

The Guide's Forecast - volume 14 issue number 10

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **March 2nd – March 8th, 2012**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Some anglers are beginning to find sturgeon in shallow water in the gorge. Some quality keepers are available. Frustrated by season cutbacks, anglers continue to witness high interception rates of Stellar sea lions predated on oversize sturgeon at Bonneville Dam.

Daily winter steelhead counts are on the upswing once again with about 3,500 upstream as of the latest data. Boat pressure is increasing around the Sellwood Bridge as hopefuls troll herring for springers. Salmon are taken nearly every day although the fish per rod average is less than impressive. Flows and turbidity are predicted to remain stable, enabling anglers a continued opportunity for the region's highest quality fish.

The McKenzie has been steadily dropping but may experience a slight rise from rain this week.

North Santiam flows are expected to be decent until the next heavy rain. Wild steelhead numbers are improving.

Winter steelhead are scattered in modest number on the Clackamas. Spinners or bobber & Jig have drawn strikes.

Sandy steelheaders have taken fish over the past week at Dodge and Oxbow parks. Sidedrifters in the lower reaches are finding more consistent action as the late run fish make a stronger showing.

Unlike most Willamette Valley lakes which are open year-around, Henry Hagg Lake opens for the season on Saturday, March 3rd. Hundreds of enthusiastic anglers are expected to participate in this productive metro fishery. A nice batch of holdover trout are expected.

Northwest – Water levels on the larger north coast systems remained high over the weekend but anglers willing to work with those conditions found some success on the remaining hatchery steelhead streams using eggs or shrimp for bait.

Smaller systems fished well with the Necanicum a late season favorite for anglers looking to tangle with primarily wild fish. On Friday, Lori Howe of Raleigh Hills hooked into an exceptional steelhead on the black pirate hot shot, only to lose it in a submerged root wad after an epic battle. The Necanicum is wrought with wood debris with multiple hazards including 2 downed trees near the Necanicum Junction which are impassable. Willing anglers need to drag their boats about 40 feet over a gravel bar to get downstream past the obstruction.

The North Fork Nehalem and Kilchis Rivers are reporting primarily wild fish present. The hatchery runs on these systems is finished.

The mainstem Nehalem remains too high and off-color for productive fishing although steelheaders working tributary mouths may find some success.

Water levels are expected to rise again before the weekend but by Saturday, most systems should be fishing well. Large broodstock steelhead, tipping the scales to over 20 pounds, have been taken in the Wilson River recently. The late run broodstock fishery and a quality wild

steelhead fishery peaks in March, making the north coast a favored target for Willamette Valley veterans.

Crabbing remains good in Tillamook and Netarts Bays. Anglers working the jetties are taking more consistent numbers of rockfish and an occasional lingcod. Smaller tide exchanges produce the best results but those are at night this weekend.

Southwest – Ocean conditions aren't boat-friendly this week although there may be a brief window of opportunity on Saturday according to offshore forecasts. When conditions allow, bottom fishing is good for rockfish and lingcod.

Crabbing has been poor offshore due to rough ocean conditions.

Crabbing improved in Winchester Bay but may be negatively impacted by precipitation this week. Sturgeon fishing has slowed around the 101 Bridge. South Umpqua steelheaders have been doing well for hatchery steelhead but rising waters will hamper efforts this week.

Lower Rogue spring chinook anglers are enthusiastic now that fish have started to enter the estuary. Unfortunately, river levels are forecast to spike with rainfall. Levels are predicted to be dropping over the coming weekend but the water will be a little high. The upper Rogue may be the best bet for winter steelhead.

Good numbers of herring were taken over the last weekend in Brookings harbor. The run is late this year and is usually short-lived. The Chetco River will be high but dropping in the weekend to come, creating winter steelhead opportunities for plunkers.

Elk and Sixes rivers are on the rise with rain this week but should fish well for winter steelhead as the water drops and clears.

Eastern – The Crooked River remains a best bet for trout on the East side.

Steelheading should be productive in the Grande Ronde but water levels are high this week.

SW Washington – Late season steelhead are making a stronger showing on the Kalama. The Cowlitz is another option but the bulk of that run has passed. The Lewis River is also a fair option for mostly wild fish with spring chinook still likely a month away.

Spring chinook are starting to show in better numbers for Davis Bar trollers. Numbers should start to build with peak opportunity the first week in April. Larger fish tend to show earlier in the run however.

The Washougal River has slowed for hatchery steelhead but a fair run of wild fish should show through March.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Salmon is still king on the Columbia River and even though the run is underway and effort is ramping up, catches remained somewhat subdued for the run many are expecting this year. Of course, the most recent cold weather front will quell effort and motivation by said targeted species but the show must go on.

