

The Guide's Forecast - volume 14 issue number 13

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **March 23rd – March 29th, 2012**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Columbia River trollers remain perplexed as to why their efforts continue to go unrewarded. Cold water temperatures and high flows are the likely cause for all the frustration. Although springers seem to be present, action will likely remain subdued until water temperatures rise into the higher 40's. With catch rates poorer than expected, anglers are hopeful for an extension past the proposed April 6th closure. Recent test-netting results indicate there are a lot of steelhead in the mainstem Columbia with a high percentage of them being hatchery fish.

Sturgeon effort remains low as spring chinook interest grows. An occasional keeper is coming from the Portland to Longview stretch but the best catch and release opportunities continue to come from the lower Willamette River.

Willamette level and flow peaked over the past weekend and has started to moderate although water temperatures remain low for best results with spring chinook. The "Spring Fishing Classic" annual salmon derby takes place March 31st regardless of water conditions. Register at Fisherman's Marine.

McKenzie levels will be dropping this week and it may fish if the water clears.

North Santiam levels are forecast to be moderating later this week with wild steelhead in the river.

A few steelhead were taken on the Clackamas this week before the water came up. It is dropping and may fish late in the weekend.

Steelheading has been good at times on the Sandy but winter has been slow to lose its grip as snow fell on the banks early this week. Fish should be well distributed throughout the system with bobber and jig fishers more likely to work the upper reaches near Marmot.

Northwest – Steelheaders remain hampered by high, cold water and inclement weather. Snow continues to create hazardous traveling conditions but numbers remain strong when anglers can fish. The Wilson River began fishing again on Monday with a good bite coming at the acclimation pond near Donaldson's. Good numbers of wild and hatchery fish will be available into mid-April.

With other systems still too high over the weekend, the Kilchis fished great in the clearing conditions. Sidedrifters did exceptional over the weekend. The Necanicum was another good option recently although wind-blown debris makes this river more hazardous to float. This will be the last full week of targeted steelhead fishing on some north coast streams so check regulations before heading out in early April.

Another hydrograph bump mid-week may put the bigger systems like the Nestucca and Wilson off until the weekend. When temperatures do warm and river levels stabilize, the fishing should be excellent. The mainstem Nehalem has been too high for most of the season.

Many coastal lakes have been stocked with trout in preparation of spring break week. Lake Lytle and Cape Meares Lake should offer up good opportunity for Tillamook County anglers. Bait fished from shore or trolled flashers and worms will likely produce the best results.

Southwest – While ocean conditions have kept boats at bay much of the season so far this year, now that spring is here, wind and wave action will allow additional opportunities. Lingcod fishing in particular will be rewarding through April and May. Rough seas are forecast until Sunday, March 25th.

Many offshore recreational boaters as well as commercial charters are looking forward to the ocean salmon season as it is expected to be a very good one this season. Offshore salmon fishing opened March 15th off the central coast while the south coast ocean troll fishery will open in May for an estimated 2.4 million Klamath and Sacramento River bound chinook.

Crabbing has slowed with fresh water washing into Winchester Bay. The Umpqua system is likely to crest on Friday this week then begin dropping and clearing into the weekend.

This week's freshet comes just as steelheading is winding down on the lower Rogue but it will also bring in fresh spring chinook which will be the primary focus of anglers as river conditions improve. While the Rogue is spewing mud out into the ocean at this time, it is predicted to be recovering by the weekend to come. Upper Rogue steelheaders deploying plugs in migration lanes will have a decent prospect for winter steelhead.

Dropping early this week, the Chetco will rise to blow-out level by the coming weekend although it is forecast to drop once again and may fish by Sunday,

As water drops and clears, expect good results from the Elk and Sixes river through the end of the month.

Eastern – Various bugs are showing on the Metolius with nymphing effective between hatches while bull trout are inhaling streamers.

Trollers working Lake Billy Chinook are still catching some quality lake trout and bull trout as well. The season is waning however as anglers refocus their efforts on trout in the coming months.

The Crooked River, while running low, has continued to fish well with nymphs effective in the morning and matching the Blue-Winged Olive hatch taking trout in the afternoons.

Soapbox Update: It's here! It's here! Author Nancy Slavin has finally published her novel. Here's a brief description of this wonderful read:

Moorings follows 23-year old Anne Holloway as she journeys up to a small, Alaskan fishing town to find her biological father. Instead of finding what she came looking for, Anne realizes the past can never be untangled from people's memories, and damage from oil spilled under the surface never completely dissolves. Still, by making the journey, Anne discovers her true identity can be found within.

