

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 14th – December 20th, 2012**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- A break in the weather this week gave the valley rivers a chance to drain and drop. The Willamette remains high and murky but the sturgeon will still readily feed, so opportunity awaits the willing catch and release angler. Reports are still coming in of fair to good action from the lower Portland Harbor and the Milwaukie area. Smelt, sand shrimp and herring are the favorite baits. Little to no effort is taking place on the Columbia River with nothing to report.

Only one sturgeon may be kept in the 2013 angling year although no open seasons have been announced for the lower Columbia or Willamette Rivers. This decision was announced December 10 as a transition to catch-and-release only for sturgeon in Oregon waters starting in 2014.

The McKenzie River has dropped since heavy storms over the past week but is still too high this week to fish well. With Detroit Reservoir over-full, extra water is being diverted into the North Santiam which will keep the river high all this week.

The Clackamas and Sandy both have winter steelhead and despite the high water conditions a handful have been caught. On the Clackamas, focus on the upper section of river between Rivermill Dam and Carver until the river falls to that perfect 12.5 ft. level. Catches on the Sandy have come from both low and high on the river with decent reports from Lewis and Clark State Park and up to Dodge Park. Look to this week for an improvement in the water conditions and the catch for both rivers.

Northwest – Despite poor weather and less than ideal conditions, salmon and steelhead anglers are still plying Tillamook County waters in pursuit of fresh fish. Although the peak of early season steelheading is upon us, there are equal numbers of anglers still looking for late-season chinook.

Tillamook Bay is still putting out fresh chinook with a few still being taken from the Ghost Hole to Bay City, particularly just after high tide. Incoming is a traditional time to target troll-caught chinook in the bay but fishing can also be fair on the first part of outgoing tide. Anglers were taking advantage of good sturgeon tides this week on Tillamook Bay with some fair keeper fishing taking place in the west channel.

Rivers were in ideal condition through the weekend with the Kilchis still putting out some fresh chinook and a rare hatchery steelhead. The Wilson is a more likely target with better numbers of chinook and early run steelhead available. Water levels are scheduled to remain stable into this weekend.

The smaller systems continue to be the primary target for winter steelhead with the North Fork Nehalem, Three Rivers and the Necanicum the best options for both bank and boat anglers. Boating remains hazardous on these systems however with constant wind-fall and saturated banks causing instability. These tributaries are more likely to produce than the larger mainstem stretches these fish first enter.

Razor clam digging was good along Clatsop Beaches early in the week but a volatile ocean may quell results by the weekend. The best tide will happen after sunset.

Southwest- Charters and recreational boats have been able to launch out of central Oregon

ports over the past few days, resulting in mostly limits of rockfish and lingcod.

Recreational ocean crabbing, which opened December 1, has been yielding good results. The ODFW announced this week that commercial efforts will be delayed through December 30 to allow quality to improve. Cabezon may be kept by bank-bound anglers but not by boat fishers until January 1, 2013.

Steelheaders on the Alsea have taken a few fresh winter fish over the past week.

The mainstem Umpqua dropped to fishable levels at mid-week but is forecast to begin rising, then roller coaster in level through the coming weekend.

The Coos and Coquille Rivers both took a heavy hit from storms over the past week and are unlikely to reach fishable levels and clarity before the coming weekend.

Plunkers on the lower Rogue experienced spotty success using scented Spin 'n' Glos as waters dropped and cleared. Steelhead must be fin-clipped to keep until January 1, 2013. The middle Rogue has dropped and when it's fishable, fresh winter steelhead will be available around Galice and near the mouth of the Applegate River. High water conditions on the Upper Rogue have made fishing a challenge this week. Steelhead will be available as the water drops but quality will be mixed.

Despite high water levels at the Chetco dumping mud into Brookings Harbor, crabbing was good late last week and into the weekend. Limits have been the rule and the Dungeness being taken are large and heavy. Water levels and flows are dropping this week although the Chetco may experience another rise over the coming weekend with passing fronts.

Elk River anglers enjoyed decent water conditions over the past weekend where late chinook are mixed with a few early winter steelhead. Conditions were better and the pressure was high on the Sixes River into this week as it clears a little later.

Eastern – Levels have been high on the lower Deschutes recently but there should be some steelhead available for those who know how and where to fish here when the water is up.

Crooked River levels remain low with anglers experiencing good results here. Trout are running eight to 12 inches with the occasional larger fish. Midges are the primary pattern of interest here.

SW Washington- The Cowlitz River is the best early season bet for fair sized winter steelhead. The trout hatchery is putting out fair catches although success has been reported river-wide.

