

The Guide's Forecast - volume 14 issue number 14

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **March 30th – April 5th, 2012**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- With Columbia River salmon action still as cold as the weather, anglers remain hopeful that the peak of the run is running behind. Fishery managers are still reluctant to promise more sportfishing opportunity past the April 6th proposed closure date but it seems likely to happen unless indicators point to an over-prediction. Test netting indicates that there are ample numbers of chinook present but high numbers of steelhead remain in the system. The commercial fleet decided to suspend efforts again this week which should provide additional opportunity for sport anglers into the weekend.

The Willamette remains a muddy mess, affecting success rates downstream but plunkers working the lower Columbia River islands are finding a few fish that are hugging the shore line in the higher flows. Anglers should scent gear heavily to assist in finding a motivated biter.

Lower Willamette flows are moderating with the water temperature gradually rising past the mid-40s but with visibility less than a foot. It'll be a while for conditions to be conducive for spring chinook results. Fish passage at the Falls has been slow in high water.

The McKenzie will be in decent shape for trout fishers with only showers in the forecast over the coming weekend and March Browns emerging in the afternoon.

Recent snow and rain will put the Santiams out of shape for at least a week.

Clackamas water levels are on the rise, putting the river out of shape for steelheading this week.

Water will be high and roiled on the Sandy River with levels forecast to drop next week.

Catch the 2012 Saltwater Sportsmen's Show Saturday and Sunday at the Oregon State Fairgrounds in Salem.

Northwest – Steelheaders had another successful week last week when flows slowed and rivers cleared. Double-digit opportunities were reported on the Wilson as soon as the river was fishable and although action slowed by the weekend, savvy anglers still posted good results. Fishing icon Buzz Ramsey put in several days on the Wilson and Trask Rivers, taking fish on the maglip 3.5 and corkies with or without bait. The Trask is coming on-line more consistently as we approach April. Some quality fish will continue to come from this system into mid-April.

The Nestucca has also been putting out consistent numbers of wild and hatchery fish. With the run as good as it gets, fresh steelhead will be available into mid-April here too with some summer steelhead likely to show in the coming weeks.

Smaller streams are getting low and clear but predicted rainfall may make them a fair option before some close after March 31st. The Kilchis will remain open but the Necanicum and North Fork Nehalem close beginning in April.

Although effort remains light, sturgeon anglers took a few keepers from Tillamook Bay on the early morning outgoing tides this week. Keepers are likely to remain in the system into the summer months but the larger population of fish that come into the estuary during the winter months are likely to begin moving back towards the Columbia.

The weekend brought a rare opportunity to harvest fish and crab offshore. Although only a few saltwater anglers took advantage of it, lingcod fishing was good and crabbing was fair. The next window appears to be a ways out again.

Trout fishing was fair for those taking advantage of recently stocked lakes such as Lake Lytle and Cape Meares Lake. Trolled flashers and worms worked most consistently.

Southwest – Lingcod catches were excellent for charters out of central Oregon ports on Monday this week. While ocean conditions are forecast to disallow trips this week, this is a great time of year for bottomfishing. Cabezon may be kept starting Sunday, April 1st.

High swells for much of the ocean crabbing season has limited prospects. Crabbing in bays and estuaries has been slow with fresh water reducing salinity levels.

Surf perch have been taken from southern beaches when wave action has moderated. Stretches near river or bay mouths are generally best.

Siletz and Alsea rivers are good bets for late winter steelhead when they recover from the freshet this week.

Sturgeon fishing and crabbing have been slow in Winchester Bay. With the spring chinook fishery getting started on the Umpqua, water levels will be rising through Sunday, April 1st. As the water drops, results for springers are expected to improve.

Plunkers have scored a few springers this week on the lower Rogue but it won't be fishable this weekend as heavy rain will push flows over 35,000 cfs by the last day of March according to NOAA predictions. While the upper Rogue or Applegate River can sometimes offer possibilities during high-water events, neither will be an alternative this week.

Fishing for all species closes at the end of day Saturday, March 31st on the Chetco River. Water conditions won't be conducive to steelheading as the date approaches however, as water flow is forecast to be rising to blow-out levels this week.