Order your copy today from Smashwords at:
<https://www.smashwords.com/books/search?query=Moorings>

SW Washington – Steelheaders are still finding fish on the Cowlitz and Kalama Rivers with some hatchery fish still available. The Lewis will continue to have a fair wild run for a few more weeks. Spring chinook should start trickling into these lower Columbia tributaries in the coming weeks although peak season is still a few weeks away.

Effort continues to increase for spring chinook despite inclement weather and poor catch rates. That should change dramatically when water temperatures climb.

Brown trout have been planted in Lacamas Lake and Kline Pond in anticipation of upcoming spring break. More rainbow plants are likely in district lakes prior to the start of spring break.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Anglers paying attention to the spring chinook fishery on the lower Columbia finally got excited on Wednesday when several anglers reported fair to good success for salmon between Davis Bar and Caterpillar Island. Trollers took the lion's share of fish with green label herring producing the best results. Most trollers reported success fishing in 18 to 24 foot of water. This action was reported despite cool water temperatures still being experienced by most anglers. Savvy anglers are still utilizing flashers to entice biters from a longer distance in this vast river system. Although fish in the 20+ pound range were reported, the smaller 9 to 12 pounders were also in the catch. As most anglers realize, those smaller fish make up the bulk of the return, therefore return at a later date (the sport fleet will be out of the river by then most likely).

Some anchor anglers reported keepers on Wednesday as well, taking fish on sardine wrapped plugs in the shallower water. As flows remain high and temperatures cold, salmon will hug the shoreline in some areas, avoiding the faster flows to conserve energy for the long road ahead. These anchor anglers may hold the advantage when temperatures rise, especially if flows remain high. You'll need green plugs of course and yes, sardine wrapped will be a near necessity.

Trollers and anchor anglers struggled at mid-week in the Kalama area. Even though fish obviously make their way through this stretch of river, it isn't always productive for even the most skilled anglers. Cloudy water from the Willamette still plagues this reach of river but temperatures are warmer, which you would think should influence the bite. The Willamette and Columbia are still scheduled to rise which may only further hamper success. Although spill on the mainstem isn't scheduled until later into April, high flows will slow catch rates. Hopefully, we'll see an extension and a productive fishery once the specimens actually arrive.

Overall, catch rates were lower this week than last (that wasn't supposed to happen) but it goes to show you that inconsistency is the rule this time of year. Even in peak season, you can't hit them every day of the peak period.

Estuary anglers didn't produce well either and if flows remain high, that will likely continue to be the case.

Sturgeon action remains predictably quiet although there were a few keepers retained in the Troutdale area for only 8 boats targeting them. Don't expect much more out of the lower Columbia until temperatures come up a bit more.

The Guide's Forecast – It's definitely time for this fishery to begin to gain momentum. The spring chinook are due, although there have been more years than not of sub-par fishing in what most would deem the beginning of the peak run. No one knows if this will be a repeat but we have a large forecast to bolster excitement and opportunity. Morning high tides should also produce better results as incoming flow should slow the current down some. Catch rates certainly took a jump on Wednesday, hopefully a growing trend.

Although anchor fishing with plugs should definitely be a part of your arsenal this season, don't count on that being a top producer this week. With the water still cold, springers are likely to remain focused on herring and it certainly won't hurt you to have some extra "bling" on your

outfit. Flashers have been an important tool in these higher flows in recent years. Anglers may want to focus their efforts in the Portland area with Davis Bar and Caterpillar Island favorite targets for trollers and some anchor effort.

Anglers that fish below the influence of the Willamette will likely continue to find challenging results until the water clears. Although anglers will likely still find success in water depths between 20 and 34 feet, don't overlook the shallower stuff to find fish utilizing the slower flows for upstream migration. Just use lighter lead to get your offering a bit farther away from the prop wash. Anchor anglers should definitely seek shallower water in these higher flows, especially given another high water event is forecasted into the weekend. Use lots of scent to entice biters; they'll need a lot of motivation.

Sturgeon anglers will have to wait a bit longer before any excitement begins. You may luck into a keeper in the Portland to Longview stretch or the Troutdale area.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Willamette flows are increasing with the water temperature, currently in the lower 40s, on the drop as of noon on Thursday, March 22nd. Visibility is less than one foot and daily fish passage at the Falls has dropped to single digits in high, muddy water.

At this writing mid-day on Thursday, March 22nd, the McKenzie is rapidly on the rise.