The Lewis, Kalama and Washougal Rivers are also steelhead favorites but catches are not expected to be great as witnessed in recent years. Fresh chinook remain an option on the Lewis but catches are slowing for the year.

Razor clam digs are scheduled throughout the week along SW coastal beaches. Check the WDF&W website for details.

Columbia River Fishing Report – The Columbia continues to be a dead zone with nothing much to look forward to. Crabbing remains a strong option still but with the extreme tide series this week, it's not the best option. The commercial fleet is to remain in port until the end of the month so this will give sport crabbers additional opportunity in the lower Columbia. We'll look at the tides in more detail in the forecast section.

Upriver, after a strong showing this fall, the John Day fishery is beginning to wane. The creel check verifies this:

John Day Pool (Columbia River above John Day Dam and John Day Arm):

Weekly checking showed one adipose fin-clipped steelhead kept, plus three unclipped steelhead released for two bank anglers; and four adipose fin-clipped steelhead kept, plus three unclipped steelhead released for 16 boats.

Sturgeon effort is next to non-existent, especially with the catch and release regulations in effect.

The Guide's Forecast – Sturgeon effort will remain subdued with the bulk of the focus in the Portland Harbor, where warmer water temperatures and better action is the likely scenario this time of year. The mainstem Columbia won't wake again until the spring. Besides, the stellar sea lions have rule the roost this time of year, especially at Bonneville.

Crabbers working the lower river still have a strong chance at taking limits of quality Dungeness crab but strong afternoon tides won't allow for a long soak before the evening tide starts to rip out and buoys get sucked under in the lower Columbia current. If you get out after them, be sure you pay CLOSE attention to the tide change because you won't have but an hour or less to pick your pots before your buoys disappear in the strong outgoing tide. You'll have to wait until low slack, which will take place after dark and as strong as the tide is, your pots are likely to migrate in the strong current. On that note, razor clam digging could be pretty good if the surf and precipitation cooperates (but good luck with that). Razor clam digging was very good early in the week by the way.

Steelheaders will have to be pretty motivated to target John Day Pool and John Day Arm steelhead this week. Success rates are dropping and should continue to do so as temperatures drop and fish migrate towards their spawning grounds.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reports, "A break in the weather this week gave the valley rivers a chance to drain and drop. The Willamette remains high and murky but the sturgeon will still readily feed, so opportunity awaits the willing, catch and release angler. Reports are still coming in of fair to good action from the lower Portland harbor and the Milwaukie area. Smelt, sand shrimp and herring are the favorite baits. There is little to no effort on the Columbia River with nothing to report."

Winter steelhead have been trickling over Willamette Falls with the YTD count still fewer than 200. These are all native fish bound for various upstream tributaries. The flow has started to moderate although the water temperature has held steady at 48 degrees for over a week and visibility has not changed - it's less than 12 inches.

McKenzie levels which were over bank-full on December 6th, have been dropping since that date.

The Santiam system will be too high to consider for fishing over the coming week.

While printing of the fishing regulation booklet was delayed this year, they should be available at sporting goods retailers and license agents by the coming weekend. For immediate regulatory gratification, click here: <http://tinyurl.com/cddk68l>.

Walling Pond and Walter Wirth Lake will be planted with hatchery trout for the last time this year and, yeah, there will be some big ones in the mix this week. The ODFW website indicates three-

pounders were planted on Monday, December 10th at Junction City Pond, Vernonia Pond and Waverly Lake and that Alton Baker Canal will receive 500 one-pound trout this week. Take the kids.