The Elk and Sixes Rivers are swollen this week. Both will close to fishing at the end of March.

Eastern – While Caddis, Blue-Winged Olives and midges are in evidence on the Deschutes during the warmth of afternoons, March Browns are due so be prepared to match that hatch if and when it occurs. The weather should be fair over the weekend and results with redsides should be fair to good.

Metolius fly anglers are hooking bull trout on streamers.

Soapbox Update: Don't forget NSIA's spring fishing classic! It's not too late to sign up for this premier event! Go to: <http://www.nsiafishing.org/hogs.php> to sign up for the March 30th event!

SW Washington – Steelheaders are still scoring fair catches on the Cowlitz River with the Lewis and Kalama still options for late season steelheaders. Spring chinook should begin to show in the coming weeks. Most anglers remain focused on the mainstem Columbia for spring chinook.

Just 30 spring chinook have passed Bonneville Dam making the Drano Lake and Wind River fishery a poor prospect this weekend. Action is more likely to peak in late April and early May.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Cold water and stormy weather is still gripping Columbia River anglers not only hoping for Columbia chrome, but waiting for spring to actually spring. **Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** reported slow fishing on Wednesday (3/28) although he did catch the only fish that he saw caught for about 3 hours of recreation. Chris landed his 16-pounder on a “naked” herring (meaning no flasher) at Davis Bar early on Wednesday.

That’s been the rule, effort based on weather, success somewhat scarce but finally on the climb. Here is the weekly creel checks from ODF&W posted on Wednesday (3/28):

Gorge Bank:

Weekly checking showed no catch for three anglers.

Gorge Boats:

No Report

Troutdale Boats:

Weekend checking showed three adipose fin-clipped spring chinook kept for 52 boats (121 anglers).

Portland to Longview Bank:

Weekend checking showed three adipose fin-clipped chinook kept, two unclipped spring chinook released, 31 fin-clipped steelhead kept and two unmarked steelhead released for 802 bank anglers.

Portland to Longview boats:

Weekend checking showed 59 adipose fin-clipped spring chinook kept, ten unclipped spring chinook released, seven fin-clipped steelhead kept and one unclipped steelhead released for 428 boats (1,107 anglers).

Estuary Bank (Clatsop Spit to Wauna Powerlines):

Weekend checking showed two adipose fin-clipped steelhead, plus one unmarked steelhead for 11 anglers.

Estuary Boats (Tongue Point to Wauna Powerlines):

Weekend checking showed six adipose fin-clipped spring chinook kept for 46 boats (96 anglers).

Although some of these numbers look to be improving, it’s certainly not what one would expect for late March. Catch rates of a salmon for every 7 boats is what you would have expected a few weeks ago, not for a run forecasted to be one of the bigger ones in the last decade. Fishery managers still remain somewhat confident that fish will show, mainly based on previous year’s peak passage dates, which have been happening in May.

Anchor anglers seem to be faring ok as reports come in from plug fishers working the Portland airport/I-5 stretch taking an occasional fish from the pick. Wednesday’s report from the Puget Island area downstream of Longview indicate action is slightly better with a better per boat average. One guide boat reported going 1 for 2 on Wednesday sitting at the top of Puget Island running plugs out of the back of the boat. I know, impressive, huh.....?

One thing is for sure, there is an unprecedented number of steelhead in the river as indicated by both test net fishing and sport fishing results from creel checks. The bank anglers out-produced

steelhead over chinook 10 to 1 on the weekend check. Anglers may want to target steelhead with a fair chance at a chinook. See the forecast section for that information.

Bonneville fish passage remains predictably slow. Only 33 steelhead have passed as of Wednesday.

The Guide's Forecast – It's not peaches and cream out there and it may not be anytime soon either. Mainstem river predictions are for significantly higher flows in the coming days which will further delay success and migration. Furthermore, the mid-valley streams look as if they will once again flow fast and high, coloring the Willamette up for many more days. Like last year, the weather pattern isn't on our side.

