

The Guide's Forecast - volume 14 issue number 8

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 17<sup>th</sup> – February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** Interest is growing on the lower Columbia for early run spring chinook but mainstem anglers are reporting poor results. Although salmon and sturgeon are clearly present in the river, anglers focused on the lower Willamette are finding greater success.

Willamette River water level and visibility have continued to gradually improve. The river is expected to be jammed with anglers this weekend for the sturgeon retention opener. The Portland Harbor should produce good results.

Avid angler John Shmilenko claimed the first spring chinook taken at Sellwood Bridge this season. Shmilenko caught the fish in 18 feet of water using a green label herring fished near the bottom. Several more springers have been reported on the Willamette since; mostly on green label herring. These early returning spring chinook are often 5-year olds, tipping the scales to 20+ pounds consistently. The smaller 4-year old component typically shows up later in April.

The Bonneville Pool will close beginning Saturday for catch and keep opportunities. Catch and release action should remain good.

The McKenzie River is fishing well for fly-rodders tossing nymphs to wild reddsides.

North Santiam steelheaders will find the best water conditions yet this year and a few wild steelhead in the system.

Clackamas levels will be dropping through the coming weekend. Steelheading has been slow with returns low so far this year.

Sandy River water levels rose over the weekend but has since dropped to lower levels. Steelheading is slow to fair.

Be sure to turn in 2011 tags, filled or not, for a chance at winning a drift boat from the ODFW.

**Northwest –** Measureable precipitation kept most north coast steelhead rivers in good shape with mixed reports coming from each system. The Wilson and Nestucca remain fan favorites with broodstock steelhead an option as well as a quality wild run. The lower reaches will continue to fish the best until the next significant rainfall which may come over the weekend.

The North Fork Nehalem continues to report fresh steelhead into the hatchery trap but conditions are low and clear, making for low catch rates. Most smaller streams that support earlier returns are done for the season but a token wild return should offer up some quality catch and release options.

The mainstem Nehalem should become more consistent in the coming weeks. This river gets a good run of wild fish but it's sheer size allows steelhead to dodge offerings more easily than smaller systems. There is good bank access in the upper reaches but boaters frequently fish from the Beaver Slide to Roy Creek or Mohler Sand and Gravel but access to their take-out only exists on the weekdays during business hours.

The Siletz River has been producing steady catches of steelhead but not like anglers remember

as hatchery plants are fewer under state policy. Wild fish can certainly supplement a quality day on the river.

Another round of good sturgeon tides will fall upon Tillamook Bay this weekend, but will make crabbing a poor option in most estuaries. High winds and a big swell will keep ocean enthusiasts off the seas and could compromise a good razor clam opportunity along Clatsop Beaches.

**Southwest** – Boats will remain inshore with ocean swells forecast to increase over the coming weekend.

Streams and rivers are in fair shape for steelheaders with mild weather and periodic showers in the forecast which should keep options viable through the weekend. This is prime time for winter steelhead at many locations with conditions predicted to improve somewhat in the week to come.

Sturgeon fishers are doing well on Winchester Bay around the Highway 101 Bridge for mostly oversized fish. Crabbing is fair to good. Winter steelhead catches have been fair to good with best results reported from the mainstem Umpqua around Elkton.

Coos Bay crabbing is worthwhile with salinity returning to normal levels. Steelheading has slowed in low water conditions.

Rogue steelheaders may expect to find low water dropping even further through the coming weekend. Despite challenging conditions, a few fresh fish are being taken on the lower river. Middle Rogue anglers are taking the occasional winter by drifting small baits or lures. Upper river fishing is spotty in skinny flows.

The Chetco River which is low and clear this week is forecast to be falling through the weekend. It should rise sufficiently to provide some fair fishing in the week to come. Anything over 1,000 cfs will produce winter steelhead to stealthy anglers using light leaders.

Smaller streams such as the Elk and Sixes were too low to fish well mid-week. Rain will provide short-lived windows of opportunity for steelheaders.