Reliable resources like **pro guide Brandon McGavran (360-607-1327)** report more consistent catches at Davis Bar but far from a consistent bite. That's not really to be expected for a few more weeks anyway but anglers want to retain optimism. Although Davis is surely a metro

favorite, serious anglers can't overlook the fact that most salmon are destined for the Willamette River, making the water downstream of the mouth of the Multnomah Channel the best choice for anglers. Creel checks river-wide however are less than impressive. Here is the ODF&W information from the weekend:

Portland to Longview Bank:

Weekly checking showed three adipose fin-clipped steelhead kept, plus one unclipped spring chinook and three unclipped steelhead released for 161 bank anglers.

Portland to Longview boats:

Weekly checking showed one adipose fin-clipped spring chinook kept for 25 boats (61 anglers).

Estuary Bank (Clatsop Spit to Wauna Powerlines):

Weekly checking showed two adipose fin-clipped steelhead kept, plus one unclipped steelhead released for 31 bank anglers.

Estuary Boats (Tongue Point to Wauna Powerlines):

Weekly checking showed no catch for six boats (13 anglers).

Recent rumors of better numbers of spring chinook in the lower river wouldn't be surprising but it also shouldn't get hopes up for anglers that are coming into the fishery with high expectations. Most recent test net results indicated poor presence for chinook and even a slight down-turn in steelhead numbers. Twelve drifts yielded just 4 chinook and 2 steelhead using the large 8" mesh net. The smaller "tooth-tangle" net was much more productive for steelhead but we don't need to detail that here. It's pretty clear, there aren't a lot of salmon in the lower river from the results of this February 26th test net trial.

Sturgeon catches aren't registering much better. With the onset of the cold front, and the simple fact that it's winter, action likely won't improve much in the near future. There are some rumors of sturgeon filling the shallow areas near the islands in the lower gorge area but no recent reports have come out to verify if these fish are present. Here is the creel report from the sturgeon fishery:

Gorge Bank:

Weekly checking showed no catch for six bank anglers.

Gorge Boats:

Weekly checking showed no catch for one boat (two anglers).

Portland to Longview Bank:

Weekly checking showed no catch for 19 bank anglers.

Portland to Longview Boats:

Weekly checking showed two legal white sturgeon kept, plus 22 sublegal sturgeon released for 17 boats (43 anglers).

The Guide's Forecast – There's not going to be a lot change in the coming week. Although chinook catches may improve slightly this week, it's not likely to bust wide open anytime soon. Weather may warm slightly by the weekend but snow-melt may become an issue, keeping water temperatures cool through the weekend.

If anglers put in the effort, Davis Bar will likely be a fair option for metro trollers but as we've indicated recently, anglers utilizing the river below St. Helens have the best chance at

intercepting Willamette bound chinook. The tides aren't strong this weekend so trollers may stand the best chance versus anchor anglers working the lower river.

Sturgeon anglers will likely remain focused on the Willamette if they're in it for sport but consumptive users may want to scout some of the shallower areas in the gorge for keeper sturgeon. It wasn't long ago that anglers found good numbers of keepers and shakers present near Rooster Rock, closing the fishery because it became a little too productive. Rumors indicate there may be other shallow water, sandy bottoms where this scenario is setting up again.

Upriver, both sturgeon and steelhead success is waning. It will be a while before spring chinook become a targeted species in these pools. Walleye fishing is fair and will likely improve when temperatures do.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Winter steelhead are crossing Willamette Falls in double digits daily with nearly 3,800 upriver as of the end of February. The first spring Chinook was counted at the Falls on February 21st. A few springers have been taken by trollers at Sellwood but catches have flat-lined this week. Plunkers are taking the occasional winter steelhead along the bank below the Clackamas down to Meldrum Bar and a couple of Lake Oswego boats have hooked winters as well.

ODFW sez, " For the first time in more than three decades the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife will release a substantial number of spring chinook salmon into the Coast Fork Willamette River in hopes of establishing a recreational fishery between Cottage Grove and Springfield.

"The department plans on March 12 to release about 210,000 chinook salmon smolts into several reaches of the Coast Fork Willamette downstream of Dorena and Cottage Grove reservoirs to the river's confluence with the Middle Fork Willamette in Springfield. If this initiative is successful, anglers could be pulling adult hatchery spring salmon out of the Coast Fork Willamette when the fish return as adults in 2014."

McKenzie River level and flow have been steadily dropping this week, as yet unaffected by rain this week. As the freezing level rises, snowmelt may become a factor.

The Santiam water level and flow are good for fishing this weekend. Shelburn to Green's Bridge remains a hazardous stretch for drift-boaters.

Cottage Grove Reservoir, Dexter Reservoir, E. E. Wilson Pond, Junction City Pond, Huddleston Pond, Sheridan Pond and St Louis Pond are scheduled to be stocked with hatchery trout this week.

Henry Hagg Lake opens on Saturday, March 3rd, for the season. It's scheduled to receive 18,000 legal-sized trout in addition to brood trout planted last fall and holdovers from 2011 stocking. That said, the crushing number of participants on opening day is a deterrent to many but the boat ramps can be a source of amusing entertainment as long lines, novices and first-timers fray the nerves of more experienced boaters hoping to launch quickly and efficiently.

