

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 24<sup>th</sup> – March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** The re-opening of the catch-and-keep sturgeon season on the lower Willamette brought about a frenzy of angler activity with successful counts of keepers coming from Oregon City to the Portland Harbor on Friday. Although the bite had dropped off significantly by Saturday, anglers consumed a measureable number of the keeper quota jeopardizing the February 24<sup>th</sup>/25<sup>th</sup> season finale. ODF&W announced Tuesday that the additional 2-day season for catch and keep will be rescinded. Willamette River retention season is over for the year.

Spring chinook fishing seemingly slowed on the Willamette River although many were focused on sturgeon. Effort for salmon on the mainstem Columbia remained fair through the weekend and persistent anglers are experiencing a rare keeper salmon at Davis Bar and Caterpillar Island. Herring and flashers will remain a top choice.

Trout fishing has been fair to good on the McKenzie with caddis hatching at times but rising water will stall results until the river recovers.

It is unlikely the rising Santiam system will be fishable by the coming weekend.

While steelheading has been slow on the Clackamas for most, it may improve as levels drop in the coming weekend. Some steelheaders have taken fair numbers recently however.

Steelheading has been spotty on the Sandy but the river is muddy and rising at this time. Larger numbers of broodstock steelhead are likely later this month.

**Northwest –** With most northwest anglers focused on sturgeon over the weekend, effort was light for north coast steelheaders. Wintery weather in mountain passes also quelled effort. Tillamook district rivers rose to optimum levels over the weekend with fair catches reported on Saturday and lasting through Monday. Side-drifters did well for most of the weekend but a K-11 chrome/red stripe Kwikfish took a nice 12-pound hatchery hen for Rennie Ferris of Newport on Monday.

The Trask, Nestucca and mainstem Nehalem all produced fair results over the weekend with hatchery fish most likely to come from the Wilson and Nestucca. The North Fork Nehalem is still producing a few hatchery fish but this system, along with the Necanicum will shift to a predominately wild steelhead prospect through the end of March.

This Kilchis River may be one of the better options by the weekend if river levels continue to rise. It is primarily a wild fish system, requiring release of most of the fish that are caught by anglers.

Sturgeon effort was light over the weekend but there have been rumors of good fishing recently. Some anglers theorize that the large smelt run on the Columbia may have drawn out a larger population that typically sticks around during winter months to feed on abundant shrimp, clam and crab populations.

Big seas remain in the forecast, nullifying offshore opportunities for crabbers and bottomfishers. A bounty of rockfish species, including lingcod awaits anxious anglers when offshore waters calm. A soft incoming tide this weekend may produce fair catches of Dungeness in Tillamook and

Netarts Bays.

**Southwest** – Ocean conditions will keep recreational and charter boats inshore through the weekend. When boats have been able to get out, lingcod and rock fishing has been excellent.

Sturgeon catches have remained good in Winchester Bay for those fishing below the Highway 101 Bridge. While crabbing has been worthwhile, rain this week may push Dungeness out of the bay. Steelheading has been fair on the mainstem Umpqua, has slowed on the North and has been best on the South Umpqua. Levels are on the rise region-wide this week.

Crabbing in Coos Bay has been good although rain this week is expected to reduce results.

Steelheading on the lower Rogue has slowed in low water although fly anglers have taken some around Agness. Plug pullers are taking steelhead on the middle river while upper river boaters are finding steady action with fresh winters with upstream movement taking place daily.

Chetco steelheading, which had been productive, slowed due to low, clear water over the past weekend. The river was on the rise on Tuesday this week but if forecasts are accurate, will be dropping in the weekend to come. Fresh, bright winter steelhead will continue to enter as long as bar conditions aren't too rough.

Results for winter steelhead have been slow on the Elk and Sixes in low water conditions but should be revitalized with rainfall this week.

**Eastern** – Fly anglers on the Crooked River have continued to do well for whitefish and trout over the past week. Small, dark nymphs have been effective.

Warmer weather may contribute to increased catches for eastern Oregon steelheaders. The Grande Ronde, Willowa and Imnaha remain top options but if temperatures get too warm, river flows may be too intense.

**SW Washington** – Broodstock steelhead programs will carry anglers through the spring months with spring chinook and summer steelhead soon on the way. The Cowlitz remains a fair option for steelhead but it's inundated with smelt right now. Sturgeon fishing in the lower reaches may be good for those that are able to match the hatch with frozen smelt. Anglers are allowed to use smelt for bait but they can't come from the population of fish that falls under the Endangered Species Act.