**Eastern** – Nymphs are taking a few trout on the Deschutes but check the regulations for closed stretches.

Lake Billy Chinook has produced some large bull trout to trollers recently.

Steelhead trollers in The Dalles Pool continue to score fish with a fish per rod average still being checked.

Eastern Oregon rivers such as the Grande Ronde and Willowa are still offering good steelhead opportunities for boaters and bank anglers. As long as rivers don't receive a lot of precipitation, they could produce good results for the next several weeks.

**SW Washington** – For tributaries upstream of the Cowlitz, hatchery returns remain lower than last year. The Washougal produced about a fish per rod over the weekend with almost half of those fish wild.

The North Fork of the Lewis should start to see some large natives showing and the Kalama might be a fair late season option.

Smelt seem to be making a strong showing in the Cowlitz with interested observers claiming returns not seen in recent history. It's quite a spectacle with eagles, sea gulls and seals all taking part in the bounty. Harvest remains closed to recreational and commercial fishers.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – With spring chinook on the mind, effort for the prized fish has jumped. It helps that water conditions are approaching ideal but this time of year, it doesn't take much to motivate anglers for a fish that is described by former chief of fisheries Jim Martin as "butter with scales". Catches remain light on the sportfishing side and on the commercial side for that matter. The latest test netting session yielded- 16 drifts in Zone 2-3 using both 4.25" & 8" nets, 0 springers, 17 steelhead (5 clipped, 12 not clipped). Sounds like a good time to be fishing for steelhead, especially if you're a gillnetter.

Anglers are finding much better success in the Willamette but we'll save that for the other section. It's still early to be getting too excited about Columbia River springers, remember, they peak in April and since 4-year old fish make up the bulk of the run here, the vast majority of springers on the Columbia will be coming later versus the Willamette run this year where a significant component is comprised of 5-year old fish.

Sturgeon fishing isn't much better. Effort and catch below Bonneville is abysmal but that is to be expected this time of year. There were a few keepers taken closer to the mouth of the Cowlitz, which is also to be expected as a large smelt run is apparently underway into the Cowlitz. Can you imagine what would happen if you were able to use fresh smelt for bait?

The Bonneville Pool remains somewhat productive but that fishery will close beginning Saturday although catch and release opportunities will persist. Another opener is likely during the summer.

Walleye anglers upstream are starting to take a few more fish. Here is the upriver check for the 3 closest reservoirs upstream of Portland:

**Bonneville Pool:**

Weekly checking showed nine walleye kept, plus four walleye released for three boats (five anglers).

**The Dalles Pool:**

Weekly checking showed no catch for two bank anglers; and one walleye released for two boats (four anglers).

**John Day Pool:**

Weekly checking showed 10 walleye kept, plus one walleye released for 25 boats (52 anglers).

**The Guide's Forecast** – Although water conditions are likely to remain as good as gold on the mainstem Columbia, anglers shouldn't target salmon there with high hopes. The bulk of the salmon in the system are likely destined for the Willamette River and therefore, most effort should be taking place below St. Helens for the best possible chance at intercepting one of these early fish. There have been some taken in the Willamette recently. If you have to fish the Columbia, bring your green label herring. It's really too early for any other method other than herring, either trolled or plunked. The temperatures are simply too cold to expect responses from any other gear.

Sturgeon anglers will be gearing up for Willamette River action this weekend. Opportunities abound for the consumptive user in the Portland harbor but not so much in the mainstem Columbia. It's likely anglers fishing in the Portland to Longview stretch will only witness a

downturn in the already challenging sturgeon fishery. Sturgeon are likely gorging themselves on fresh smelt right now and by law, you shouldn't have any.

If you are a walleye fisher, there is some pretty good opportunity in the Bonneville Pool and upstream. Steelhead trollers working The Dalles Pool are also still taking fish although action may cool with the temperature over the weekend.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – Flows at Willamette Falls as of February 13th were down to 23,800 cfs with visibility of roughly 1.5 feet. Water temperature is holding in the mid 40s Sturgeon retention will be allowed on Feb. 17-18 and Feb. 24-25 or a quota of somewhere between 1,768 and 2,022 fish. How many boaters will it take to catch 500 sturgeon per day. Check the lower Willamette this Saturday!