The Guide's Forecast – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) predicts, "Even though the Willamette River remains high and off color, steelhead can be caught at Meldrum bar. The first trick is to fish close to shore and out of the main current. Look for the seam that separates the faster flowing water with the slower broken current. This zone is usually close to shore, sometimes within five feet of the dry rocks. The depth may be between 2 and 12 feet deep, but usually less than eight, this is the path the steelhead will follow when the water is up in the willows. The next consideration should be visibility, give them an offering that stands out. Chartreuse is a highly visible color in murky, low light conditions but offering up some contrast is just as important. Chartreuse and flame red or orange makes for a great combination, as does darker colors like black, purple or blue. Also, luminous glow finishes are available that can be outstanding. The spin n glow or spinning cheater is a great choice because you have buoyancy, bright, contrasting colors and the next consideration, which is vibration or sound. The moving current gives the lure its spinning action which in turn creates an audible sound under water. When suspended sediments filter light and visibility, a steelhead may not be able to see more than 2 feet any which direction, so a lure that has sound or vibration is much easier to locate. Lastly, but not of least importance is "scent" or smell; give them something that has an attractive smell to it and use it liberally. This can be achieved by using some fresh or cured bait in conjunction with the vibrating lure, or by adding a gel, paste or oil scent to it. Seasoned anglers know that steelhead (and salmon) love shrimp of all sorts. Be it sand shrimp, prawns, coon shrimp or krill, they all find their way onto a steelheads dinner plate at some point. Anise is also a favorite and is very popular with steelhead and salmon anglers alike. Squid is an underutilized bait and industrious steelhead anglers should take note. Studies have shown that up to 90% of a steelhead's diet in the Pacific ocean is made up of squid. That translates into: the lowly cephalopod is no stranger to the sea going rainbow trout. Two or three tentacles, cured in pink Pro-Glow egg cure, impaled on a 3/0 Gamakatsu, dangled behind a whirling, size 10 "Willamette Special" spin n glow, lightly smeared with shrimp flavored Smelly Jelly seams so powerfully magnetic to a STEEL-head, it should be made illegal. Now, position the Holy Grail of offerings in a well-traveled seam, attach your bell and wait patiently."

While one would reasonably expect the high, roiled waters of the lower Willamette to be productive for catch-and-release sturgeon fishing (and it has been over the past week), results this week have been slow to fair with only small shakers to show for the effort. It's best to get out of the way of debris washing downstream & fish areas with lesser current.

Despite dropping water levels for a week since storms pushed water over the bank on the McKenzie, the flow remains nearly twice what it was in mid-November, too high to fish well. Perhaps next week if all goes well.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reports, "The Clackamas and Sandy both have winter steelhead and despite the high water conditions a handful have been caught. On the Clack, focus on the upper section of river between Rivermill Dam and Carver till the river falls to that perfect 12.5 ft level. Catches on the Sandy have come from both "low" and "high" on the river with decent reports from Lewis and Clark State Park and up at Dodge Park. Look to this week for an improvement in the water conditions and the catch for both rivers."

Reports this week from the Clackamas indicate good level and color although there is room for improvement. According to river forecasts, it should be dropping and clearing through Saturday.

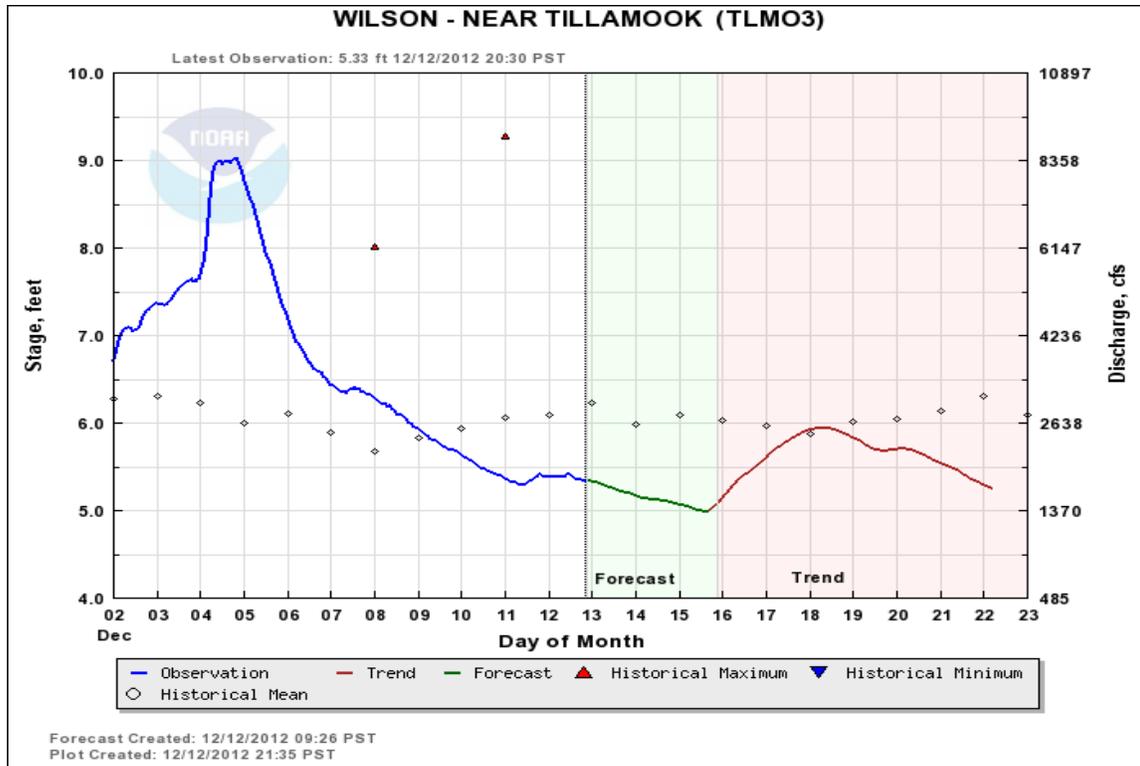
Between the Clack and the Sandy, the latter is a hands-down better bet for a steelhead encounter of the winter kind.