The Kalama has put out a few steelhead recently with plugs becoming an effective method in the dropping flows. Another sharp rise in river levels is expected in the SW district however, putting boaters and bank anglers off for several more days.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – With the focus on the Willamette River for the brief (and now over) sturgeon season, effort was light on the mainstem Columbia over the weekend. Salmon is an odd target for so early in the season but with few keeper sturgeon in the system, it is the best option. Although effort is running high, it isn't paying dividends with most experienced anglers several trips into the season without posting a prize.

Davis Bar remains a prime target for trollers although it may be more wise to spend time downstream of the mouth of the Multnomah Channel (near St. Helens) as a good percentage of the fish coming in should be destined for the Willamette River and actually using the Multnomah

Channel in higher flows. Herring will remain the bait of choice in the cold water and flashers seem to make a difference in water conditions that are still colored this time of year.

Upriver, as in above Bonneville has slowed for steelhead and sturgeon but the walleye bite is picking up and may be worthwhile for those interested in this fishery. The most productive pools are likely the John Day and Bonneville Pools. Effort is waning for steelhead, as is the catch.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Spring chinook action should get more interesting in the coming weeks. Although anglers shouldn't expect a knock-down, drag out week, catches should improve steadily as we enter March. Mainstem commercial catches remain morbid but since steelhead are making up the bulk of the catch, commercial nets have not been able to fish. As previously mentioned, anglers may fare best if they target their quarry downstream of the mouth of the Multnomah Channel. And you do remember about using herring don't you? Plugs and hardware are a bit of a waste of time.

Sturgeon anglers still aren't having much luck on the mainstem. With cold water and scattered numbers, they will remain a challenge for most. Spring time should bring better catches but with catch and keep season closed on the Willamette, anglers will be looking.

You've missed your window of opportunity for steelhead and sturgeon above Bonneville Dam. Although catches are still going on, it should continue to decline from here. Better options are on the table.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report** – It seems the crazy number of sturgeon fishers who hit the lower Willamette on February 17th & 18th took Over 90% of the quota in the initial two-day opener so the catch and keep fishery will not continue Friday and Saturday this week. Catch-and-release sturgeon fishing will be allowed for the time being.

Something over 3,100 winter steelhead have crossed Willamette Falls with daily counts fair but steady. Fish numbers have fluctuated periodically and another push is overdue. The first spring Chinook for 2012 was counted at Willamette Falls on February 21st. For those accessing Meldrum Bar, be aware of tide changes. A couple of short-thinkers have managed to get their vehicles stranded recently.

Spring Chinook trolling has produced the occasional springer but overall, catches have reflected that it's too early in the run for stellar results. Still, it's guaranteed to beat projects around the house.

McKenzie flow has doubled over the past couple of days to roughly 9,000 cfs at Vida although the water level is forecast to be dropping over the coming week.

The water level in the Santiams rose sharply mid week although drier weather should have water dropping into the coming weekend.

Henry Hagg Lake opens on Saturday, March 3rd. A misprint in the 2012 Sport Fishing Regulation erroneously states the opener as March 4th. It's always the first Saturday of March.

Alton Baker Canal, Cottage Grove Pond, E. E. Wilson Pond, Junction City Pond, Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake are scheduled for trout planting this week.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Water levels are again on the rise in the lower Willamette and will likely result in additional effort by plunkers at Meldrum Bar and Dahl Park as well as a few more

boaters trolling green label herring in an effort to intercept spring Chinook drawn upstream by the freshet. The lower Willamette is showing a little color and visibility will decrease before it improves. Spring Chinook results will pick up a little deeper into the season.

Trout fishing will be worthwhile once the waters of the McKenzie drop and clear. The latest round of rainfall will result in better numbers of steelhead in the river.

The North Santiam should be fishable at Mehama over the coming weekend for those seeking catch-and-release wild winter steelhead fishing. South Santiam steelheaders will find decent conditions at Waterloo.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports** – Clackamas water level spiked overnight on Wednesday this week but started to fall on Thursday morning. It is forecast to be dropping into the week to come. Catches have been nil as the river was rising.

Sandy water levels came up this week but are dropping at this writing on the morning of February 23rd. Prior to the increase in flow, effort was steady and fair to good catches were coming from most landmark stretches.

Free steelhead spey casting lessons from Marty & Mia Sheppard and Brian Silvey will be available at a clinic on Saturday, February 25th on the banks of the Sandy at Oxbow boat ramp from 1 to 3 PM.

**Bears Repeating Department from the ODFW:** "An error on page 54 of the 2012 Sport Fishing Regulations booklet incorrectly states the Sandy River above the mouth of the Salmon River is open the entire year for the harvest of both adipose fin-clipped and non adipose fin-clipped steelhead.

