

The Guide's Forecast - volume 14 issue number 7

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 10th – February 16th, 2012**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- There have been confirmed reports of sport caught spring chinook on the mainstem Columbia near Caterpillar Island. With the Willamette clearing and weather moderating, there will likely be several more caught before another winter storm turns the river brown again. Early spring chinook often respond best to herring but anglers should still pursue fish in slower flows as returning adults will seek the path of least resistance.

Bonneville Pool sturgeon catches have slowed but the east wind hasn't been helping matters. The staff proposal of a February 15th shutdown for this fishery will likely get adopted but a sufficient number of fish will likely remain to conduct a summer catch-and-keep fishery.

Water flow is moderating with the visibility gradually improving on the lower Willamette. Winter steelhead counts at the Falls are picking up. It's highly likely spring chinook will be caught any day at Sellwood Bridge but be aware of the in-water work being conducted in the area; boat with care.

McKenzie water level and clarity are good for winter trout fishing this coming weekend.

The Santiams are forecast to drop rapidly through the weekend. There should be a few steelhead available.

Steelheading is slow and spotty on the Clackamas with boat anglers doing better than those fishing from the bank.

The Sandy has been providing a fair number of hookups but about half of the fish landed recently have been natives. A stronger showing of broodstock fish is likely in another few weeks.

Northwest – District rivers were in ideal shape through the weekend but produced varied results. The Wilson was predictably crowded but produced better in the high water versus the ideal green water conditions over the weekend. Some sizeable fish have been taken recently. Plugs may become more effective in the dropping and clearing flows but anglers should remain vigilant in targeting any water that has a broken surface.

The Nestucca was crowded too with fair fishing for this early in the broodstock season. Fishing for late season natives and hatchery broodstock fish will steadily improve into the month of March. Given the robust returns we've already seen however, good action should be expected this month, traditionally a slower, transitional period before the bulk of the late season fish return.

Rivers that produce early returning steelhead like the North Fork Nehalem, Necanicum and Three Rivers are really starting to wane, with spent adults making up the bulk of the catch. They are easy prey however, providing good sport for newcomers.

The mainstem Nehalem should become a good option but anglers have to realize it's a significantly bigger body of water and results aren't as predictable. With the continued dry trend predicted, it could be a highlight over the weekend. The extreme tide series could motivate fish to return.

Despite good tides over the weekend, sturgeon fishing wasn't great on Tillamook Bay over the weekend. Pressure was light with no reports of success. Weekend tides look favorable but will be in the early morning.

Crabbing was surprisingly good on Tillamook Bay over the weekend with little effort by other boats. The offshore forecast should have crabbers inland again this weekend although extreme tides may limit success.

Southwest – Offshore boats have been unable to get out due to rough ocean conditions. Ocean crabbing has not been possible in the high wind and waves. When boats have gotten out, rockfish and lingcod catches have been excellent.

Crabbing is picking up in bays and estuaries as the salinity levels return to normal.

We have a really nice window of weather and numerous dropping and clearing rivers around the state. Locally, Lake Creek and the Siuslaw are coming around, the South Coast is in fine shape and the Alsea system has been fishing well for several days.

Winchester Bay crabbing is fair to good and improving. Hatchery steelhead catches have been good on the South Umpqua. While good catches are being made on the mainstem and North Umpqua, almost all are unclipped which require release as wild fish cannot be kept anywhere on the Umpqua system.

Winter steelhead are scattered on the Rogue with fish being caught from every location; low, middle and upper. Side drifters and plug pullers are hooking up regularly. Two steelhead per day are allowed, one which may be wild. The water is forecast to be dropping and clearing through the week to come.

Boaters have been unable to access the ocean out of Brookings for the most part but those who have done so made good catches of lingcod. Chetco water levels are too low to fish well but precipitation is predicted to improve flows somewhat mid-month.

Elk and Sixes water levels are low and clear which has slowed winter steelheading. These volatile systems change rapidly with dry or wet weather.

Eastern – Fly anglers are taking browns, rainbows whitefish and the occasional bull trout on the challenging Metolius.

It's too early for kokanee at Green Peter but trollers are taking some rainbows. The water is fairly low at this time of year.

The Dalles Pool continues to kick out steelhead although the fish are not of the highest grade.

SW Washington – The Cowlitz has slowed for steelhead but may provide some late season opportunity later this month.

Other district streams are recovering but only offering limited success for anglers willing to work for their quarry. The Kalama did put out a few fish over the weekend and the East Fork of the Lewis should start to produce some larger fish in the next few weeks.

Smelt have showed up in force in the Cowlitz River but no sport or commercial harvest is allowed. This return often sparks good sturgeon fishing in the lower reaches but since anglers

may not use fresh smelt, success will be limited. Several years of strong returns are necessary for federal restrictions to be lifted.

Soapbox Update: The Association of NW Steelheaders is doing wonderful work here in Oregon and Washington. Take advantage of the offer below and contribute to the organization that's working hard on behalf of the NW angler. Then, go to the Association of NW Steelheaders home page and see what else you can do to become a better sportsman or sportswoman. Go to: <http://www.nwsteelheaders.org/>

Be sure and bring your knife to the Sportsman Show Feb 8-12 at the Portland Expo Center. Kershaw is doing a knife sharpening and is donating the proceeds to the Steelheaders. Cost is \$3 per knife and 100% of the proceeds are donated to the Steelheaders. The knife sharpening is happening at the Fred Meyer booth. Stay sharp and give back to the resource!