North Santiam water levels are dropping but will still be high enough over the next few days to advise caution to drift boaters.

St Louis Pond and Blue River Reservoir are scheduled for trout planting this week.

The Guide's Forecast – Willamette flows will crest over the weekend then start to moderate in the week to come but a large river like this will be slow to recover. The first opportunity for fishing will come to plunkers along the bank below the Clackamas mouth. Once the water drops, clears and warms, spring Chinook trolling will start to be productive although March is still considered to be early for best results.

Since there's no fishing in the lower Willamette there may be little interest in launching a boat, but for those who might, be aware that the Jefferson Street ramp in Milwaukie is blocked by a log jam and it appears heavy equipment will be required to clear it.

While there's snow on the banks of the McKenzie River this morning, it'll be gone by the weekend and March Browns will be hatching.

Conditions on the South Santiam are forecast to improve rapidly, offering decent conditions although there aren't a lot of fish available at this time of year.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Clackamas level and flow suffered only moderate effect from storms this week and the forecast shows it should be improving over the coming weekend. Watch out for sea lions which have been spotted recently above Carver.

While the Sandy experienced a slight rise mid-week, it has been dropping since and will continue to do so through the weekend. The freezing level will be rising over the weekend and into early next week which can sometimes result in off-color water conditions.

The Guide's Forecast – With the water level gradually dropping and in good color, expect to find winter steelhead scattered and well-distributed on the Clackamas. Stay versatile and be patient for what is expected to be fair but steady fishing.

Prospects for broodstock winter steelhead are decent on the Sandy over the coming week. This river remains the best prospect for steelheading in the valley.

North Coast Fishing Report – Is anyone else upset at the weatherman? If I was that far off with my fishing predictions, I don't think The Guide's Forecast would exist! Anglers that ignored the weatherman's warnings did not find a lot of pressure on our local area streams. And what's more exciting is that they found some good fishing opportunities.

The Wilson was expected to remain a little high through mid-week but sidedrifters working the water found good action with several boats reporting near double-digit opportunities. Small clusters of eggs drifted with light lead are typically the ticket in higher flows and that was certainly the case this week. In these conditions, fish could be anywhere, giving anglers ample opportunity throughout the day to come across a motivated fish. There have been some quality ones too, easily surpassing the 10-pound class. Both wild and hatchery fish have been prevalent, making for some great fishing lately. On Monday, we floated for a few hours from Siskeyville to Donaldson's gravel bar, just taking 2 fish (one wild, one hatchery) in our float (both sidedrifting) but came across anglers in the Duyck's Drift tearing 'em up. There were clearly pockets of fish that contained high numbers. Tuesday and Wednesday also produced great results, thanks in part to a botched weather report (but I'm not bitter.....).

The Kilchis came into fine shape over the weekend when just days before, it was over its banks. Again, not much pressure but good fishing for those that participated. Again, sidedrifting was the key to success. Plugs should now be a good option with the flows dropping and fish getting more territorial.

The Trask and Nestucca Rivers have also been area favorites with good numbers of wild fish now entering the Trask system. The Nestucca continues to yield both wild and hatchery broodstock fish with some nice ones coming from that system as well. The upper reaches of the Nestucca have been the better bet although the fish are well distributed throughout the system.

The Necanicum and the North Fork of the Nehalem remain sleepers but should have ample numbers of wild fish available. As we've mentioned all season, the Necanicum is a boater's nightmare, and that is before the recent wind storm. Adventurous anglers however are likely to be rewarded. Pressure is light and these systems close to steelheading after March 31st.