The McKenzie is a good level and exhibiting decent color for fishing although results for trout have been slow to fair.

The Santiams have dropped to fishable level for the first time since January rain storms with the visibility improving.

Mt Hood Pond and Creswell Pond are scheduled to be planted with hatchery trout.

**The Guide's Forecast** – There are a few options for the lower Willamette angler. Now that spring Chinook are been taken near Sellwood Bridge, springer fever is certain to follow with pressure from trollers and anchor fishers increasing. Early season springers nearly all fall to cut-plug green-label herring usually fished behind a flasher. As this coming weekend is the first two of only four days this year during which sturgeon may be kept on the lower Willamette, hundreds of hopefuls are expected to participate. Winter steelhead should be passing near the bank of the Willamette below the mouth of the Clackamas which will have plunkers lining up at Meldrum Bar.

While winter trout fishing on the McKenzie would be an option and there are a few steelhead in the system there are better fisheries available in the Willamette Valley.

With about 2,000 or so steelhead upriver, there will be some available in the Santiams for those who would like to wrestle with fresh wild winter steelhead.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** –Clackamas level and flow have been on a steady drop over the past five days. Winter steelhead catches have been fair but spotty with the river producing from McIver downstream. Try drifting small baits or a jig and bobber to tempt the recalcitrant fish.

The Sandy flow has been gradually dropping over the past week. Pressure has increased as the river has been in decent condition for steelheading with catches fair to good.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Clackamas River levels are forecast to rise over a foot at Estacada this weekend, after which levels are predicted to be variable for the week to follow. Catch it on the drop for best results. It's a bit early to be thinking spring Chinook on the Clack but they'll be in the river in weeks to come. Eagle Creek has been running very clear but should get a little color over the week to come.

Dodge Park and the river below Cedar Creek have been most productive recently on the Sandy.

With the freezing level dropping over the weekend, the water clarity should be excellent for steelheading.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – Steelheaders had a ho-hum week on most north coast streams. With stable flows (I know, it's hard to complain about that, right?) consistency produces consistency. In other words, no big weather changes has kept area rivers fishable but no significant spurts of fish are making their way into these systems. Make no mistake however, anglers still have a good chance at catching quantifiable numbers of steelhead on most any north coast stream but a weather change would bring an awkward excitement to the region.

The Wilson remains a top target for steelhead seekers; especially for those seeking consumptive opportunities. Although dropping flows restrict some of the best access upstream of Mills Bridge, the best action is likely to happen downstream where fresh fish are more likely to linger in the low flows. Anglers that have been thoroughly hitting the lower reaches have been scoring fair to good results of steelhead with a mixed bag of early spent steelhead, along with quality wild and broodstock fish.

The Nestucca is also receiving a fair amount of pressure but not as much as the Wilson. Anglers are seeing fair results although most would agree that the hatchery returns in recent years aren't quite up to snuff when compared to previous years. None-the-less, the lower Nestucca is in prime shape right now and should be into the weekend if the forecasted weather system doesn't go overboard. The river still has some early season spent fish in it, making their way back downstream for another attempt at spawning next year. Wild fish are becoming more prevalent with another batch of hatchery broodstock with them.

The Nehalem has been in good shape for the first long stretch of time recently. Although effort has remained somewhat light, fish are available with persistent anglers coming up with some quality fish on a fairly regular basis. This system fishes pretty good for bank anglers that concentrate effort near tributary mouths such as the Salmonberry River.

Smaller streams are all but done although anglers fishing the North Fork Nehalem are still reporting some fresh fish in the system. Although best success is likely to come from the hatchery reach, in the lower flows, fish are also likely to frequent downstream deeper holes as well. Although fresh fish will likely remain available, it will become increasingly more challenging to find ones of quality table fare.