For trollers, it's going to be slow although there is a chance that the bite could pick up slightly at Davis Bar (mouth of the Willamette, Washington side) when the Willamette blows out again, slowing an already slow bite downstream. If this set-up happens, prepare for crowded conditions here with lots of competition looking for the same thing you are. Upriver areas could perform fair but don't look for a bunch of biters to make it past the Davis Bar trollers although anglers fishing the Oregon side could produce some results as Davis Bar anglers are targeting the Washington side of the river.

Fish numbers are on the increase but high flows and persistent cold water will keep them down. Anglers may want to switch to anchor fishing, particularly in shallow water, where you'll have a chance at both ample numbers of steelhead and shallow running spring chinook. Bank anglers always do better in high flows. Small plugs or heavily scented spin-n-glos should produce fair results for anchor anglers. Don't overlook water even as shallow as 3 foot, especially in heavy flows as this water can often produce the best results.

We'll reiterate, don't expect much, even as we draw closer to peak season. It's pretty clear that we're in for another late return this year so hopefully fish managers will allow the sport fleet to continue to fish well into April. The sport fleet tally to date is less than impressive with numbers through March 25th about 1,000 fish of a 12,700 fish quota. We clearly have a ways to go before attaining the quota, that is, if the run size prediction remains consistent. The run size update won't happen until late April at the earliest.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – As the water level and flow at Willamette Falls has continued to moderate this week, the temperature hasn't varied much from the mid-40s. Once it approaches 50 degrees or a little better, spring Chinook hookups will follow providing the water visibility shows some improvement. Fish counts started to pick up with the drop in flow with a total of 322 summers and 4,633 winters as of March 26th.

McKenzie water levels, dropping over the past 10 days, will be on the rise with rain and snowmelt.

The Santiam system has been too high to fish over the past week and heavy rain forecast for the last two days of March will do nothing to improve this situation.

Most Willamette Valley lakes were stocked last week for spring break and will still have many of those fish available. This week, Canby Pond, Alton Baker Canal, Dexter Reservoir, Foster Reservoir, Freeway Lake East, Timber Linn Lake, Walling Pond, Walter Wirth Lake and Waverly Lake are scheduled for planting.

The Guide's Forecast – That drop in water levels recorded at the Falls is about to turn around

as heavy precipitation starts to fall starting Friday this week. The level is forecast to rise through the weekend, then start gradually dropping in the week to come.

It may take until mid-April for conditions to sufficiently improve to allow for spring Chinook trolling. As far as other Willamette Valley rivers are concerned, all is not lost. Use the time over this coming weekend to clean and lube reels, tie leaders or flies and sharpen hooks.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Water levels of the Clackamas River are forecast to exceed 'Action Level (18 feet at Estacada) overnight on Saturday, March 31st. Flows are predicted to approach 18,000 cubic feet per second.

Water levels of the Sandy River crested about 10 days ago and have been dropping since. Steelheading has been slow this week despite improving water conditions.

The Guide's Forecast – Fishing won't happen for a while on the Clackamas. At 3,000 cubic feet per second, plunkers will have an opportunity but it will fish best at 1,800 cfs or less. According to long-range forecasts, it will be a week or more until conditions allow fishing.

The Sandy will be on the way out over the coming weekend as heavy rain combines with a rising freezing level which will trigger melting snow. This is not a good combination for those of us looking to catch a fish or two but conditions will improve with dryer weather.

Generally, fish steelhead in higher water starting high on the system. Try areas which aren't capable of holding fish when the water is lower and if the water is swift, start fishing closer to the bank. Use larger, brighter lures or big baits if the water remains slightly off-color.

North Coast Fishing Report – What a see-saw year for steelheaders on the north coast. It's another system pounding the north coast right now, putting many rivers offline prior to the weekend and maybe well beyond if you dare to believe in the hydrograph models. Most anglers would agree however, it's been a steelhead season for the books.