Columbia River Fishing Report – Well, it's finally happened, maybe even sooner than I had thought. The rivers first spring chinook was caught last Sunday and although it wasn't a large fish, it was a spring chinook. Rumor has it that the first spring chinook that was commercially caught on the Columbia a few weeks ago sold for around \$600.00. That fish was about 20 pounds. I think that's a down payment on a boat? The springer was caught on a herring and flasher near Caterpillar Island. It's off to the races now! Effort is up as demand for \$600.00 worth of prime salmon is reason enough. It won't be long before the catch rates may justify more effort out there but it's a long shot now.

Sturgeon action remains subdued on the mainstem and even the Bonneville Pool bite has slowed although a stiff east wind was largely to blame for a reduction in effort. Here's the creel check from ODF&W tally over the weekend:

Weekly checking showed four sublegal sturgeon released for 56 bank anglers; and seven legal white sturgeon kept, plus 171 sublegal sturgeon released for 39 boats (97 anglers). This is a significant drop from previous weeks. Fish managers have decided to keep some of the quota for summer retention and decided mid-week to close the reservoir for further retention beginning February 18th. Here's the official press release:

NEWS RELEASE

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Feb. 8, 2012

Bonneville Pool will close to sturgeon retention Feb. 18

CLACKAMAS, Ore. -- Oregon and Washington fishery managers announced today the closure of sturgeon retention in the Columbia River and tributaries from Bonneville Dam upstream to The Dalles Dam, effective 12:01 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 18. Catch-and-release angling will remain open. The mid-February closure is projected to leave a balance of approximately 900 white sturgeon from the 2,000 harvest guideline for the Bonneville Pool recreational fishery. The intent is to use the remaining quota for a summer retention season proposed during a December public meeting in The Dalles.

"Catches in early January were excellent but have since slowed allowing us the opportunity to consider a split season similar to the one in 2011 that seemed popular with fishers," according to John North, manager of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Columbia River Fisheries Program.

Sturgeon retention fisheries in The Dalles and John Day reservoirs are not affected by this closure. Through January 31, catches are at 9 percent and 15 percent of the harvest guidelines of 300 and 500 fish, respectively, in these two reservoirs. Monthly sampling summaries and catch estimates for these fisheries can be found on found the [WDFW website](#).

Anglers that have been paying attention to the developing steelhead fishery in The Dalles Pool won't be excited to know that success has dropped off recently. Although it remains a respectable fishery, the quality of fish continues to decline and so have the catch rates. From the ODF&W creel check:

The Dalles Pool:

Weekly checking showed eight adipose fin-clipped steelhead kept, plus 12 unclipped steelhead released for six boats (11 anglers); and four adipose fin-clipped steelhead kept plus two unclipped steelhead released for 23 bank anglers.

As you can see, the bulk of the catch remains in the wild category but 20 steelhead for 6 boats is a respectable catch rate.

The Guide's Forecast – With no big precipitation events scheduled to happen before the weekend, the Columbia could remain a good option for herring trollers over the weekend. Although a chance of rain exists through the weekend, it doesn't look like wind should be a persistent problem but that doesn't mean it's going to be an easy score. Quite the contrary actually but fish from the Willamette system as well as the Columbia are certain to come in. Herring will remain the best bet under these conditions and with the waters still a little murky, it's not a bad idea to utilize flashers to draw extra attention. It's best to keep your efforts below the mouth of the Willamette and maybe even consider fishing downstream of the mouth of the Multnomah Channel in an effort to target the earlier returning Willamette fish.

Sturgeon will remain as elusive as a spring chinook downstream of Bonneville anyway. Don't put in too much effort as we've repeatedly offered up that action won't likely pick up until spring. Most serious sturgeon anglers will be looking to the lower Willamette River for the upcoming opener. Catch and release fishing remains productive here.

Steelhead trollers will likely continue to score on maturing summer run steelhead in The Dalles Pool. They are not of the best quality but the action makes up for the quality of fish.

Weather may be more conducive to a Bonneville Pool effort. Time is running out for catch and keep fishing, at least for the winter time.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Water level and flow at Willamette Falls has been on a steady drop since the first of the month with visibility gradually improving. Daily counts of winter steelhead which had stalled in high water are picking up once again. Sturgeon retention will be allowed on February 17th, 18th, 24th and 25th. A spring Chinook has been confirmed caught on the Columbia - it won't be too much longer for Willamette springers. That should give Meldrum Bar plunkers additional reason for optimism – and much-needed patience.

The McKenzie River is at excellent level and color for fishing. Catch-and-release trout fishing has been improving.

The Santiams are still running high from last month's storms but the water levels are forecast to be on the drop through the week to come.

Alton Baker Canal is scheduled for trout planting.

Henry Hagg Lake opens in less than one month. Trout stocking will take place prior to the March 4th opener which, along with holdover fish, should provide some action.

The Pacific Northwest Sportsmen's Show is running now through Sunday, February 12th. Get tickets for \$6 at your local Winco or see Random Links, below for discount coupons.

The Guide's Forecast – Plunking is expected to increase on the bank of the lower Willamette below the mouth of the Clackamas and anglers are likely to pick up a few Clackamas-bound winter steelhead. Expect to see a few hopefuls trolling the lower Willamette in search of early spring Chinook.

Trout are responding well to nymphs on the McKenzie now that the water is in good shape. Try Hare's Ear or Prince Nymphs to tempt reddsides. A few winter steelhead are being taken with prospects improving as counts at Willamette Falls pick up.