"The correct regulation should limit the season to the retention adipose fin-clipped steelhead and non adipose fin-clipped steelhead from July 1 to Aug. 31."

There was a reader question and comment recently regarding TGF reports involving broodstock steelhead, even questioning use of the term 'broodstock.' To clarify, this term refers to first-generation offspring of wild steelhead which former are gathered by ODFW officials, often with the assistance of anglers, The eggs and milt harvested and the offspring are literally born and raised in a hatchery. One of the characteristics exhibited by these hatchery fish is that they return on a schedule similar to that of their wild parentage, hence the later-returning winter steelhead in the Sandy where a broodstock program was implemented several years ago.

With regard to the use of the term 'broodstock,' this is what the ODFW call 'em and one that is understood by the vast majority of Oregon fishers. It's our goal to use words that will be understand and. of course, to help people catch more fish!

**The Guide's Forecast** – The Clackamas should be productive from McIver downstream once the water starts to drop and clear. There are good numbers of winter steelhead in the river now. Fish will be moving into Eagle Creek with the freshet this week and there should be some opportunism to catch a few over the coming weekend as levels fall

Water conditions on the Sandy should be good this weekend as rain is forecast to moderate and the freezing level will drop. Steelhead should be available river-wide and will respond to a variety of baits and lures.

With the freezing level dropping on Saturday, use caution on upper elevation roads through Monday next week. It'll be slick out there.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – Steelheaders finally got their water on the north coast Friday night. Although the inclement weather scared off traveling steelheaders, the waters fished well for those that participated. The valley presence was clearly focused on sturgeon as I was the only boat that launched at Siskeyville Ramp on Saturday.

Never would I have thought that would be the case on a Saturday in February. It didn't seem to matter however as we drew nothing but blanks on the float, at least until we got to Mills Bridge. Once we joined a few other steelheaders, action still seemed subdued but we found a pod of biters in the chrome patch not far upstream from the Sollie Smith Boat ramp. For about 45 minutes, we were getting a fish per pass on side-drifted eggs with the final tally of 7 hooked, 4 landed and several other bites.

Sunday brought more smiley faces to the Wilson River with fair fishing reported and some big brutes topping 20 pounds lately, and those were the hatchery fish. We lost a big one on Saturday but I don't think it would have gone much over 12 pounds although we never saw it.

I put in a few more hours (2 to be exact) on Monday after a successful cow elk hunt. The river was just too good to keep cutting up elk so we did a 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. float from Siskeyville downstream. We were side-drifting successfully but managed to pull out the plugs towards the end of the drift, coming up with a nice 12-pound hatchery hen a bit before sun-down. It took the chrome/red stripe K-11x Kwikfish in about 7 feet of water.

Here's a secret that you may or may not know, this big hen hit the plug at the TOP end of a large boulder, not behind it. Some of my biggest fish have come from the pillow that forms upstream of a boulder. Don't pass this water up but you must be willing to lose a plug or two to fish this water as this also is a place where tree branches hang up.

The water came up again mid-week, even higher than hydrological models predicted but it looks like it may fish by the weekend. The recent high water has put most north coast streams out of reach for mid-week anglers.

The Nestucca has been another fair fishing stream with the higher reaches fishing best in high water. Although there are certainly broodstock fish available for take-home, many anglers are reporting wild fish are making up the bulk of their catches. The upcoming weeks are peak times for these coastal systems with wild fish likely to inundate all north coast streams when conditions allow. These other systems have been too low to be productive until recently.

The Trask should also be a better option in the coming weeks but it tends to peak a little later than most other systems. April can be almost a better option than February or March on this system. The upper reaches may be the best option by the weekend.

Most early returning systems should have the bulk of their down-runners out of the way, making way for native runs that should peak in the month of March. The Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem (to a lesser extent) and Kilchis should be good options in the coming weeks.

Mixed reports are coming in for north coast sturgeon but effort tells a story; there aren't many.

Reliable reports are coming in from shore casting crabbers in Tillamook Bay, indicating there are good numbers of quality keepers along the jetties. Rockfish are also coming from the jetties in

fair numbers. Bay crabbing should be good in Tillamook and Netarts Bays with some degree of success from Nehalem as well.

Big Creek Reservoir-1 & 2 and Olalla Creek Reservoir are scheduled for trout stocking.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Steelheaders have another productive weekend to look forward to. As the wild and broodstock numbers build into March, more consistent fishing is likely in the weeks ahead.

