, a tributary of the Snake, where anglers spent an average of about two hours per steelhead caught. Stay tuned here for updated creel check results on both the mainstem Snake and all tributaries.

Northcentral Washington

Most hatchery **steelhead** fisheries on the upper Columbia River from Rock Island Dam to Chief Joseph Dam, and those on the Wenatchee, Icicle, Entiat and Methow rivers, close Jan. 2 to keep impacts on wild steelhead within limits established under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Whitefish angling also closes Jan. 2 on the Wenatchee, Methow and Entiat rivers to minimize impacts.

Steelhead and whitefish seasons remain open until further notice on the Okanogan and Similkameen rivers. Details on what's closed and what's open are available on the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (WDFW) [website](#).

"The primary reason the upper Columbia steelhead fisheries are permitted is to remove excess hatchery fish from spawning grounds," Jeff Korth, WDFW northcentral regional fish manager, Korth said. A steelhead run update later this month could allow some areas to reopen for additional fishing opportunities, he said, noting that anglers should keep a close eye on the WDFW website for these possibilities.

Meanwhile, ice fishing opportunities are now available at Patterson and Davis Lakes in the Winthrop area, Rat Lake near Brewster, and Big and Little Green lakes west of Omak, said Bob Jateff, WDFW Okanogan district fish biologist. "The predominate species at Davis, Rat, and Green lakes is **rainbow trout** in the 10-12 inch range," he said. "Patterson Lake has **yellow perch** in the seven to eight-inch range. Powerbait works well for trout, and small jigs tipped with mealworms work well for perch."

Jateff encourages anglers fishing Patterson Lake to retain as many perch as possible. The daily limit for rainbow trout is five fish per day with no minimum size. He cautions to be alert and aware of changing ice conditions at these and other waters. Safety tips for fishing through the ice are available on [WDFW's website](#).

Rufus Woods Reservoir, upriver from Chief Joseph Dam on the Columbia River, has big **triploid rainbow trout** that can be caught throughout the winter months. Boat anglers can launch at the Army Corps of Engineers boat ramp and can explore upstream any one of numerous back bays and shorelines that could hold triploids.

"Most of these fish are in the two to four-pound range, with larger fish to eight pounds," Jateff said. "Still fishermen use Powerbait, while gear and fly fishermen use jigs, spinners, and streamer patterns."

Southcentral Washington

Anglers continue to reel in hatchery **steelhead** from portions of the Columbia and Snake rivers, although the lure of bigger fish will undoubtedly prompt some to switch gears. Starting Jan. 1,

the John Day Pool (Lake Umatilla) will reopen for retention of **white sturgeon** that measure 43 to 54 inches from their snout to the fork in their tail.

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

Another option is McNary Pool (Lake Wallula), including the Snake River below Ice Harbor Dam, which reopens for sturgeon retention Feb. 1. There is no quota in that pool, where anglers often catch sturgeon up until the pool closes to retention Aug.1.

Meanwhile, **steelhead** fishing has been up and down, typical of the winter fishery, said Hoffarth, who noted that some of the best catches on the Columbia River have been reported in the Ringold area. In the Tri-Cities area, the fishery is open for retention of hatchery steelhead from John Day Dam upstream to the wooden power line towers at the old Hanford town site through March 31, 2012.

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. Barbless hooks are required.

Anglers should be aware that steelhead fishing will close Jan. 2 by [emergency rule](#) on the upper Columbia River from the Rock Island Dam to Chief Joseph Dam, as well as on the Wenatchee, Icicle, Entiat, and Methow rivers.

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.

Angling activity on the Yakima River has been fairly slow, although anglers have been taking a few limits of **whitefish** on the mainstem and its tributaries. Seasons for winter whitefish are currently open on the Yakima, Naches, Tieton, Cle Elum and Bumping rivers. Anglers are strongly advised to check the Fishing in Washington rules pamphlet for regulations that apply to specific river reaches.

Eric Anderson, a WDFW fish biologist stationed in Yakima, recommends that anglers fishing for whitefish concentrate their fishing efforts in deep pools below riffles. Whitefish gear is restricted to one single-point hook with a maximum hook size of 3/16-inch from point to shank (hook size 14), and bait is allowed. Fish are usually caught with a small fly, tipped with a maggot, Anderson said. Up to 15 whitefish can be retained daily. Most fish are 10 to 15 inches.

TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail

Write to the TGF staff:

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Random Links

Diving Tacklebuster Reef off Depoe Bay Oregon (video):

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_nBFruXCEU

Rod-Building 101 (Video):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NySfjgn6exY>

Ice Fishing? (video) :

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKuG5NDYbOA>

ODFW parking survey for Elk River anglers:

http://dfw.state.or.us/fish/local_fisheries/elk_river/boat_parking_survey.asp

GOOD LUCK!