Fishing will be slow on the Santiams even when the water drops into shape until steelhead numbers improve.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – The Clackamas River level, flow and color are excellent for this time of year. With all the conditions as good as they can get, where are the steelhead? Perhaps it is that question that has led to only moderate pressure recently despite good fishing conditions. Eagle creek has been in good shape this week.

Sandy water conditions have remained good during mostly dry weather this week. The later-arriving broodstock winter steelhead which have been planted here for years are entering in worthwhile number now and will continue to provide a viable fishery for weeks to come.

The Guide's Forecast – Winter steelhead are being taken here and there on the Clackamas but numbers seem to be low for the best action. Fortunately, it won't be too long until we start reporting on spring Chinook. Eagle Creek may be worth a try as it should remain at fishable level through the coning weekend.

Steelhead are being taken from most locations on the Sandy although Dodge Park has been most productive. Spinners, jigs, drifted corkies and bait have all accounted for winters at times. Generally, there are fish around but patience is required as catches are sporadic. There is a mix of hatchery and native fish in the river now.

North Coast Fishing Report – Although it's been a week of ideal river conditions, it hasn't been a week of ideal catching. The Wilson and Nestucca have been primary targets with the broodstock program well underway. There has been good catches of broodstock fish already this season; real good as a matter of fact but after several days of consistent (stagnant) water conditions, fish aren't as motivated to move upstream en masse. What is nice however is persistent anglers can still take fish in the remaining steelhead green water conditions and recent

rains is keeping some color in the river. One thing we know, fish bite better when the water has some color to it. You just have to get more creative in your offerings so fish aren't seeing the same thing day in and day out. Effort on the Wilson has dropped off in recent days after a very busy weekend.

The Nestucca is much the same way with mediocre fishing reported most recently. Fish are certainly available but anglers are having to work a little harder to make a good day out of it. The lower reaches of the river are fishing better and plug pullers may find a higher level of success in the dropping flows.

The Trask has yet to show signs of a strong run but it often peaks later than the other district streams. Like larger systems on the north coast, the lower reaches will be fishing better in the lower flows.

The smaller streams have few quality fish remaining in them but that will change in the coming weeks. Many of these systems receive the early returning hatchery fish which are spent now. The Kilchis, North Fork Nehalem, Three Rivers and Necanicum Rivers all fall under this category. Bill Hedlund, president of the north coast chapter of the Association of NW Steelheaders, caught and released a nice buck in the high 19-pound range.

The mainstem Nehalem will finally be an option although no recent reports have come in from that waterway. It's always a long slog before this system fishes in the winter time and although it's a wild steelhead stream, it's time for this run to get off the ground.

Sturgeon action over the weekend was less than impressive. Although effort was light on Tillamook Bay, we put in an afternoon's worth in the middle bay and south channel, only to come up bite-less. Recent reports indicated there was fair action in the middle channel but we didn't get a chance to fish there.

Crabbing was reported good over the weekend with one boat reporting taking 20 keepers in Tillamook Bay on Friday. That certainly surprised me. Other estuaries are likely not producing that well.

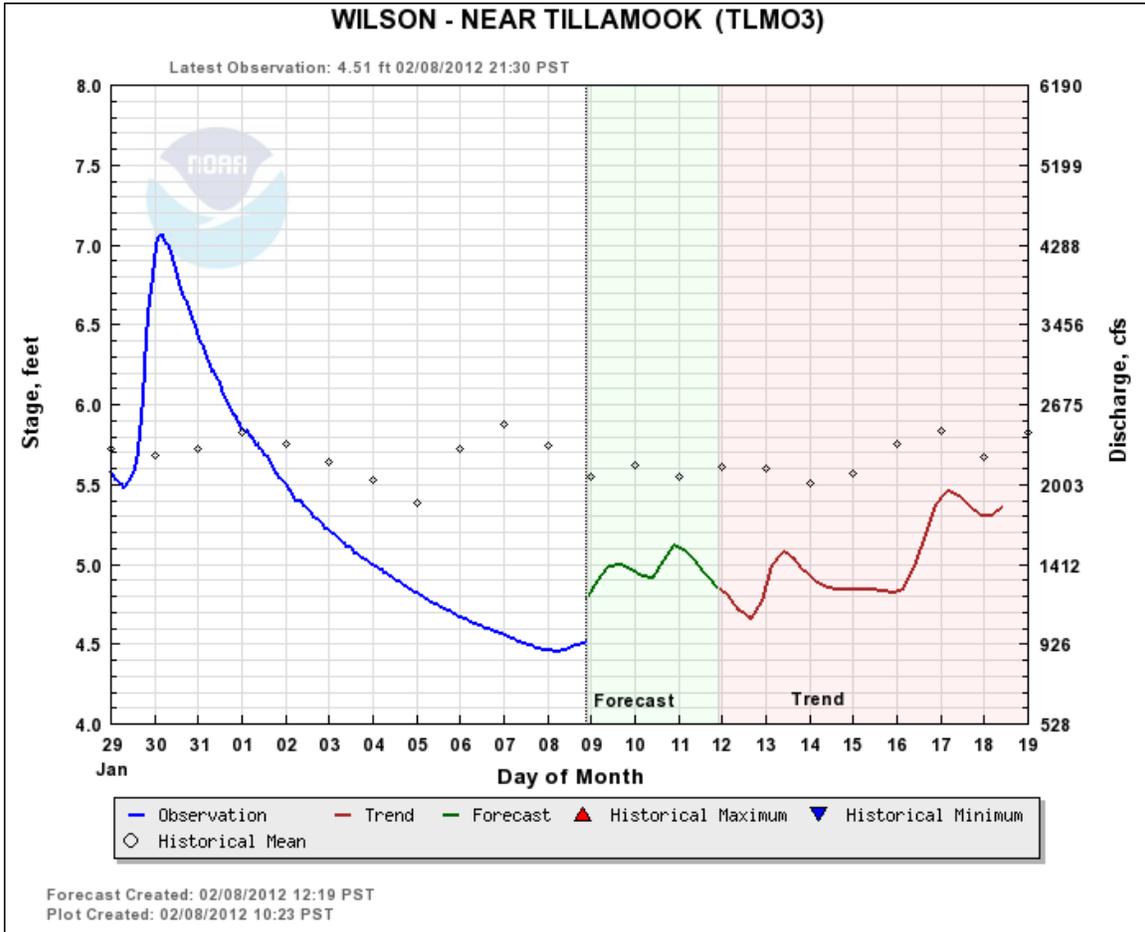
It's still a big ocean out there. Bottom fishing isn't an option.