For hatchery broodstock options, the Wilson and Nestucca are really in the only ones on the north coast. The Wilson should begin to fish well again by Friday and even though the flows will still be a bit high on Friday, side-drifters should produce fair to good results using bigger baits and brighter colored yarn. As we consistently state, the higher the flows, the higher you should target your efforts. Bank anglers should have fair to good opportunity on the upper Wilson through the weekend and beyond.

The Nestucca should fish well from 6<sup>th</sup> Bridge downstream but those that launch that high up should be experienced oarsmen as there is a challenging run just above 5½ bridge. Anglers should find a slightly higher ratio of wild over broodstock fish on the Nestucca versus the Wilson River and although this system is a bit further from the more high used Wilson, it may still feel crowded, especially on the weekends.

The Kilchis should be a strong option by Friday and maybe through the weekend as well. Wild fish should begin making a strong showing here with plugs becoming more effective as flows drop. Side-drifted bait should produce well through the weekend.

The North Fork Nehalem may produce a rare late season bright hatchery steelhead but anglers will likely find a mix of an occasional wild fish coupled with some spawned out early run hatchery fish. Some years, this system gets a fair run of natives. The mainstem (south fork) will likely be too high for productive fishing until mid-week. It doesn't take much to keep this system high and colored as extensive as this system is.

Although sturgeon fishing may not be a great option on the north coast this weekend, crabbing and jetty bottomfishing may produce fair results. Tides are excellent but if crabbers time their soaks right and have properly weighted crab gear, results should be fair to good. The offshore option is a poor one.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – Offshore forecasts indicate ocean swells to 20 feet. Plan for something other than rockfish and ling cod trips this coming weekend. When conditions have allowed, bottom fishing has been excellent but ocean conditions have been challenging so far this year.

The ODFW will make the final decision on the 2012 halibut regulations and dates at a meeting on April 20th, although the spring season is tentatively set for May starting the 10th and 12th. Quotas has been set as follows for Central Oregon (Cape Falcon to Humbug Mountain): nearshore - 23,014 lbs., Spring all depth - 120,821 lbs. and Summer all depth - 47,945 lbs.

The steelhead run is winding down on the Alsea but with a few last, fresh water in the river, plunkers may have an 11th-hour shot at them.

Crabbing has been fair in Winchester Bay. steelheading has been fair but steady on the mainstem Umpqua although it's mostly a catch-and-release fishery for wild steelhead. Similar results may

be has on the North Umpqua. Additional winter steelhead moved into the South Umpqua with the last round of rainfall with hatchery steelhead catches fair to good this week. The ODFW has indicated that anglers may expect a good return this season.

Coos Bay crabbing is reported as good this week. Rough ocean conditions have kept rock fishers off the jetties. Despite low, clear water, the Coos system has been fair for winter steelhead. Winters are taking small baits of cured roe and jigs. Catches have come this week from the Millicoma and South Fork Coos.

Anglers report fair to good winter steelheading on the South Fork Coquille this week. A few have also been taken from the East Fork Coquille around China Creek.

With the water low and clear on the lower Rogue, few are even making an effort. The first verified spring Chinook was landed on February 20th, It's still early for the season to get underway here but this will probably ignite the fishery. Steelhead catches have slowed on the middle Rogue with best results coming to plug pullers working the river below Grants Pass. Upper river steelheading has been fair with best results on the Shady Cove stretch.

Chetco levels remain low and the water is extremely clear. Relief is in the forecast for the coming week as rainfall is predicted to raise flows to 2,000 cfs.

Elk and Sixes levels are too low for best results but rain in the week to come should be catalyst for some improvement.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – Throwing nymphs has resulted in slow to fair trout catches on the Deschutes.

Catches are decent on the Crooked River for trout and whitefish.

The Grande Ronde was fishing well a week ago but has come up dramatically this week. Watch the levels and fish accordingly as this one will produce when conditions are right.

### **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 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](http://www.wdfw.wa.gov).

### **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."

### **TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail**

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

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#### **Random Links**

Selling McKenzie Water?

<http://special.registerguard.com/web/updates/27325726-41/river-state-mckenzie-waterwatch-demers.html.csp>

NOAA comes under fire for "fishermen-funded party boat

[http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/localnews/2017537782\\_noaaboat18m.html](http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/localnews/2017537782_noaaboat18m.html)

Learn to Take a Child Fishing Workshop

[http://dfw.state.or.us/education/outdoor\\_skills/workshops/take\\_a\\_child\\_fishing\\_salem.asp](http://dfw.state.or.us/education/outdoor_skills/workshops/take_a_child_fishing_salem.asp)

Henry Hagg Lake Tech from Luhr Jensen

<http://www.luhrjensen.com/downloads/tech-bulletins/541OregonHenryHaggLake.pdf>

**GOOD LUCK!**