The river fished pretty well last week, especially later in the week with weather forecasters missing the mark on low-level snow and rain. Thursday I had the pleasure of fishing with Buzz Ramsey, hooking (well, he was hooking) several fish, only to land one hatchery broodstock fish. It's been a theme lately, there are plenty to hook, they just don't hold. Friday took me to the Kilchis River in order to avoid the crowds but the Kilchis was low and clear despite a chamber of commerce (beautiful) day. We went strike-less on the Kilchis and launched on the Wilson for an afternoon run, coming up pretty short there except a last minute prayer of a 8-pound wild buck just above Mills Bridge on a K-11x Kwikfish. The side-drifters were ruling the roost for much of the week.

By early this week, flows were starting to subside enough to have growing optimism for ideal plug conditions. For spring break, the river was largely empty and I don't even think everyone was springer fishing. On Tuesday, I had 2 ladies on board that went 3 for 4 on plugs, taking 2 nice hatchery fish with the big one right at 34½ inches, easily 15-pounds. The other fish, a bright buck, went about 9 pounds and one wild fish at 7 pounds released near the Blue Hole. The hot plug this week has been the candy-apple metallic red and metallic blue colors. I've been running the same colors in the smaller Hot Shot size #30 in shallower water with good results.

By Wednesday, flows were on a steady increase and it doesn't look like they'll be coming back down anytime soon. More on that in the forecast section.

The Nestucca has been a highlight, on and off that is. It seems the best day was last Friday when Nestucca **pro guide Kent Anderson (503-550-6303)** reported a double digit day. We all know those kind of days can't go on forever as production fell, although not all that badly, by the weekend when everyone showed up for the action. Most recently, it has been slower fishing although dedicated anglers could still expect results. There are more dark fish beginning to show in the Nestucca and Wilson systems.

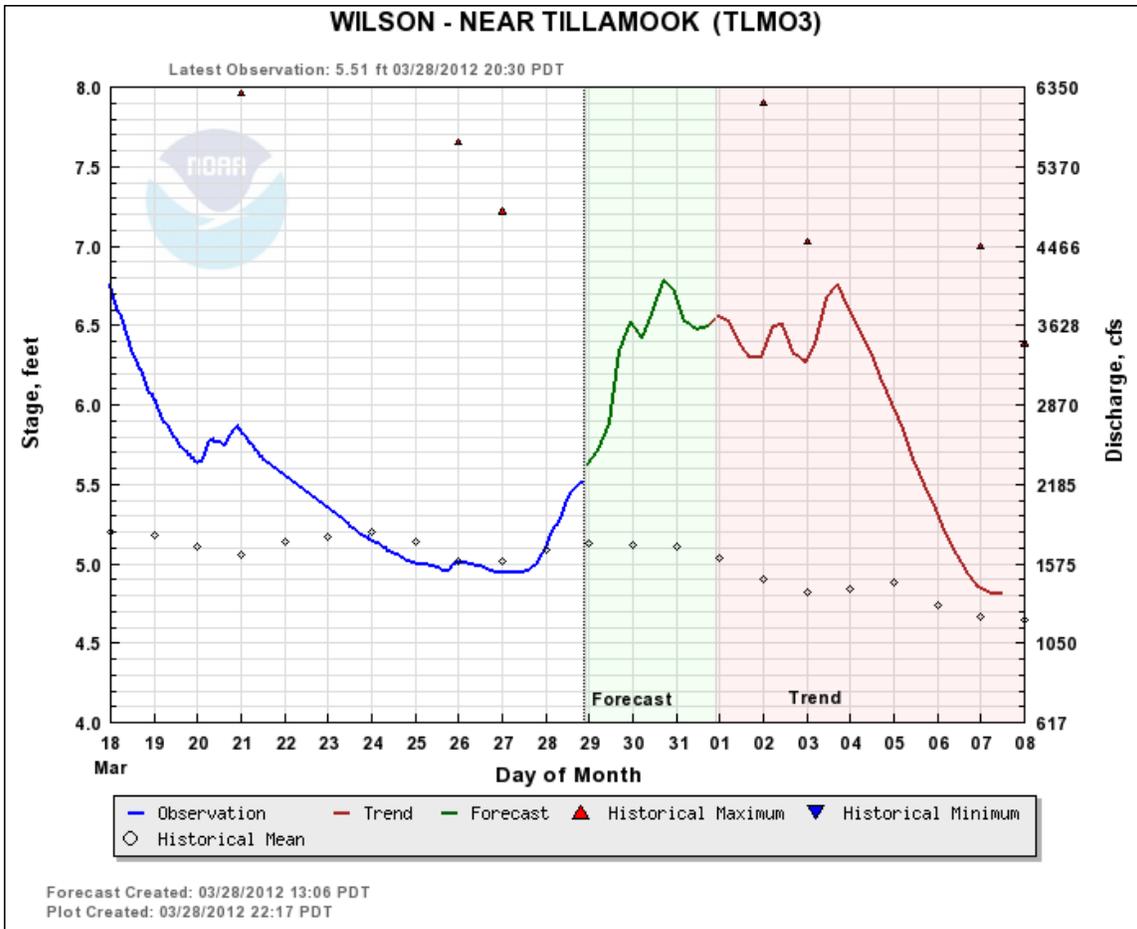
Other rivers were pretty low and clear recently but that will change this week. Some north coast streams close after March 31st so check your favorite stream before going out. The Kilchis will again remain open for steelhead for the remainder of the year although it's primarily all catch and release at this point. There have been some big fish this year.