Alder Lake, Buck Lake, Carter Lake, Cleawox Lake, Dune Lake, Elbow Lake, Erhart Lake, Georgia Lake, Lost Lake (Lane County), Munsel Lake, North Gerogia Lake, Perkins Lake, Siltcoos Lagoon and Thissel Pond are scheduled to be stocked with hatchery trout this week.

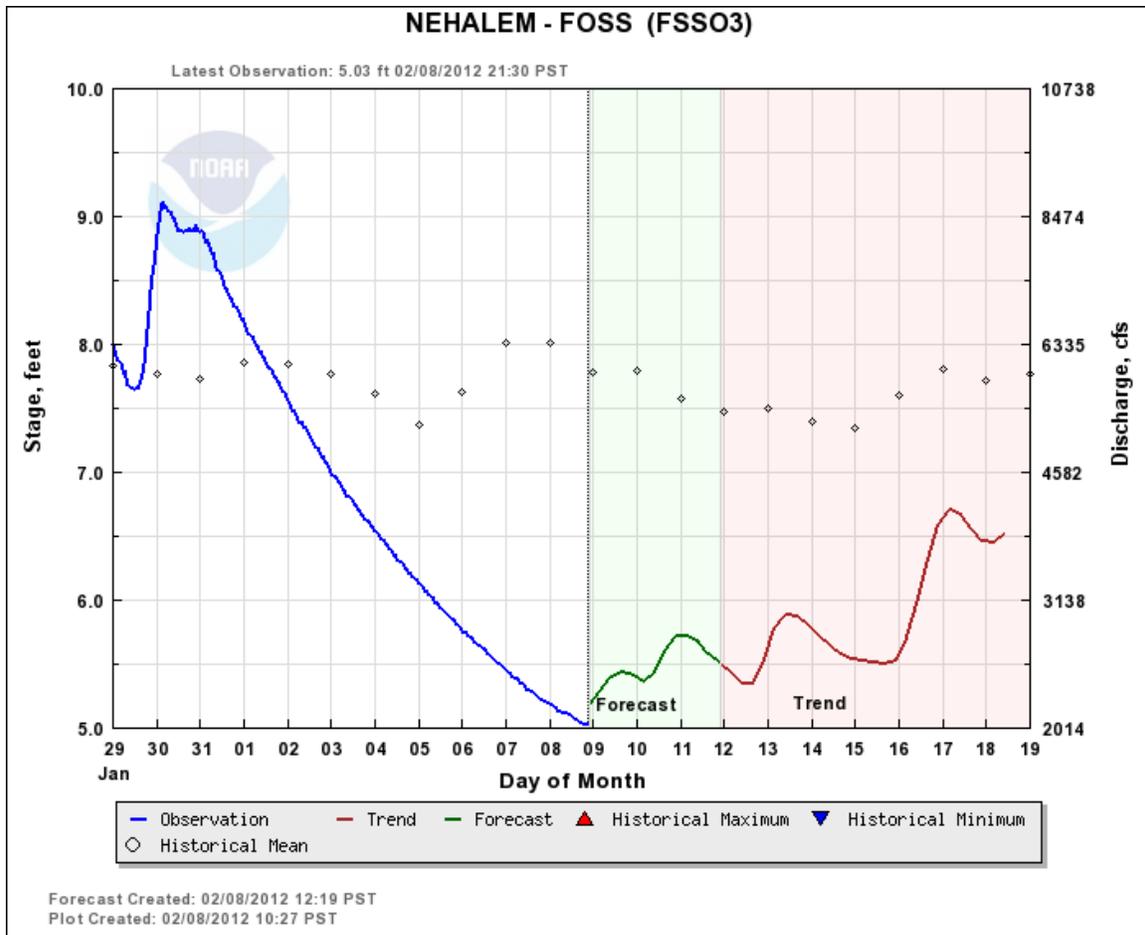
The Guide's Forecast – Anglers are going to remain focused on steelhead on the north coast. This fishery still offers up some of the best opportunity in NW Oregon for a quality fish. That is, on the Wilson, followed by the Nestucca River. Hydrological models indicate a small river rise which coupled with a good tide series this weekend, could spur another push of fresh fish into these systems. Assuming rivers don't get too high as is indicated, the lower reaches will likely produce the best results although fish could move fast if the river comes up higher than forecasted. Regardless, there have been some surprising spurts of fish lately and although that's not likely to continue on a consistent basis, I've already underestimated how productive this "in-between" season could be. If the weather prediction holds true, anglers will have some pretty good water conditions to work with this weekend.