Most serious steelheaders are awaiting the next significant rain freshet which should draw in good numbers of wild fish. Mid-February can really mark the beginning of the first good push of wild and late-returning broodstock hatchery fish too. The Kilchis, Necanicum and Miami Rivers may offer up some good steelheading in the coming weeks.

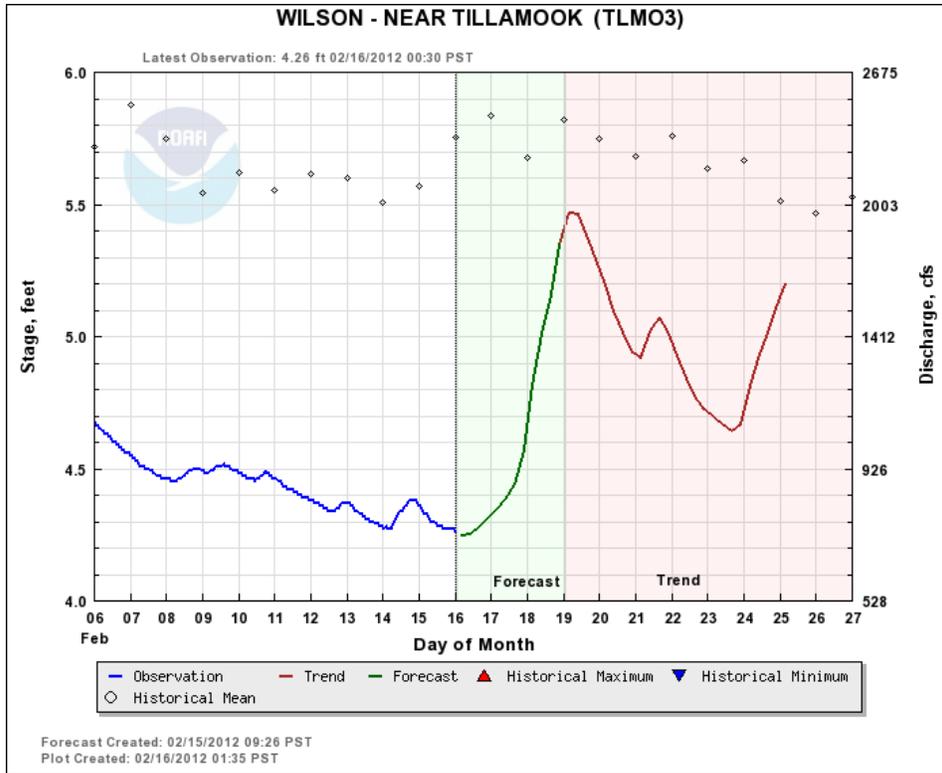
Effort for crabbing and sturgeon fishing has been low with better success reported for crabbing over sturgeon fishing. Tillamook Bay remains the best option for both but most sturgeon fishermen are realizing, myself included, that this may not be a big year for Tillamook sturgeon. Do you think the relatively large return of Columbia River smelt has anything to do with it?

Don't even breathe offshore opportunity, not yet anyway.

Trout are scheduled to be stocked at Alder Lake, Big Creek Reservoir-1 & 2, Cleawox Lake, Dune Lake, Munsel Lake and Olalla Creek Reservoir.

**The Guide's Forecast** – This weekend may be “the perfect storm” that steelheaders have been waiting for. The predicted rise in rivers levels isn't significant to send the whole lot of steelhead upriver. It's actually one of the better scenario's where a 1-foot rise will certainly motivate fish to move and bite, especially after a prolonged period of dry weather.

The constant theme you've heard us talk about is the Wilson River. Still likely to be a fan favorite, a good push of wild and broodstock fish will likely show on this rain freshet. Models are always unpredictable but the modest rise predicted to start on Friday night may set up a great weekend program for driftboaters and bank anglers on the big 2 of Tillamook County. Here is the hydrologic model for the Wilson River over the weekend:



Another positive note is the outlook that it is a gradual rise over a few days versus a fast rise over a few hours. This could give steelheaders ample opportunity on most north coast systems through the weekend. One of the better bank angling opportunities in Tillamook County under these circumstances would be the Dam Hole on the Trask River. It often produces its best in higher flows where fish wait on the sidelines before negotiating the rapids at the head of the hole.