What few sturgeon anglers there were did produce some results on Tillamook Bay over the weekend. Early morning tides produced near Bay City so there are clearly a few sturgeon still holding over in the estuary.

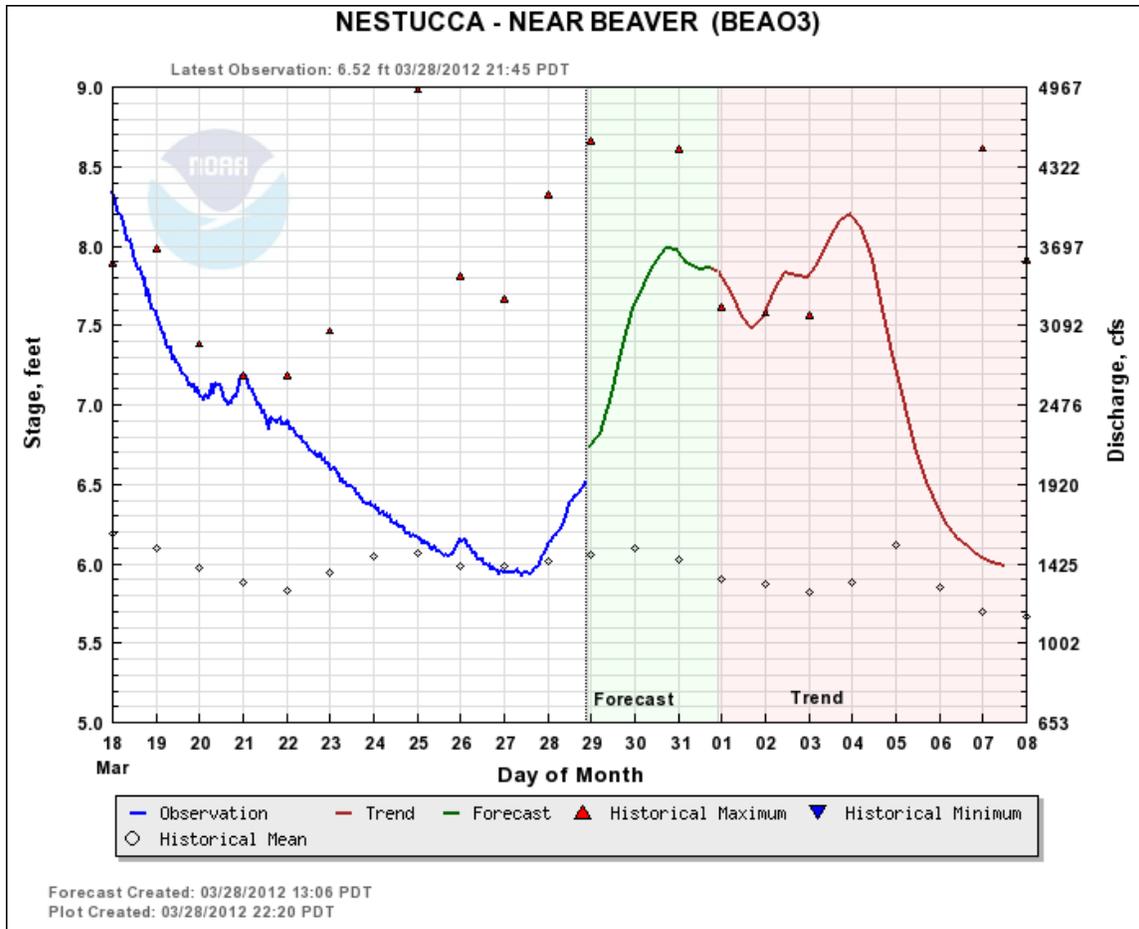
Anglers taking advantage of the nice offshore conditions on Sunday also found good fishing. The problem was, there weren't many people taking advantage of it. There were quite a few dory launches in Pacific City however, likely anglers wanting to take advantage of good bottomfishing on the nearshore reef. Crabbing was reported as fair in the salt chuck. Soon after that however, the ocean blew up again and won't be an option for quite a while.