Bank anglers along the Wilson and to a lesser extent, the Nestucca, should have fair opportunity where they can get access to good drifting water.

Here is the hydrograph model extending into the weekend:



Despite a likely rise in river levels, it may not be significant to dirty the mainstem Nehalem again; it all depends on the amount of precipitation that falls however. A slow rise may actually improve the action. The strong tide series should make the lower stretches a fair option. Here is the Nehalem hydrograph, subject to change anytime of course:



Again, pending water level rises, small systems could receive a small shot of wild fish over the weekend but it's likely that they will remain most productive for spent hatchery fish from the early run. These low quality fish may be in full bloom this weekend. There remains steady reports of fair success for stealthy anglers.

Sturgeon tides are going to happen either early in the morning or after sunset. The weather doesn't look all that peachy for open water anglers, including offshore fishers. Maybe a good weekend to explore the Sportsmen's Show?

Crabbing should taper with the stronger tides but motivated crabbers should still find some success on Tillamook Bay close to the tide changes.

Central & South Coast Reports – Most streams and rivers have dropped and cleared. Larger ocean tributaries remain fishable but in any event, long-range weather forecasts indicate another round of rainfall is due late in the coming week.

Steelhead have been taken on the Alsea this week but as is common here, it's pretty crowded.

Winchester Bay is producing fair catches of Dungeness as the salinity level returns to normal. While most of the sturgeon hooked here are over the legal size for retention, catches of been good on the lower Umpqua from Reedsport to Wells Creek. Winter steelhead continue to enter the Umpqua but most of those hooked on the mainstem are wild and unclipped steelhead can't

be kept anywhere on the Umpqua system. While there has been some discussion in the angling community that wild steelhead retention will be allowed sometime later this year. the ODFW has stated that this is untrue. Steelhead numbers are decent in the North Umpqua but with 95% of these fish wild, it's mostly a catch-and-release fishery. Since hatchery smolts are released on the South Umpqua, it follows that the better number of fin clipped winter are being caught here. Fishing has been worthwhile but will only improve into March as the run peaks.

Crabbing has continued to improve on Coos Bay following the January freshet with some crabbers find good results while others report only fair numbers. Rockfishing has been fair to good on the South Jetty when wave action has allowed safe access. South Fork Coos River steelheading was very good mid-week with winters gobbling single corkies East and West Fork Millacoma steelheaders have been scoring as well,

While pressure has been high on the Coquille system, steelheaders on the North And South Coquille have been scoring decent numbers of fresh, bright fish.

Despite the lower Rogue dropping to fairly low levels this week, winter steelhead have continued to enter, providing fair to good catches to anglers. Best results of come to side drifters and plug-pullers. Although the winter steelhead season is just getting underway on the middle Rogue, high water late last month seemed to provide an early start. Results will continue to improve through February. This week, best results came from the stretch between Grants Pass and Galice for a mix of wild and hatchery fish. Winter steelhead are into the upper Rogue in modest number with a few caught daily by both boat and bank anglers.

Steelheaders on the Applegate have been taking fair to good numbers of bright winter steelhead over the past week. While this Rogue tributary will drop and clear more quickly than the larger river into which it flows, fishing will only improve here as more winters enter the system.

Results for steelhead were excellent on the Chetco over the past week but slowed recently with the river dropping and clearing. While there are plenty of steelhead in the system, getting them to strike or bite in these conditions is a challenge, Use tiny baits or smaller lures and try early or late in the day, when visibility is minimized.

Steelheading has slowed at the Elk and Sixes Rivers with water low and clear. Catches will take off again with the next decent round of precipitation.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Deschutes fly fishers are making fair catches with nymphs and on BWO imitations during early afternoon hatches.

One or two boats may be seen at Green Peter trying for kokanee but catches this early in the year have been few.

Lake Billy Chinook has been producing bull trout to trollers. Herring trolled behind a flasher has been productive.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report for February 2012

North Puget Sound

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

“Over the last couple of years, the San Juan Islands have been the most productive for anglers fishing for blackmouth salmon in February,” said Steve Thiesfeld, a fish biologist with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). “Fishing isn’t red hot in the early part of the month, but there have been reports that indicate anglers have had some pretty good days.”

Anglers fishing Marine Area 7 (San Juan Islands) – as well as marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) and 9 (Admiralty Inlet) – have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook salmon.

Thiesfeld reminds anglers that Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) is closed to salmon fishing.

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.

Winter is prime time to jig for **squid** in Puget Sound. Good spots include the Des Moines Pier, Redondo Pier, 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](#).

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

Most river systems close Feb. 1. However, the Puyallup River system closed Jan. 16, and some waters near WDFW fish hatcheries are scheduled to close Feb. 16.

Pre-season estimates developed by WDFW last fall indicate that wild steelhead will return to those watersheds in numbers far short of target levels, said Bob Leland, WDFW’s steelhead program manager. “By taking this action, we can protect wild steelhead that do make it back to these river systems,” he said.

Leland reminds anglers that the Samish River, from the I-5 Bridge to the Hickson Bridge, closed to fishing Dec. 1. The stretch of the Samish River from the mouth to the I-5 Bridge closed Jan.1. For more information on all the closures, check the emergency rule changes on WDFW’s website at <http://1.usa.gov/hfDjYI>.