The Guide's Forecast – With freezing levels forecast to be below 4,000 ft. through Saturday, Sandy steelheaders should experience some decent water conditions. The long-range forecast is for freezing levels to drop to 2,000 feet or lower over the week to come. That sounds like winter steelheading weather.

The Clackamas is a decent level and flow and exhibiting good color as of mid-day on December 13th although catches have been slow. A few winters are being taken in the lower Clackamas with drift boats launching at McIver and floating to Barton Park hooking a few. Now that the hatchery is seeing winter steelhead returning, steelheaders are hitting Eagle Creek with mixed results.

North Coast Fishing Report – North coast anglers were pretty motivated mid-week with several trailers parked at the Sollie Smith Boat Ramp on Wednesday, likely in pursuit of both late fall chinook and early winter steelhead. Tis the season for opportunities for both.

It's clearly not a banner year for either but both are available and the Wilson is a top prospect for salmon and steelhead this time of year. Catches overall have been light but those putting in the effort are coming up with some results. The water conditions are ideal to try for both species and those familiar with the water when pursuing both species are coming up winners. Chinook have started to settle into traditional holding water with the flow finally dropping into familiar stages. Here is the updated hydrograph as of Wednesday night:



<http://www.nwrfc.noaa.gov/station/flowplot/hydroPlot.php?id=TLMO3&pe=HG>

The stage you see here is about ideal for both species (salmon and steelhead). It's the stage where anglers can predict with more certainty where fish are going to be. Chinook start to settle into traditional water such as deeper holes and along deep cut banks in depths of 5 to 8 feet while steelhead will hold in tail-outs and broken surfaced shallow runs, giving anglers versed in fishing a variety of water, a strong chance at finding fish with the right presentation.

Plugs become effective this time of year, particularly in the tail-out sections of most runs where you may still find both chinook and steelhead, especially in the early morning. As far as plugs go, the Tadpolly's seem to produce equally well for both chinook and steelhead this time of year. With the dropping flows, plugs become even more effective.

The Kilchis has also been producing some chinook and an occasional winter steelhead. Steelhead plants on this system have been dwindling in recent years so anglers shouldn't expect to intercept many of these fish on this system although confirmed catches have come from recent weeks.

Anglers seeking the best chance at early run winter steelhead will spend most of their time on the North Fork Nehalem, Necanicum or Three Rivers where early run fish are destined for their release sites and in the case of the hatchery systems (North Fork Nehalem and Three Rivers) fish will be recycled throughout the return period.

These systems, identified above, should be the top prospects on the north coast and anglers are not flocking in great numbers to these systems because fish are not coming back in the numbers that most would hope for. These remain the top prospects but only a few anglers were fishing in ideal conditions on Wednesday, indicating that catches were less than anglers had hoped for this time of year; a clear indicator that returns will mimic coho returns this season, which have been dismal to date.

The Trask and Nestucca also remain late season options, especially for chinook but as the weeks pass, so does the opportunity. Winter steelhead in the system are likely headed for tributaries such as Three Rivers and won't spend much time in the mainstem. The Trask only gets a rare stray hatchery steelhead but pressure is always lighter. The Trask offers a better chance at a winter run chinook over the Nestucca system.

Trollers working Tillamook Bay are still finding some late-run fresh chinook on the first part of the outgoing tide in the Ghost Hole and at Bay City. This appears to be the best prospect on the north coast this week with monster tides giving trollers one last hurrah for fresh chinook during the holiday season. Although anglers historically target the second half of incoming tide on the east side of the estuary, most recently, the first part of the outgoing tide has been most productive. It's best to focus your effort on the last 2 hours of incoming and the first 2 hours of outgoing in the Ghost Hole and at Bay City.

Sturgeon should also be an option on the outgoing tide, especially in the outgoing tide in the west channel and the middle channel of Tillamook Bay. Tides are ideal this week but low slack will happen after dark.

Crabbing remains challenging in most estuaries but Netarts is the best bet for Tillamook County but the lower Columbia will certainly be the top prospect if you maintain your wits about when buoys will be sucked under if you're not paying attention.