Although few people are crabbing on the north coast, one recent report indicated that there are catchable numbers of keeper crab in Tillamook and Netarts Bays. Ocean crabbing should be fair as well but I wouldn't go out there anytime soon.....

The Guide's Forecast – It's not looking good for hatchery steelhead seekers on the north coast. Weather systems are supposed to pummel most watersheds for the next several days, bringing water levels up to unfishable levels through the weekend and maybe well beyond that. When the Wilson graph shows flows higher than 6.0 foot, it's pretty high to be expecting good results. Here's the hydrograph for several days out:



That said, if it does come into shape, the action should remain good for another few weeks given the magnitude of the run this year. Broodstock (hatchery) fish along with a fair run of wild returnees and maybe even a summer run fish could make their way to the net if the Wilson drops below 5.5 foot. The Nestucca will perform near the same as the Wilson for the remainder of the season. That includes how the hydrograph performs. This is the Nestucca but it looks pretty similar to the Wilson River:



Keep in mind however that the weatherman is WRONG A LOT! Who knows where this will actually end up as only a fool would go by a weather prediction; it's already cost me some good days of fishing. Yes, I'm still bitter.....

Smaller systems may remain on line under these conditions although many smaller systems close to steelhead fishing on March 31st. One exception however is the Kilchis River, which should continue to get a fair number of fish into April.

Tillamook Bay, area lakes and certainly the ocean will be poor choices given the weather ahead. If another weather mis-prediction comes along however, crabbing could be good in the soft tide exchanges occurring through the weekend. Jetty bottomfishing could turn out to be good as well. Only a fool would consider the ocean under this forecast:

FRI

SW WIND 20 TO 25 KT...EASING TO 10 TO 15 KT IN THE AFTERNOON. WIND WAVES 5 FT...SUBSIDING TO 3 FT. W SWELL 19 TO 21 FT. RAIN.

FRI NIGHT

SW WIND 10 TO 15 KT...BACKING TO NE AFTER MIDNIGHT. GUSTS TO 20 KT. WIND WAVES 3 FT. W SWELL 15 FT. RAIN.

SAT

E WIND 15 TO 20 KT...BECOMING SE 10 TO 15 KT IN THE AFTERNOON. WIND WAVES 4 FT. W SWELL 12 FT. RAIN.

SAT NIGHT

NW WIND 20 TO 30 KT. WIND WAVES 6 FT. W SWELL 15 FT. RAIN LIKELY.

SUN

SW WIND 20 TO 25 KT. WIND WAVES 7 FT. W SWELL 19 FT.

MON

S WIND 20 TO 25 KT. WIND WAVES 6 FT. W SWELL 18 FT.

Decils Lake is scheduled to be planted with hatchery trout.