The Guide's Forecast – The water temperature in the lower Willamette is a controlling and at times, particularly at this time of year, a troublesome factor. With the water temps currently in the lower 40s, it's sure to have a negative impact on the spring Chinook bite. Once the water warms a little, the Chinook fishery will be on. In the interim, there are fair to good numbers of winter steelhead in the lower river.

Trout fishing should be fair to good over the weekend on the McKenzie with Blue-Winged-Olives hatching early afternoons on most days. It's primarily a nymph show, however, but winter trout catches are often quite good when water levels are down. It should go without saying but the McKenzie is strictly a catch-and-release fishery from Leaburg Dam to Hayden Bridge until April 28th.

With a fair number of steelhead over Willamette Falls, there are fish available in the Santiams. Most appealing is the catch-and-release action available on the North Santiam but results will be better later in March.

A "Learn the River" trip will take place on the North Santiam from Green;s Bridge to the Santiam Rest Stop on Saturday, March 3rd. Interested drift-boaters can call 503 897 3301 for more information.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Clackamas River water levels spiked a week ago but have been dropping since. Steelheaders should find decent water conditions for the weekend to come with fish scattered river-wide.

The Sandy was a little high but exhibiting good color over the past weekend. Conditions continued to improve and Wednesday this week several nice winter steelhead were landed.

The Guide's Forecast – Winter steelhead catches at the Clackamas have been fair at best with many anglers claiming low numbers this year. Be that as it may, bank and boat fishers stand about an equal chance at a hookup. Eagle Creek has produced a few winters but catches have been spotty.

Opportunities for winter steelhead are available to bank anglers at the popular spots at Dodge Park, the Garbage Hole, Revenue and Cedar Creek. Boaters will take winters on the stretch from Oxbow to Dabney parks. The freezing level is forecast to rise over the coming weekend and may effect water flows on the Sandy as upriver snow and ice melts.

North Coast Fishing Report – Inclement weather has valley anglers less than motivated to pursue steelhead, risking their lives traveling over the pass (good thinking). Action however has been fair for those still willing to work the water. Most recently, **pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** fished with 2 friends on Tuesday, going 5 for 6 with all the fish landed being hatchery broodstock fish from the Wilson River. Chris floated the Siskeyville to Sollie Smith Bridge drift with all fish coming off of eggs sidedrifted. Chris mentioned seeing quite a few fish yesterday, coming from both the bank anglers and boating community.

The Nestucca has been fishing similarly with fair to good results coming from the upper reaches of the river. River heights have been good enough to put fresh fish in the higher drifts, spreading them throughout the system so all anglers have a chance at them. **Pro guide Kent Anderson (503-550-6303)** has reported good results the first few days of the week, hooking double digit numbers each day. The run is clearly in on the Nestucca.

The Trask and Kilchis Rivers have fish present too although they're not posting as high of catch rates as the other systems. The top Tillamook two have the hatchery supplementation to boost numbers and consumptive opportunity and both of these rivers typically get better numbers later into the season.

I fished the Necanicum River on Friday, taking 2 plug-pulling customers. Despite quality water conditions, we only did fair, hooking 6 fish and landing 3. One of the fish we hooked however was a bruiser that entangled itself into a submerged root ball, eventually breaking us off. There was just one other boat on the float and it may be because of the river obstruction downstream. We knowingly came across 2 trees, blocking complete passage near the Highway 101/Highway 26 junction (Cannon Beach Junction). We had to drag my driftboat across a gravel bar for at least 40 feet before splashing down again. Thank goodness we had gluv-it on the bottom of the boat. Most of the fish hit the black pirate size #30 hot shot; a hard one to find in stores these days.

Tides haven't been conducive for sturgeon anglers and that won't change anytime soon. Crabbers continue to take fair numbers of quality keepers from Tillamook and Netarts estuaries. Other systems aren't nearly as productive.

Offshore action hasn't been an option but bottomfishing along the north jetty in Tillamook has. There has been an impeding swell however so boaters do need to exercise extreme caution. Soft tides have helped out recently however.

The Guide's Forecast – Although all that snow has to melt sometime, the weekend river forecast does look favorable for anglers. The river is forecast to rise again but only in small increments, enabling good access to numerous streams on the north coast.

Of course the focus will be on the Wilson and Nestucca systems; hopefully the weather allows for safe passage over the coast range. Both of these systems should have ample numbers of wild and hatchery steelhead available. With water conditions the way they are, fish should be well distributed throughout the system, giving bank anglers good access to them too in the upper reaches where it's easier to fish from the bank. Bait will likely continue to produce the best results in the higher flows. Keep in mind however that plugs can be an effective tool when everyone else is sidedrifting their way downstream. Expect about equal numbers of wild and broodstock fish in your catches.

It's important to point out that this has been an extraordinary season and it's likely to continue that way too. The weekend crowd however is likely to have an impact on catch rates and despite the great conditions, not everyone is going to score chrome this weekend. Fortunately, the river is up enough where you don't have to be the first one through to achieve results. It will be important however to be innovative as fish that see the same blob of eggs from every Joe angler that floats by will be accustomed to what's going on. Add this to the good fishing that's happened early in the week, not every day can be super good so it's best to go into the weekend not expecting too much but fish confidently enough knowing you are fishing on top of fish.