Another consistent message you here in this newsletter is the higher the flow, the higher you should target your quarry. The Nestucca is the perfect system for offering up this opportunity as its upper reaches extend well into navigable waters providing quality drifting water for veteran side-drifters. This should be the case through the weekend with small egg clusters or sand shrimp taking fish.

The smaller systems such as the Kilchis, Miami and Necanicum River may get a good shot of wild fish with early indications for the wild component showing a strong return this year. These smaller systems may still harbor windfall hazardous to boaters so proceed with caution. The

North Fork Nehalem may still have a few fresh hatchery steelhead but count on seeing spent fish too.

Good tides ahead for clamming and sturgeon fishing on the north coast, too bad the weather doesn't look to cooperate. Both should be somewhat disappointing as sturgeon seem scarce this year and a pounding surf may keep the clams from feeding near the surface.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – Swells are forecast to top 20 feet at times over the coming weekend so offshore bottom fishing will not be an option. Ocean crabbing has been poor due to rough offshore conditions.

It seems an odd time of year to start thinking about bass fishing but it's just around the corner. The Emerald Bass Club's Frostbite Open tournament, an annual event that takes place on Tenmile Lake, is scheduled for Saturday, February 18th.

Siuslaw anglers are hooking up with winter steelhead this week by drifting cured roe.

South Jetty rock fishers are making fair catches of rockfish on Winchester bay when ocean swells have moderated. Crabbing has improved along with water quality in the bay but is still only fair at best. Sturgeon fishing has been worthwhile in the upper bay and lower Umpqua for mostly oversized fish. Steelheading has been fair to good on the mainstem Umpqua with about 90% of the fish wild. Fishing has been decent on the North Umpqua for those who enjoy catch-and-release for wild winter steelhead as these are 90% of the component here. Catches of hatchery steelhead are fair to good on the South Umpqua as the last freshet brought good numbers of fish into the system.

Boats crabbing Coos Bay have been doing well worth some crabbers taking limits of Dungeness. Rock fishing has been fair from the jetties when wave action has allowed the activity and surf perch are being caught off beaches near the bay entrance when the ocean has laid down. Coos River steelheaders are finding a mix of bright and dark fish and action fairly slow. Flows and water color in the South Fork have been adequate for fair to good results. The West Fork Millicoma is too low and clear to fish well.

The Coquille River has been kicking out good numbers of winter steelhead to drift boat fishers with bank anglers on the East Fork taking a few as well.

As the lower Rogue water level has continued to drop and clear, angler effort has dwindled. Boat fishers are taking a few on plugs. The middle Rogue is more productive with best results coming in the Grants Pass to Galice stretch. Winter steelhead are entering the upper Rogue as well, providing steady action on the Shady Grove stretch. One unclipped winter steelhead up to five per year may be retained as part of one's limit on the Rogue anywhere below Lost Creek Reservoir.

As with other southwest rivers, the Applegate is getting down to challenging levels but there are still decent numbers of winter steelhead in the system and fishing has been fair but steady.

Chetco steelheading has remained rewarding over the past week despite low water conditions. A mix of fresh winters and spawned-out fish have been hooked recently but baits of cured roe have taken some beautiful fish up to 20 pounds. Pressure on the river has dropped along with the water level. Steelheading will continue into March and if the run continues as strong as it has been thus far, it will be a good season.

Elk River steelheaders have continued to take a few steelhead although the water is below the optimum five-foot level and getting very clear. The Sixes is too low to fish now but precipitation will turn things around.

Lake Selmac, Agate Lake and Reinhart Pond are scheduled to be stocked with trout.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – The Grande Ronde has been producing steelhead regularly and action will continue until the river rises wither from rain or snowmelt.

With the weather fairly mild on the east side recently, Crooked River has been fishing well despite low water. Fishing slows here when the weather turns cold.