With several of the region’s rivers closing early, freshwater anglers might turn their attention to local lakes. Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish are good spots to fish for **perch, cutthroat** and **smallmouth bass**, said WDFW fisheries biologist Danny Garrett. “Anglers have had success catching trout at both lakes recently, and bass and perch have been caught as well,” he said.

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

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

Several areas of Puget Sound open to blackmouth salmon fishing in February, as wild steelhead continue to move into coastal rivers. A razor clam dig also is tentatively scheduled later in the month.

If tests are favorable, WDFW will proceed with an evening **razor clam** dig at Long Beach, Twin Harbors and Mocrocks. Tentative opening dates and evening low tides are:

- Feb.18, Saturday, 4:13 p.m. (0.0 feet) Long Beach, Twin Harbors and Mocrocks
- Feb.19, Sunday, 5 p.m. (-0.2 feet) Long Beach, Twin Harbors and Mocrocks

Clam diggers are reminded that they should take lights or lanterns for the nighttime digs and to check weather and surf forecasts before heading out. No digging will be allowed before noon on any of the razor-clam beaches. Harvesters are allowed to take no more than 15 razor clams and must keep the first 15 they dig, regardless of size or condition. Each digger's clams must be kept in a separate container.

All diggers age 15 or older must have an applicable 2011-12 fishing license to harvest razor clams on any beach. Licenses, ranging from a three-day razor clam license to an annual combination fishing license, are available on [WDFW's website](#) and from license vendors around the state.

Meanwhile, the hatchery **steelhead** run is winding down, but more wild steelhead are arriving to the northern rivers each week, said Kirt Hughes, regional fishery manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

Beginning Feb. 16, anglers can retain one wild steelhead per license year on the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc rivers. Those eight rivers are the only waters in Washington where wild steelhead retention is allowed.

"The abundant wild steelhead populations returning to those rivers also provide great catch-and-release fishing opportunities," Hughes said. Information on weekly steelhead catches in the Quillayute River system and the Hoh River are available on [WDFW's website](#). Elsewhere, fishing for steelhead and other game fish closed early in several rivers along the Strait of Juan de Fuca, where wild steelhead are expected to return in numbers far short of target levels.

The early closures, which take effect Feb. 1, affect the Dungeness, Pysht, Clallam and Seiku rivers, as well as Morse, Salt and Deep creeks. For more information on all the closures, check the emergency rule changes on WDFW's website at <http://1.usa.gov/hfDjYl>.

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

Once the Strait opens, anglers might want to try trolling Coyote Bank, which is located about 13 miles north of the Washington shore between Port Angeles and Dungeness Spit, said Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist. "This time of year, Coyote is a good bet for salmon anglers out in the Strait," he said. "Weather can be issue, however, so make sure you check the forecast if you're heading out that way."

In South Puget Sound, anglers are hooking resident **coho salmon**, especially in the Tacoma Narrows area of Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound), said Larry Phillips, regional fish biologist for WDFW. Other areas anglers might want to try fishing for resident coho include the Squaxin Island area and in Eld Inlet off Evergreen Beach.

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.

Winter is prime time to jig for **squid** in Puget Sound. Good spots include the Point Defiance Park and Les Davis piers in Tacoma, and the Illahee State Park, Waterman and Indianola piers in Kitsap County. More information is available on the department's [squid fishing webpage](#). Information on fishing piers is available [here](#).

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

Looking for some competition? Anglers can take part in the **Olympic Peninsula Salmon Derby** over Presidents' Day Weekend near Sequim. Prizes include \$10,000 for the largest fish, \$5,000 for second place and \$1,500 for third place. Details are available at the [derby's website](#).

Southwest Washington

Ocean bright **spring chinook salmon** are beginning to move into the Columbia River, setting the stage for one of the state's most popular fisheries. Anglers typically start landing early-returning "springers" in early February, but the fishery usually doesn't catch fire until March.

"This is a good time to dust off your gear, order your bait, prepare your boat, and maybe do a little prospecting," said Joe Hymer, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "You want to be ready to go when the bulk of the run arrives." According to the pre-season forecast, a total of 314,200 upriver spring chinook will return to the Columbia River Basin this year, which would be the fourth-largest run on record. Another 109,000 spring chinook are expected to head for tributaries to the lower Columbia such as the Cowlitz, Lewis and Willamette rivers.

Cindy LeFleur, Columbia River policy manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), said this year's spring chinook fishery looks promising, especially compared to last season.

"Not only is the run forecast well above average, but fishing conditions should be a lot better than last year when anglers had to contend with weeks of high, turbid water," LeFleur said.

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

Fishery managers from Washington and Oregon have adopted new fishing seasons for spring chinook that run from March 1 through April 6 below Bonneville Dam. (See the WDFW [news release](#) and [rule changes](#) for details.) Until then, seasons and regulations listed in the 2011-12 [Fishing in Washington pamphlet](#) remain in effect.

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

"The Cowlitz River and waters near the Willamette River are probably the best bets early in the season, because spring chinook usually start showing up there first," Hymer said.

Meanwhile, anglers continue to reel in **hatchery steelhead** from waters ranging from the Cowlitz River to the John Day Pool and beyond. In general, the steelhead in the lower tributaries are winter-run fish, while those above Bonneville Dam are left over from last year's summer run, Hymer said.

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

Anglers fishing the Columbia River can also catch and keep legal-size **white sturgeon** in areas both below and above Bonneville Dam. Anglers can keep one fish measuring 38-54 inches (fork length) per day from The Dalles Dam downstream. The minimum size is 43-54 inches (fork length) upstream from The Dalles Dam.