Given that, the non-hatchery systems will receive much less pressure this weekend and should have ample numbers of fish to pursue. The Trask and Kilchis as well as the Necanicum are just those rivers. Bait will work best here too but plugs may also be effective, especially on those smaller streams. Did you also catch the fact there's quite a navigational hazard on the Necanicum too? Be prepared to drag your boat over gravel because you're not going through those two trees.

Three Rivers and the North Fork Nehalem are done. There has been an occasional wild fish come from these systems and even less common, a quality hatchery fish. These systems are in ideal condition however but who cares? The mainstem Nehalem remains out of reach. Estuary anglers won't have much to crow about this weekend although bottomfishing may offer up some opportunity on the smaller tide swings. Unfortunately, the smaller swings happen after sunset as fishing and crabbing should be pretty good. No sturgeon fishing and don't even think

about going offshore. Tillamook Bay seems to be a quiet place for sturgeon this season although some still claim to be catching a few keepers.

Central & South Coast Reports – Charter boats were able to get out early this week to enjoy a hot ling cod bite which provided limits for most. Rockfish were not quite so cooperative but everyone got a least a few.

Offshore conditions are marginal for the weekend but there may be a window of opportunity to get out of some ports on Saturday.

The ODFW will make a final decision on the 2012 Halibut regulations and the opening dates at a meeting on April 20th. The good news is that catch quotas will increase by nearly 9% in 2012.

The Pacific Halibut Commission has set the quotas for 2012. For area 2A (Oregon) the TAC (Total Allowable Catch) has been increased by 8.7%, this is the highest TAC since 2008."

Water in the mainstem Umpqua are predicted to be high but dropping over the coming weekend. Fewer than 10% of the steelhead here are of hatchery origin and about half that percentage enter that North Umpqua. Since only fin-clipped fish may be kept here, there's a fair to good chance of catch-and -release encounters with big, tough wild steelhead.

For those who would rather take a winter steelhead or two home for the dinner table, the South Umpqua boasts a majority of hatchery fish with numbers surging at the recent freshet. It may be a few days until water conditions improve sufficiently to allow for fishing, however.

Coos Bay crabbing has held up despite storms dumping fresh water into the river. Good catches of large crab have been taken this week. Surf perch are being taken from area beaches whenever there's a break in wave action. Coos River steelheaders have been taking fish in low water before rainfall this week. The South Fork Coos, West Fork Millicoma, and East Fork Millicoma rivers should have fresh winters entering with the latest freshet. Try small baits of cured roe to tempt them.

Lower Rogue flows are forecast to peak overnight on March 2nd, moderating thereafter. Many are gearing up for spring Chinook which have been rolling for weeks and are beginning to move upstream. Springers will be the primary target in a couple of weeks. Boat anglers should score winter steelhead now by pulling plugs or side-drifting as the water drops and fly anglers have experience some success recently. The water should start dropping Sunday on the middle river, offering opportunities for fair fishing for bank and boat anglers as winters will be on the move in higher flows. Winter steelhead are available in the upper Rogue with the increase in flow this week encouraging upstream movement. It's legal to keep one wild steelhead per day up to five per year anywhere on the Rogue at this time.

Chetco water levels have been predictably on the rise with rain storms this week which is not a bad thing considering how low and clear the water has been. Forecasts indicate water flows still below optimum over the coming weekend, but there should be some opportunities for steelheaders. Catches have been very good here this season, even with the water low.

The southwest corner of the state experienced stormy conditions mid-week which put water into the Elk and Sixes rivers. Running high and murky as of the first day of March, a break in rainfall is expected this weekend which should have these rivers fishing as they recover quickly. Elk River conditions are available at 541-332-0405.

Bradley Lake. Empire Lake - Middle, Empire Lake - Lower. Johnson Mill Pond, Powers Pond, Arizona Pond, Garrison Lake and Saunders Lake are scheduled to be planted with trout this week.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Trout fishing is expected to improve on the lower Deschutes in March as the first signs of spring start to show.

Bull trout should be available to anglers fishing the Metolius arm of Lake Billy Chinook opening today, March 1st.

Look for midges hatching early and Blue-Winged Olives hatching most afternoons on the Crooked River. Results have been fair to good for a mix of trout and whitefish. Some decent-sized reddsides landed this week. It's spawning time for the whites, making a small egg pattern a good bet.

Water conditions have improved on the Grande Ronde but with the water temperature in the high 30s, steelhead will be slow to bite or strike.

Washington fishing reports:

*From the WDF&W Weekender Report for
From the WDF&W Weekender Report for March 2012*

North Puget Sound

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

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

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

Anglers looking for some competition might want to participate in the **Everett Blackmouth Derby** on March 17. Prizes include \$3,000 for the largest fish, \$1,500 for second place and \$500 for third place. For details, visit the [derby's website](#).