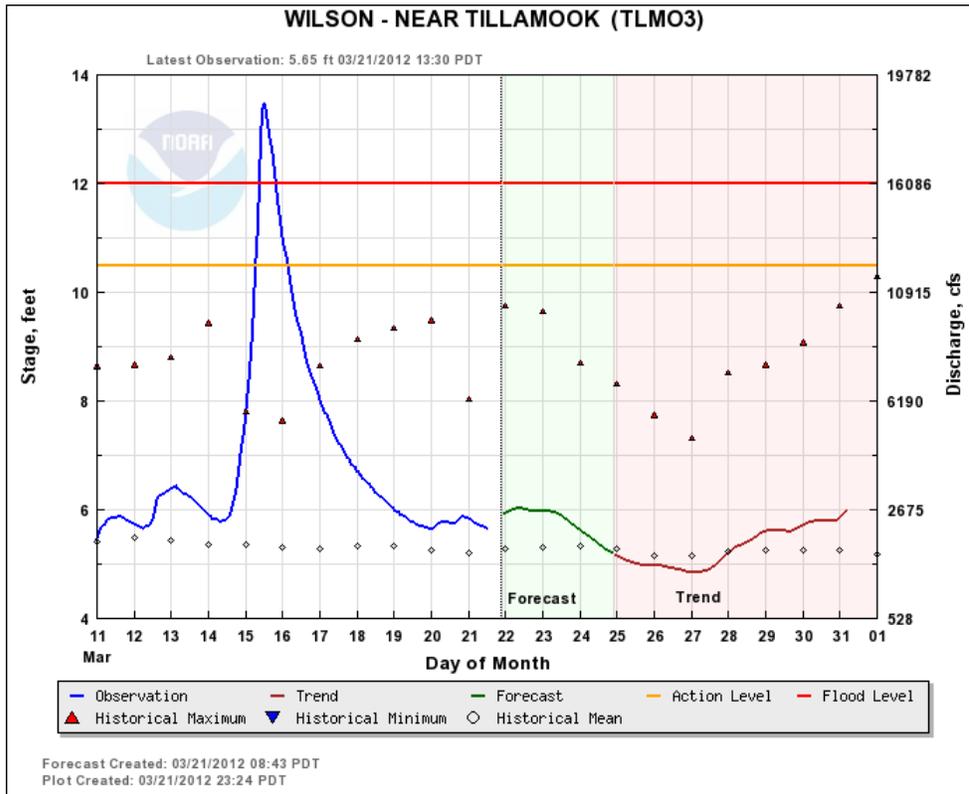
No hits, no strikes and no errors for sturgeon fishers, crabbers or offshore anglers. It's a nightmare out there on the open water right now.

Scheduled for trout planting this week are Bradley Lake, Upper and Middle Empire Lake, Johnson Mill Pond, Powers Pond, Ben Irving Reservoir, Cooper Creek Reservoir, Galesville Reservoir, Herbert's Pond, Lake Marie, Loon Lake and Plat 1 Reservoir.

The Guide's Forecast – It does look like a productive week of steelheading ahead for Tillamook County streams. If the weatherman doesn't screw up any more forecasts, river levels should remain stable and even continue to drop in the coming days. That should put almost all systems online for the weekend and well into next week. The one exception is the mainstem Nehalem, which really hasn't fished much all season.

As you likely know, the Wilson and Nestucca will be the only hatchery options for the remainder of the season and anglers may even find a few summer steelhead starting to show in the coming weeks. These systems, especially given the number of fish returning this year, should continue to produce well into mid-April. Sidedrifters will still take the bulk of the biters, at least until the weekend. By the weekend, flows should drop and fish will likely get used to seeing anglers offerings so you'll have to mix it up and go rogue if you want to produce better results. Bobbers and jigs or pink worms may produce better results. Plugs will become effective too over the weekend.

Here's the hydrograph model for the days ahead:



This year, the Wilson is fishing best between 5.0 and 5.8 on this graph and it's getting pretty clear when the graph reads 4.8 or lower. The water upstream of Mills Bridge, specifically the rock garden, gets tough to negotiate below 4.7 feet although you need to exercise caution at any level. Wear life jackets on these systems!

The Trask should continue to fish well too with only higher numbers of wild fish entering the system into April. The upper reaches on the peninsula will fish well prior to the weekend and as flows drop, the lower reaches should have ample numbers of fish available.

Last chance winter dance for the Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem Rivers before the March 31st closure date. Watch for sweepers as they do exist and claim lives every so often.

The offshore fishing option doesn't look too bad for the weekend. That is, if you believe your weatherman. There may be a window of opportunity for offshore fishers and crabbers but it's a pretty volatile time of year to expect this forecast to be accurate:

FRI

SE WIND 20 TO 25 KT WITH GUSTS TO 35 KT. WIND WAVES 6 FT. W SWELL 10 FT. CHANCE OF RAIN.

FRI NIGHT

E WIND 10 TO 15 KT WITH GUSTS TO 20 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 8 FT.

SAT

NE WIND 5 TO 10 KT...RISING TO 10 TO 15 KT IN THE AFTERNOON. GUSTS TO 20 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 7 FT. CHANCE OF RAIN.

SAT NIGHT

N WIND 10 TO 15 KT...BECOMING W 5 TO 10 KT AFTER MIDNIGHT. WIND WAVES 3 FT. W SWELL 6 FT. CHANCE OF RAIN.