Central & South Coast Reports – The luxury of a wide open, unrestricted ocean without restriction to joyously exploit (up to the legal limit, of course) for bottom-dwelling fishes will come abruptly to a close on April 1st. This change will be even more jarring to season offshore bottom fishers with the implementation of a 30-fathom limit. It is hoped by the decision-makers that confining ocean bottom-fishing efforts to 180 feet or less that further restrictions to 20 fathoms (as has been the case in the recent past) will not be necessary.

Another change beginning on April Fool's Day will be that keeping cabezon is once again an option. One per day measuring 16 inches or better will be allowed through September.

Steelheading has been decent on the Siletz River so far this season but, as with most rivers on the coast, it'll be high and roiled through the weekend to come.

While a few hearty souls have been successfully taking rockfish by casting bait off the south jetty at Winchester Bay, with the water turning muddy from heavy runoff, most other activity such as crabbing or even sturgeon fishing has been fruitless. As with other river systems on the south coast, the Umpqua will be too far out of shape for fishing this weekend. The timing is unfortunate, too, with the spring Chinook fishery just getting underway here. When the river recovers, springer catches are expected to be decent with best results near tidewater and fish scattered up to the confluence of the North and South Umpqua rivers. The winter steelhead season is on the wane.

Steelheaders took a few fish on the lower Rogue mid-week as the water level and flow dropped between storms but spring Chinook efforts were mostly fruitless. This is stated in past tense as rain once again started to push the water levels up overnight on Wednesday this week with forecasts calling for flood-levels overnight on Saturday, March 31st. Needless to say and yet we say it regardless, fishing the Rogue will not be on the list of angling opportunities over the coming weekend. While long-range forecasts are notoriously unreliable, particularly given the tumultuous and unpredictable meteorological events of Oregon in springtime, we're anglers, therefore optimists, and we're thinking it'll fish in the first full weekend of April; probably. When the water drops and clears, catches of spring Chinook should be decent as a good run is expected this year and hatchery fish are usually in the majority in April. Wild springers must be released until June. Rain this week will put steelhead into the upper Applegate which has been productive and will be once again as water levels drop and clear.

If you've read the report, above, on the Rogue River, and the information below on the Elk and Sixes (unlikely, but that is the order in which these were written), then the Chetco story becomes

obvious. It's on the rise and will be a surly, sloppy, blown-out muddy mess for the weekend. Unappealing? Yeah, but it'll recover in the coming week. No help there, though, as it closes to fishing of any type on the last day of March. It will re-open May 26th.

Elk and Sixes steelheaders are plying the waters today, Thursday, March 29th, as the break in rainfall allowed these smaller rivers to drop briefly into shape. We say "briefly" because the next storm front is due to move in tonight and is forecast to drench the southwest corner in a deluge for the next few days. The discussion is academic because Elk and Sixes water levels will have started to rise as you read this and these rivers close to fishing at the End of Day on March 31st. It was a spotty and unreliable winter steelhead season this year on the Elk and Sixes.

Diamond Lake will open April 28th. We'll start following the spring thaw a couple of weeks in advance of the opening so readers can plan their trips. Trout number in the hundreds of thousands here, growing large and healthy in the clear, sparkling water. Averaging 11 to 20 inches, there is a generous limit of eight per day.

Upper and Middle Empire Lake, Cooper Creek Reservoir and Galesville Reservoir are scheduled to be planted with trout.

An article in the latest issue of Popular Mechanics reports a fish hook unearthed at an archaeological dig in East Timor is the oldest yet recovered, dating back about 16,000 years. Prior to this, the oldest hook discovered was about 10,500 years old.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Deep trolling has been producing bull trout with fair reliability over the past week but those who have tried for kokanee here have yet to see any success. Angling pressure was light this week.

Crooked River flows are up due to an increase in water release. The latest report indicated 400 cfs which is generally considered too swift to fish well but no reports have come in this week. It had been fishing very well prior to this increase.

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.

TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com

Michael Teague: Michael@TheGuidesForecast.com

Random Links

There's an App for that – Rod-Builders' Guide Placement Software:

<http://anglersresource.net/GuidePlacementSoftware.aspx>

Newport class targets inshore marine fishing April 7:

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/education/outdoor_skills/workshops/basic_inshore_marine_fishing_newport.asp

GOOD LUCK!