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

Freshwater anglers, however, can wet a line at some local lakes. Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish are good spots to fish for **perch**, **cutthroat** and **smallmouth bass**. Fishing there and in many other lakes should improve in March as water temperatures increase and fish move into shallower water.

Looking forward to the **summer salmon fishing** season? There's still time to comment on proposals for this year's fisheries. Several public meetings have been scheduled throughout March as fishery managers continue to develop the 2012 salmon seasons, which will be finalized in early April. For more information on the meetings, visit WDFW's [North of Falcon website](#).

Hunting: Deer and elk hunters have until March 31 to enter their name in a drawing for a 2012 multiple-season permit, which can greatly increase their opportunities for success in the field.

In mid-April, WDFW will randomly draw names for 8,500 multiple-season deer permits and 1,000 multiple-season elk permits.

Winners of the drawing will be eligible to purchase a special tag allowing them to participate in archery, muzzleloader and modern-firearm general hunting seasons for deer or elk in 2012. Winners who purchase the multiple-season elk tag by Aug. 31 can participate in general elk-hunting season in both eastern and western Washington. They also may apply for special permits to hunt deer or elk, regardless of weapon type.

Hunters may purchase a multiple-season permit application at [authorized license dealers](#), or by calling (866) 246-9453. The permit application is \$6 for residents and \$100 for nonresidents. A 2012 hunting license is not required to submit an application, but winners of the drawing must purchase one before they can purchase a multiple-season tag.

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

Blackmouth salmon fisheries are in full swing in Puget Sound, the lingcod season gets under way mid-March in ocean areas south of Cape Alava and several ocean beaches are tentatively scheduled to open for two razor clam digs this month.

As usual, the final word on beach openings will be announced about a week before each razor clam dig is scheduled to start, said Dan Ayres, coastal shellfish manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Unlike previous openings this season, the digs are timed to coincide with morning low tides. No digging will be allowed on any beach after noon.

Proposed beach openings, along with morning low tides, for the first dig are:

- March 10, Saturday (7:39 a.m. -0.3 ft.): Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- March 11, Sunday (9:28 a.m. -0.4 ft.): Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks

Later in the month, diggers will have another opportunity. Tentative opening dates and evening low tides for that dig are:

- March 24, Saturday (8:25 am +0.3 ft.): Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- March 25, Sunday (8:59 a.m., +0.3 ft.): Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks

Ayres notes that the dig planned at Copalis on March 24 will coincide with the sixth annual [Ocean Shores Razor Clam Festival](#), which includes a chowder cookoff and other events.

Under state law, diggers can take 15 razor clams per day, and are required to keep the first 15 they dig. Each digger's clams must be kept in a separate container.

All diggers age 15 or older must have a valid fishing license to harvest razor clams on any beach. Licensing options range from a three-day razor clam license to an annual combination fishing license, which can be purchased on [WDFW's website](#) and from license vendors around the state.

Meanwhile, fishing for **blackmouth** – resident chinook – is an option in several areas of Puget Sound. Anglers fishing marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon) and 12 (Hood Canal) have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook. Those fishing the Strait of Juan de Fuca – marine areas 5 (Sekiu) and 6 (eastern Strait) – and Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound) have a daily limit of one salmon.

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.

Rather hook a **lingcod**? Fishing for lingcod gets under way March 17 in marine areas 1-3, south of Cape Alava. The minimum size for lingcod in these areas is 22 inches, with a daily limit of two fish per angler. For lingcod fishing regulations, check the [Fishing in Washington pamphlet](#).

Back on shore, there's still time to provide input on the **summer salmon fishing** seasons. Several public meetings have been scheduled throughout March as fishery managers continue to develop the 2012 salmon seasons, which will be finalized in early April. For more information on the meetings, visit WDFW's [North of Falcon website](#).

In the rivers, **wild steelhead** returns to northern peninsula streams reach their peak in March. As in years past, anglers may retain only one wild steelhead per license year on the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc rivers. On all other rivers, anglers may retain only hatchery-reared steelhead marked with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar.

Anglers should be aware that wild steelhead retention closes on portions of the Dickey River in mid-March. For more information on steelhead fishing regulations, check the [Fishing in Washington pamphlet](#). Information on weekly steelhead catches in the Quillayute River system and the Hoh River are available on [WDFW's website](#).

Southwest Washington

Spring chinook fever is starting to take hold on the Columbia River. More than 100 boats were counted on the lower river one day in late February when only a single adult fish had passed Bonneville Dam. By late March – when the bulk of the run is expected to arrive – that number is expected to grow to more than 2,000 boats per day.

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

According to the pre-season forecast, 314,200 upriver fish are expected to return to the Columbia River this year, which would be the fourth-largest run on record. The sport fishery below Bonneville Dam is scheduled to run through April 6, but could be extended if enough fish are available for harvest.