Below Bonneville Dam, the retention fishery downstream from the Wauna powerlines is open on a daily basis. Waters above the powerlines to the dam are open for sturgeon retention Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays only.

Sturgeon retention is also open in all three pools – Bonneville, The Dalles and John Day – on a daily basis. However, anglers should be aware that the catch in the Bonneville Pool is approaching the 2,000-fish quota established last year and that fishery managers from Washington and Oregon are scheduled to assess sturgeon seasons in all three pools Feb. 7. Any updates will be posted here and on WDFW's [Fishing Rule Website](#).

At a public meeting late last month, the two states set joint sturgeon-fishing seasons below Bonneville Dam that are designed to reduce the harvest for the third straight year. Concerned by the continued decline of sturgeon below the dam, fishing seasons were tightened to reduce this year's catch by 38 percent. For more information about summer and fall sturgeon seasons, see WDFW's [news release](#) outlining the results of the Jan. 26 meeting of the Columbia River Compact.

Fishing for **Columbia River smelt** will remain closed in both fresh and saltwater statewide. In 2010, the federal government declared eulachon a "threatened" species under the Endangered Species Act.

Rainbow trout, on the other hand, are readily available in lakes throughout southwest Washington. WDFW stocked tens of thousands of them in 15 area lakes last month, and is following up with several thousand more in February. In Clark County, Battle Ground Lake and Klineline Pond are each scheduled to receive 2,000 more rainbows this month, and Horseshoe Lake in Cowlitz County will receive 500 half-pound rainbow broodstock to augment fishing there.

"Most of the fish we've planted so far this year should be available to anglers through February," said John Weinheimer, a WDFW fish biologist. Weinheimer said he's also getting reports of **kokanee** being caught at Merwin Reservoir, adding that the action should pick up throughout the month.

Eastern Washington

Recent snow is keeping winter fishing wintery, at least in some parts of the region, and that can make access difficult. But fish are available for hardy anglers at several year-round and winter-only waters.

Anglers are reminded to be especially careful on iced-over lakes or around icy shorelines. Repeated thawing and re-freezing can make ice unsafe. Tips to help keep an outing safe include:

- Don't fish alone. Let others know exactly 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 with appropriate clothing and equipment for weather conditions and emergencies.

Stevens County's two winter-only lakes – Hatch and Williams – are still providing some catches through the ice, according to Bill Baker, WDFW northeast district fish biologist. Hatch Lake, about five miles southeast of Colville, was producing some carry-over rainbow trout up to 15 inches and others around 11 inches that were stocked last year as fry. Williams Lake, 14 miles north of Colville, hasn't been checked recently, but usually provides 14-inch-plus rainbows through the season.

Year-round-open Lake Roosevelt, the Columbia River reservoir off Grand Coulee Dam, has net-pen-reared **rainbow trout** that run 15 to 22 inches. But Baker reports that Roosevelt fishing was slow at the end of January. Anglers fishing the reservoir's deeper water near river mouths, like the Colville River, Hawk Creek, or near the Spokane arm, are catching **burbot**.

This is the last month to fish Waitts Lake, west of Valley along Hwy. 395 in southern Stevens County. This 455-acre lake is stocked with rainbow trout catchables, **brown trout** fingerlings, net-pen-reared trout of both species, and even some brood stock – all with good winter carry-over. Waitts closes Feb. 28.

In Spokane County, year-round Eloika Lake, north of Chattaroy, was recently producing some **yellow perch** catches. WDFW Police Sgt. Dan Rahn reported checking anglers on the ice at Eloika and said catch rates were fairly slow. With more rain than snow in the forecast, Rahn noted Eloika's ice could become marginal and anglers should be cautious about venturing out on it.

Rahn also recently checked about 23 anglers at Hog Canyon Lake northeast of Sprague in southwest Spokane County and tallied an average of only about one **rainbow trout** per angler. Catch rates had been better earlier in the season, which opened Dec. 1 and runs through March. But Rahn also noted all the fish checked were over 14 inches. Anglers have a daily five-trout catch limit at Hog Canyon but only two fish over 14 inches can be retained. Fourth of July Lake, on the Lincoln-Adams county line south of Sprague, is on the same winter-only fishing season with the same rules. Anglers there are averaging a couple of trout each, all over 14 inches.

WDFW Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area Manager Juli Anderson reports potential remains for winter trout fishing at the Lincoln County area's Z Lake. An aerated opening about half way up the lake keeps this an open-water opportunity, she said, but anglers need to walk in about a mile from the county road to get there.

Year-round Rock Lake in Whitman County has been consistent through the winter for **brown** and **rainbow trout** catches. But be prepared for wind if you go there.

WDFW Blue Mountains Wildlife Area Complex Manager Bob Dice reminds **steelhead** fishers of

the recent addition of 2,200 acres in the Mountain View area in Asotin County, along two miles of the Grand Ronde River and north along Cougar Creek, open now for outdoor recreation. The acquisition is phase one of a multi-year project to put nearly 12,000 acres of the 4-O Ranch in public ownership for recreation and fish and wildlife habitat management as part of the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area. Dice says many of the new property lines have been identified with "Wildlife Area" signs, but a map is available on [WDFW's website](#).