Bull trout are being taken by determined fly fishers from deep holes on the Metolius.

### **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/hfDjYl>.

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 Klinline 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**

Subscriber Rob R. wrote this week, "I know my opinion means next to nothing, but I have to express my strong disappointment in the Guide's Forecast. Statements like this one, relating to the Sandy, only serve to hurt wild fish: "but about half of the fish landed recently have been natives."

"You and your team are consistently making wild fish out to be undesirable, and you are glorifying hatchery programs that hurt wild fish. In the case of the Sandy wild-brood program, it's flat out illegal, and should be terminated. You are in a position to influence people's perceptions, and you are consistently choosing to foster ill will toward wild fish, and to hold up so-called "broodstock fish" as the second coming of Christ.

"Also, using the term "broodstock fish" is incorrect, and misleading. They are not broodstock fish—they are not used as broodstock. They are hatchery fish derived from wild stocks, and they endanger our wild runs.

"Sorry to be a pill, but it's really unsettling to see someone of your intelligence and influence supporting, and even stoking harmful stereotypes.

"Thanks for your consideration."

Pro guide and TGF co-editor Bob Rees replied, "Thanks Rob, we take everyone's opinion into consideration and appreciate you taking the time to comment.

"Michael Teague writes the Sandy section of the newsletter although I'm as guilty as he for shining light on the broodstock programs that have reinvigorated interest in fishing on the north coast in recent years. The effort alone on the Wilson and Nestucca Rivers alone show how NW

sportsmen continue to honor put and take fisheries. I do fish these rivers but most times, try and talk my customers into trying a less crowded river knowing that they stand little chance at a keeper fish. They seem to "bite". Our initial mission at The Guide's Forecast was to motivate anglers into advocacy. Well, when that didn't work so effectively, in order to justify the time we put into the publication, we decided to charge for it and the interest remains today. I'm pretty sure I speak for many an angler in stating that if we had wild runs that could sustain consumptive opportunities like the current hatchery programs do, we'd all advocate to put ODF&W's monetary resources elsewhere. I still hope to achieve that before I die but it seems unlikely given our habitat constraints and crippling natural resource policies.

"You're right in your correction of our definitions and we'll certainly take those into account in future editions.

"Again, we'll always respect your opinion and I hope to always have the opportunity to take one home for the barbie! The kid loves fish!

"Hope you're having a good season!"

Rob R.'s response, "Thanks for the thoughtful reply. I respect your points, and I have no doubt about your good intentions. But I submit that the Guide's Forecast is a lot like hatchery programs: it feeds the public what it wants, with little regard for the negative impacts on our rivers, our fish, and our society. I fear you may be helping to motivate anglers into advocacy--for hatchery programs, for the "right" to fishing opportunity, and against native fauna. Maybe the Guide's Forecast can be part of the solution by leading readers to new levels of awareness? That would be monumental if you could pull it off.

"Do you really think it's fair to say that NW sportsmen "honor" put-and-take fisheries. I'd say that's an awfully cheery characterization. They are drawn to them. They crowd them like birds at a feeder. There is no upside to the fish, or our rivers. And you know as well as I do that most hatchery winter steelhead that are taken home are poor table fare. Especially when compared with wild rockfish at \$7 a pound. But I guess that's a matter of opinion.

"I'm still one of your biggest fans, regardless of my concerns about the Guide's Forecast. Small stuff, in the big picture. Thanks again for your time."

#### **Write to the TGF staff:**

Bob Rees: [brees@pacifier.com](mailto:brees@pacifier.com)

Doug Rees: [doug@TheGuidesForecast.com](mailto:doug@TheGuidesForecast.com)

Michael Teague: [Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com](mailto:Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com)

#### **Random Links**

10 Most Treacherous Rivers To Run In The Northwest

[http://pubs.royle.com//display\\_article.php?id=970865](http://pubs.royle.com//display_article.php?id=970865)

Fly fishing blog links - Enter at your own risk

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**GOOD LUCK!**