Harvest guidelines adopted by the two states will allow anglers fishing below Bonneville Dam to catch and keep up to 14,500 hatchery-reared spring chinook before the run forecast is updated in May. Upriver fish bound for rivers above the dam are expected to make up the majority of the catch, but salmon returning to the Cowlitz, Lewis, Willamette and other rivers below Bonneville also contribute to the fishery.

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

Cindy LeFleur, WDFW Columbia River policy manager, said this year's spring chinook fishery looks promising, especially compared to last season.

"Not only is this year's 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.

Spring chinook fishing is currently open to boat and bank anglers on a daily basis from Buoy 10 near the mouth of the Columbia River upstream to the Interstate 5 bridge. Starting March 1, the sport fishery will expand upriver to Beacon Rock and run through April 6. During that period, the sport fishery will close on three Tuesdays – March 20, March 27 and April 3 – to accommodate commercial fisheries.

Starting March 1, bank anglers will also be allowed to fish from Beacon Rock up to the fishing boundary below Bonneville Dam.

Above Bonneville Dam, the fishery will be open to boat and bank anglers on a daily basis from March 16 through May 2 between the Tower Island powerlines six miles below The Dalles Dam and the Washington/Oregon state line, 17 miles upriver from McNary Dam. Bank anglers can also fish from Bonneville Dam upriver to the powerlines during that time.

Starting March 1, anglers fishing downriver from Bonneville Dam may retain one marked hatchery-reared adult spring chinook as part of their daily catch limit. Above the dam, anglers can keep two marked adult spring chinook per day effective March 16.

To guard against overestimating this year's run, the states will again manage the fisheries with a 30 percent buffer until the forecast is updated in late April or early May.

Fishery managers from Washington and Oregon have already scheduled a meeting April 5 to review the catch and determine if the season can be extended. If the catch to that point has not reached the initial harvest guideline, the two states will consider an immediate extension, said LeFleur, the WDFW fishery manager.

Effective March 1 through May 15, the mainstem Columbia River will be open for retention of **shad**, but only on days and in areas open for retention of adipose fin-clipped spring chinook.

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

All of those rivers are also open to fishing for late-run **hatchery steelhead** under rules outlined in the 2011-12 [Fishing in Washington](#) pamphlet. Hymer said fishing for winter hatchery steelhead is still going strong, particularly on the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers, noting that summer-run steelhead will start coming in right behind them later in the month.

In other waters, anglers should be aware that March 15 is the last day to fish for steelhead on Abernathy, Cedar (Clark Co.), Germany, Mill (Cowlitz Co.), Rock (Skamania Co.), Salmon (Clark Co.) creeks and on the Coweeman, Elochoman, Grays, East Fork Lewis and Washougal rivers.

Meanwhile, **sturgeon** fisheries below Bonneville Dam will be further constrained for the third straight year. Responding to the continued decline of sturgeon abundance below the dam, fishery managers adopted fishing regulations designed to reduce the catch by 9,600 fish – a 38 percent reduction from last year.

That action follows a 30 percent catch reduction in 2011 and a 40 percent reduction in 2010.

"This year's sturgeon fishery will be opening later or closing earlier on various sections of the river," LeFleur said. "Anglers should check this year's fishing rules carefully before they head out."

Monitoring data jointly collected by Washington and Oregon indicate that the abundance of legal-size white sturgeon has declined by nearly 50 percent since 2003. Factors often cited for the decline include increased predation by sea lions and a drop in the abundance of smelt and lamprey, which contribute to sturgeons' diet.

To keep this year's catch within the new harvest guideline, the sturgeon fishery will end 23 days earlier than last year in the estuary below the Wauna powerlines and start eight days later in the fall from the powerlines upriver to Bonneville Dam. Fishing seasons approved for 2012 in the lower Columbia River are as follows:

- **Buoy 10 to the Wauna powerlines:** Retention of white sturgeon is allowed daily from Jan. 1 through April 30 and from May 12 through July 8. From Jan. 1 through April 30, sturgeon must measure between 38 inches and 54 inches (fork length) to be retained. From May 12 through the end of the season they must measure 41 inches to 54 inches (fork length) to be retained. Catch-and-release fishing is allowed on days when retention is prohibited.
- **Wauna powerlines to Bonneville Dam:** Retention of white sturgeon is allowed three days per week (Thursday through Saturday) from Jan. 1 through July 31 and from Oct. 20 through Dec. 31. Sturgeon must measure between 38 inches and 54 inches (fork length) to be retained. Catch-and-release fishing is allowed on days when retention is prohibited.

Sport fishing for sturgeon will be closed from May 1 through Aug. 31 in the nine-mile sturgeon sanctuary downriver from Bonneville Dam described in the *Fishing in Washington* rules pamphlet. Sand Island Slough near Rooster Rock also will be closed to fishing at least through April 30.

As in years past, 80 percent of the allowable catch will be allocated to the sport fishery and 20 percent to the commercial fishery. Under the new harvest rate, the portion of the catch available to recreational fisheries will be allocated as follows: up to 4,160 fish in the estuary, up to 2,080 above Wauna and between 1,768 and 2,022 in the Willamette River (actual catch was 1,535 fish in the two day season).