Northcentral Washington

WDFW Chelan District Fish Biologist Travis Maitland of Wenatchee reports fishing at year-round-open Fish and Roses lakes has been "relatively good." Mostly **rainbow trout** and **yellow perch**, with the occasional **brown trout**, are being caught through the ice at both lakes. Roses Lake, about a mile north of Manson, is also producing an occasional **largemouth bass**. (Fish Lake is about 16 miles north of Leavenworth.)

Maitland reminds anglers to be aware of changing conditions at this time of year, because repeated thawing and re-freezing can make ice unsafe.

Tips to help keep an outing safe include:

- Don't fish alone. Let others know exactly 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 with appropriate clothing and equipment for weather conditions and emergencies.

In Okanogan County, several winter-only ice fishing opportunities continue this month, but anglers there are also advised to watch for changing conditions.

Patterson Lake near Winthrop was recently checked by WDFW police officers who reported several ice fishers catching lots of **yellow perch** in the seven to eight-inch range. Anglers are encouraged to retain as many perch as possible out of Patterson Lake.

Davis Lake, also in the Winthrop area, Rat Lake near Brewster, and Big and Little Green lakes west of Omak have also been providing good catches of **rainbow trout** through the ice.

WDFW police checks of the Okanogan and Similkameen rivers at the end of January found both waterways almost completely iced over and therefore without **steelhead** anglers. But conditions can change quickly at this time of year. Steelheaders planning to try fishing in the coming weeks these two rivers, which remain open until further notice, should keep the following rules in mind:

- Mandatory retention of hatchery (adipose fin clipped) steelhead, daily limit two hatchery steelhead, 20-inch minimum size
- Wild (adipose fin present) steelhead must be released unharmed and cannot be removed from the water prior to release.
- Night closure and selective gear rules remain in effect.

Whitefish anglers must follow selective gear rules – including no bait allowed – in these areas open to steelhead fishing.

Southcentral Washington

While winter has put a chill on many area fisheries, the action should pick up for several species in the weeks ahead. Steelhead fishing usually starts to come alive in late February or early March and walleye fishing should improve as water temperatures rise.

But for **whitefish**, prime time is here now. Relatively hard to find during most months of the year, whitefish appear during the winter months and tend to go on the bite after the snow starts to fly. Hardy anglers are now catching whitefish on the Naches and Tieton rivers, and on the Yakima River upstream from Union Gap.

"February is a perfect time to catch whitefish," said John Easterbrooks, southcentral regional fish manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "Now is when they start to congregate and the catch levels rise."

Anglers can catch and keep 15 whitefish per day, but fishing gear is restricted to one size 14 single-point hook. The standard bait is a whitefish fly and a maggot. While bony, whitefish – often served smoked -- have a dedicated following.

Easterbrooks reminds anglers that all fishing is closed on the Yakima River between the Highway 223 Bridge in Granger to the Interstate 82 Bridge in Union Gap. WDFW and the Yakama Nation closed that stretch of the river to protect steelhead listed under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Sturgeon fishing is another option, especially since the McNary Pool (also known as Lake Wallula) opened Feb. 1 for retention of legal-size fish. Drawing anglers from throughout the region, the fishery extends from McNary Dam upstream to Priest Rapids Dam on the Columbia River and upstream to Ice Harbor Dam in the Snake River.

Paul Hoffarth, a WDFW district fish biologist located in Pasco, said the opening at Lake Wallula should take some pressure off the fishery under way at Lake Umatilla (John Day Pool), where anglers have been chiseling away at the annual quota. "That quota has been reached very early in recent years, so anglers should go soon – and keep an eye out for updates," he said.

In both areas, only sturgeon measuring 43-54 inches from their snout to the fork in their tail may be retained. "That's also the measurement anglers should note on their catch record card," Hoffarth said.

Meanwhile, anglers continue to catch some **hatchery steelhead** at Ringold, both from the bank and by boat. Although fishing has been spotty this winter, catch rates should pick up in late February or early March, Hoffarth said. The lower Snake River is also open for the retention of hatchery steelhead through March 31. The daily limit in the Snake River is three hatchery steelhead and barbless hooks are required.

Walleye fishing can also slow down 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. The Oregon record, just shy of 20 pounds, was taken on Lake Umatilla during the winter of 1990.

Rather catch some **trout**. Dalton Pond, east of the Tri-Cities and about five miles northeast of Ice Harbor Dam on the north side of the Snake River, is scheduled to be planted with rainbow trout from WDFW's Lyons Ferry Hatchery by the end of February if the weather stays below

freezing. Quarry Pond, located in Walla Walla County near the Tri-cities, should also be stocked by the end of February.

For additional information, see the [Fishing in Washington](#) pamphlet, available online.

TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail

Write to the TGF staff:

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Random Links

Pacific Northwest Sportsmen's Show Seminar Schedule:

<http://www.thesportshows.com/pnwss/seminar-schedule/>

Pacific Northwest Sportsmen's Show \$2 off admission coupon:

<http://www.anchor-caddie.com/sportsmans-show-coupon.html>

Here's the ifsh.net webcam at the Sportsmen's Show: <http://67.23.201.28:8080/>

Saltwater Sportsman's Show Tickets: http://www.oceaned.org/tickets_2012.html

The 2012 Northwest Fly Tyer & Fly Fishing Expo is set for March 9 & 10 at the Linn County Expo Center in Albany: <http://nwexpo.com/>

Interesting - two points of view on the February 6th charter boat collision at Depoe Bay:

<http://youtu.be/oUwXuHPk4>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTdt3jL-zx4&feature=player_embedded

GOOD LUCK!