SUN

W WIND 5 TO 10 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 6 FT.

MON

S WIND 20 TO 25 KT. WIND WAVES 5 FT. W SWELL 6 FT.

Central & South Coast Reports – Rough ocean conditions are forecast to continue through today and Friday but some charters are gearing up for the possibility of trips over the coming weekend. There is no depth restriction for bottom fishing and seven rockfish and two legal-sized ling cod may be kept per day, no cabezon may be retained until the 1st of April.

The Spring All-Depth Halibut dates are tentatively scheduled for May 10th-12th, 17th-19th, May 24-26 and May 31st-June 2nd for the central coast from Cape Falcon to Humbug Mountain. The Halibut Commission will finalize dates in April.

The Siletz rose to just short of flood level mid-month but has been dropping into shape since that time. As the condition of the river has improved. steelheaders have been rewarded with fair to good catches daily. It's expected to fish well over the weekend.

Steelheading holds some promise on the Alsea for those who fish upriver and on the North Fork.

Coos Bay crabbing is slow with nets and traps producing only the occasional decent Dungeness. Rock fishing has been worthwhile from the South Jetty when conditions have allowed. High, swift, muddy water has prevented steelheaders from chasing fish this week but there should be a chance to fish this weekend as the river recovers.

Steelheading will resume as the Coquille recovers although it's getting late in the season for best results. The river will remain open for steelhead through April.

Crabbing at Winchester Bay has taken a hit from storms this week with fresh water pushing Dungeness out of the bay. Umpqua mainstem water conditions are terrible at this time, over the

action stage and a torrential, muddy mess. Fortunately, recovery is forecast to be swift although it doesn't look good for the coming weekend. With the South Umpqua most productive and likely to recover at a quicker pace, there may be a chance to hookup here with a steelhead and, of course, the best shot for a hatchery fish will be on this fork of the river.

Water on the lower Rogue will be dropping over the coming week but will be high this coming weekend. While the latest freshet will bring in spring Chinook as the ocean is predicted to calm down, it's still early for best results. There are a few winter steelhead in the system although the season is winding down on the lower river at this time of year. Still high mid-day on Thursday this week, the middle Rogue will be too swift to be productive over the weekend to come. Prior to the latest storm, steelheading was only fair anyway. Upper Rogue steelheaders should have the opportunity to hook up with winter steelhead in the next few days as fish have moved into this stretch of the river and water conditions will be a bit better up high. One wild steelhead may still be retained per day here but no more than five during the year.

As of Thursday this week, the Chetco has started to drop after cresting overnight at more than 14 feet and 25,000 cfs near Brookings. Forecasts indicate a continued moderation of flow into the coming weekend which, if predictions hold true, will provide opportunities for plunkers by Friday with a good chance for drifting from bank and boat by the weekend. This latest freshet will encourage late-run winter steelhead so fishers can expect a mix of bright fish and those which have already spawned and are headed back to the ocean.

For the latest updates on conditions at the Elk River, call the hatchery hotline at 541-332-0405. Pre-recorded reports are updated daily.

Alder Lake, Big Creek Reservoir 1 & 2, Buck Lake, Carter Lake, Cleawox Lake, Dune Lake, Eckman Lake, Elbow Lake, Erhart Lake, Georgia Lake, Lost Lake (Lane County), Mercer Lake, Munsel Lake, North Gerogia Lake, Olalla Creek Reservoir, Perkins Lake, Siltcoos Lagoon, Siltcoos Lake, Thissel Pond and Woahink Lake are scheduled to be stocked with hatchery trout.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Lower Deschutes water conditions are fair with as it's running a little off-color. Steelhead are spawning and redds should be avoided. Trout are somewhat receptive to attractor patterns and caddis imitations with best results early afternoons.

Nymphs are taking trout on the Crooked River during morning hours while Blue-Winged-Olive imitations are drawing strikes later in the day.

Fishing has been fair to good for somewhat selective trout on the Fall River but try for weekdays as the river experiences some pressure on weekends.

Washington fishing reports:

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 cook-off 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 town site. 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.

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Random Links

Trout Stocking Sites from the ODFW (pdf) – locations and directions:

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/trout_stocking_schedules/2011/willamette/2011_SWWD_Stocking_Sites.pdf

ODFW Google-Maps Trout Fishing Spots:

<http://dfw.state.or.us/news/2012/March/032112.asp>

Hard-to find book now online - Atlas of Oregon Lakes: <http://aol.geos.pdx.edu/>

GOOD LUCK!