Unlike the lower river, legal-size sturgeon populations appear to be growing above Bonneville Dam, said Brad James, a WDFW fish biologist. This year's harvest guidelines for sturgeon fisheries above the dam remained the same as last year – 2,000 fish in Bonneville Pool, 300 in The Dalles Pool, and 500 in John Day Pool. Over half the Bonneville Pool guideline was reserved for the summer season as the first retention period closed Feb. 18.

Another option is **walleye**, which are now on the bite above Bonneville Dam. The **kokanee** fishery is also picking up in Merwin Reservoir and should improve throughout the month. For other freshwater fishing options, check the [stocking schedule](#) on WDFW's website for **trout** plants throughout the region.

Eastern Washington

Over a dozen trout-stocked lakes in the eastern region open to fishing March 1, and those that are ice-free should be productive.

In the southeast district, six of the seven man-made lakes off the Tucannon River in Columbia County – Big Four, Blue, Deer, Rainbow, Spring and Watson – are stocked with catchable size **rainbow trout**, including 8- to 12-inch, one-third pounders and some 14-inchers up to or over a pound each.

Glen Mendel, southeast district fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), said Beaver Lake continues to have decreased water flows due to river changes, and for the second year will not be stocked.

Fishhook Pond in Walla Walla County and Pampa Pond in Whitman County also open March 1 and are well-stocked with catchable-size rainbows. Other year-round-open waters in the southeast district are also receiving hatchery plants now. Specific fish stocking numbers are available on [WDFW's website](#).

Other waters opening March 1 further north in the region will likely provide action on a variety of fish later in the month when ice melts and access is easier. Most of these are not dependent on catchable-size fish stocking, but have fish populations that carry over through the winter. They include Downs Lake in Spokane County, with **bass, crappie, perch** and rainbow trout; Liberty Lake east of Spokane, with rainbow and **brown trout**, bass, and perch; and Medical Lake near the town of the same name, with brown and rainbow trout.

Also opening March 1 are Amber Lake in southwest Spokane County for catch-and-release of rainbow and **cutthroat trout**; Coffeepot Lake in Lincoln County for rainbows, yellow perch and black crappie under selective-gear rules; and North Silver Lake in southwest Spokane County for rainbows under selective-gear rules and a requirement to release adipose-fin-clipped fish.

Deer Lake in southern Stevens County also opens March 1, but WDFW northeast district fish biologist Bill Baker said the lake is still iced over. "With these wintery conditions, the opener might provide some ice-fishing opportunity," he said. "But as the season progresses, anglers need to be very cautious about safe ice depth." Deer Lake has bass, crappie, perch, rainbow and **lake trout**, as well as **kokanee**.

Baker also notes that northern Stevens County's two winter-season rainbow trout lakes – Williams and Hatch – are still producing catches of 13- to 14-inch fish, although catch rates are slower. Both lakes remain open through the month of March, but Baker said anglers need to be cautious about quickly changing ice conditions this late in the season.

Fishing action has also slowed at the central district's two winter-season (December through March) lakes – Hog Canyon in Spokane County and Fourth of July in Lincoln County. Fish are still available, but changing conditions may keep anglers at home.

Kokanee and rainbow trout fishing should be good all month at year-round-open Lake Roosevelt. In the Spring Canyon area of the big Columbia River reservoir, both species are usually caught near the surface.

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

Steelhead fishing on the Grande Ronde River, especially the Shumaker and Cougar Creek areas, remains very good. The season is open through April 15 in the stretch from the county road bridge to the Oregon state line for up to three hatchery-marked steelhead daily. All tributaries are closed to steelhead fishing. In addition to a fishing license, a [Columbia River Salmon/Steelhead Endorsement](#) is required.

Another kind of fishing is available at the Inland Northwest Wildlife Council's 52nd annual [Big Horn Outdoor Adventure Show](#), March 15-18, at the Spokane County Fair and Expo Center. Some 5,000 trout are stocked in three huge indoor lakes for kids to catch at "Fishing World." The show also includes a "Virtual Reality Fishing Simulator," fishing demonstration tank, lots of fishing seminars by experts, and hundreds of fishing equipment and charter service vendors. WDFW

staff will be on site selling fishing licenses and talking with visitors about all things fish and wildlife.

Northcentral Washington

Dozens of trout-stocked lakes in the Columbia Basin district of the region open to fishing March 1, and most are nearly ice-free and ready for action.

The best bets initially may be Martha and Upper Caliche lakes in Grant County, where the greatest number of March opening lakes are concentrated, said Chad Jackson, Columbia Basin district fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

"Both lakes were rehabilitated in 2010, treated to rid them of undesirable fish and re-stocked with **rainbow trout** fry in the spring and extra "catchable" size trout last fall," Jackson said. "Both should have good catch rates on this opener for rainbows that run between 11 and 13 inches long."

Burke and Quincy lakes on the Quincy Wildlife Area southwest of the town of Quincy, were each stocked with about 11,000 catchable size (11 to 13 inches) rainbow trout last fall, Jackson said. "These fish should be slightly larger by opening day," he said. "And even earlier plants of fish should provide good opportunity for carryover trout up to and over 20 inches."

Dusty Lake, also on the Quincy Wildlife Area, should be good on the opener for rainbows that mostly run 12 to 14 inches, Jackson said. Lenice and Nunnally lakes, on the Crab Creek Wildlife Area just east of Beverly, should also fish well with similar size rainbows, although the trout at Nunnally can require some time to locate. All three lakes are under selective gear rules and a one-fish daily catch limit.

Lake Lenore, two miles north of the town of Soap Lake, typically fishes slow on the opener but picks up by mid-April, Jackson said. It's also under selective gear rules and during the first two months of the season it's catch-and-release only. "Anglers who fish from float tubes or small boats can catch five to 10 fish during an outing," he said. "The **cutthroat trout** in Lake Lenore range in size from 16 inches to pushing 30 inches."

Ice cover is still good in most Okanogan County lakes, reports WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff. Ice fishing opportunities are available at Patterson Lake near Winthrop for seven- to eight-inch **yellow perch** and 10- to 11-inch **kokanee**; Davis Lake near Winthrop for 10- to 12-inch rainbow trout; Big and Little Green lakes near Omak and Rat Lake near Brewster for 10- to 12-inch rainbow trout; Palmer Lake near Loomis for eight- to 10-inch yellow perch; and Bonaparte Lake near Tonasket for 10- to 12-inch **eastern brook trout** and **kokanee**.

"This month is the last chance to catch and keep fish at Davis, Green and Rat lakes," Jateff said. "Those lakes shift to a catch-and-release season April 1."

Winter **whitefish** seasons in Okanogan County are limited now due to current steelhead closures. Areas that remain open for whitefish through March are the Chewuch River near Winthrop from the mouth to the Pasayten Wilderness boundary; and the Similkameen River from the mouth to 400 feet downstream of Enloe Dam and from Enloe Dam to the Canadian border. Whitefish gear rules apply, except in areas that are currently open for steelhead under selective gear regulations.

Fishing for **triploid rainbows** at Rufus Woods Lake, the Columbia River reservoir off Chief Joseph Dam, has slowed recently, Jateff said. Triploids being caught are in the one- to three-pound range. Jateff reminds anglers that when fishing with bait in Rufus Woods, the first two fish caught are counted as part of the daily limit whether kept or released.

Southcentral Washington

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

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

In March, more than 20 lakes and ponds in Yakima, Kittitas, Franklin and Benton counties are scheduled to receive thousands of "catchable size" rainbow trout, along with hundreds of jumbos and triploids. For a complete list, see the [stocking schedule](#) for southcentral Washington on the WDFW website.

Anglers should also be aware fishing for **hatchery steelhead** usually picks up right before the season closes March 31. WDFW fish biologist Paul Hoffarth said some of the highest catches of the season occur in March near the Ringold Springs Hatchery.

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

Fisheries for hatchery steelhead are open through March on the Snake River and on the Columbia River downstream from the wooden powerline towers at the Old Hanford townsite. Steelhead fishing is not permitted anywhere on the Yakima River.

Meanwhile, the sport fishery for **white sturgeon** above McNary Dam (Lake Wallula) opened on Feb. 1 and is scheduled to run through July 31. Lake Umatilla, which extends from John Day Dam to McNary Dam, is also expected to remain open through March for retention of white sturgeon.

Hoffarth notes, however, that the Lake Umatilla fishery is managed on a quota system and could close abruptly when the quota is reached. Anglers planning to fish the lake should keep an eye on the WDFW website for possible updates.

In both areas, anglers may retain only those white sturgeon that measure between 43 inches and 54 inches when measured from the tip of the snout to the fork of the tail.

Hoffarth also reminds anglers that some of the year's biggest **walleye** are caught in the spring. These fish are now preparing to spawn and are nearing their highest weight of the year, he said. Once commonly caught in Lake Umatilla below McNary Dam, walleye are now routinely caught above McNary Dam in Lake Wallula, including the lower Snake River and the Hanford Reach.

TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail

Write to the TGF staff:

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Random Links

50 Places to Fish within 60 Minutes of Portland courtesy ODFW:

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/lets_go_fishing/

50 places to fish within 60 minutes of Roseburg courtesy ODFW:

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/lets_go_fishing/docs/50_in_60_Roseburg.pdf

For east-side fishers

Map of stocked ponds and reservoirs in Union County (jpg):

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/trout_stocking_schedules/2011/northeast/UnionCo_stocking_map.JPG

Map of stocked ponds and reservoirs in Baker County (jpg):

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/trout_stocking_schedules/2011/northeast/BakerCo_stocking_map.JPG

Driving directions to Union and Baker County stocking locations (pdf):

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/trout_stocking_schedules/2011/northeast/Union_Baker_sites.pdf

GOOD LUCK!