Clamming was great early in the week but likely dropped off when the surf conditions picked up and rain ensued. Clams don't show very well under these conditions.

The Guide's Forecast – Water levels are forecast to cooperate for both steelhead and salmon fishers. The strong tide series we're currently on should also bode well for fresh, incoming fish. The lower reaches of most north coast streams will be the best place for intercepting fresh fish, particularly just after high tide.

Chinook will be most available on these systems, in this order:

The Wilson River downstream of Sollie Smith Bridge,
The Kilchis River downstream of the Logger Bridge, and to a much lesser extent,
The Trask River, followed by the Nestucca River.

Steelhead chasers should remain focused on the Highway 30 systems, the Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem, Three Rivers, the Wilson, Nestucca and Kilchis Rivers. As we mentioned above, the Trask will have a rare hatchery stray. The Necanicum likely offers the best opportunity for bank anglers.

Sturgeon chasers on Tillamook Bay have some nice tides to work with although the best part of the tide falls after sunset. There is still ample tide to soak sand shrimp in the west channel in pursuit of keepers in the bay.

Tides are not conducive for effective bay crabbing but if you watch your gear closely, you will have a small window of opportunity close to high and low tides. Be very cognizant as to where you place your gear. Unfortunately, seas are predicted to be big, keeping recreational crabbers for taking advantage of likely ample numbers of quality keepers. The commercial season has again been delayed until the end of the month. Here is the offshore forecast from Thursday morning:

FRI

S WIND 5 TO 10 KT...VEERING TO NW WITH GUSTS TO 20 KT IN THE AFTERNOON. WIND WAVES 1 TO 3 FT. NW SWELL 10 FT AT 11 SECONDS. RAIN LIKELY IN THE MORNING...THEN CHANCE OF SHOWERS IN THE AFTERNOON.

FRI NIGHT

W WIND 5 TO 10 KT...BECOMING SW AFTER MIDNIGHT. WIND WAVES 1 FT. NW SWELL 7 FT AT 12 SECONDS. CHANCE OF RAIN.

SAT

S WIND 10 TO 15 KT...RISING TO 30 TO 35 KT IN THE AFTERNOON. GUSTS TO 40 KT. COMBINED SEAS 13 FT DOMINANT PERIOD 12 SECONDS. RAIN.

SAT NIGHT

S WIND 25 TO 30 KT WITH GUSTS TO 45 KT... BECOMING SW 20 TO 25 KT AFTER MIDNIGHT. COMBINED SEAS 15 FT DOMINANT PERIOD 14 SECONDS. SHOWERS.

SUN

S WIND 25 TO 30 KT. COMBINED SEAS 16 FT.

MON

SW WIND 20 TO 25 KT. WIND WAVES 8 FT. W SWELL 18 FT.

Razor clam diggers have some nice tides to work with through the weekend but it doesn't appear that the surf will cooperate as large, breaking surf will likely keep the razors from feeding near the surface.

Central & South Coast Reports – Charter boats got out of central Oregon ports on Monday this week to limit on rockfish and lingcod. While offshore bottom fishing can be excellent in wintertime, the same cannot be said for ocean conditions. Swells and winds this week are not predicted to be boater friendly.

When charter and recreational craft can cross into the ocean to fish, they are allowed seven rockfish and two lingcod 22 inches or better. Cabezon, off limits to boat anglers, may be kept by bank fishers or divers through December 21st. Starting January 1, 2013, cabezon may not be kept by anyone until July 1st.

The ODFW announced changes on December 10th to the halibut seasons for 2013:

Central Oregon Coast Subarea

The nearshore (inside 40 fathoms) fishery was changed from being open seven days per week to being open three days per week, Thursday through Saturday. After August 15, IPHC, NMFS, and ODFW can meet, and if harvest and effort have been slow, may open additional days each week.

A "trigger" was put in to change the allocation between the three Central Oregon Coast Subarea fisheries. If the entire Area 2A total allowable catch (TAC) is below 700,000 pounds, the quota for the Central Oregon Coast Subarea will be changed to 75% to the spring all-depth fishery and 25% to the nearshore fishery. If the 2A TAC is 700,000 pounds or above, the allocation will remain the same (63% to the spring all-depth, 25% to the summer all-depth, 12% to the nearshore). With a 2A TAC less than 700,000 pounds there is not enough quota for the summer all-depth fishery to be open for 2 full days, given recent years' trends in catch and effort.

South of Humbug Mountain Subarea

No changes for 2013

ODFW, CDFG, NMFS, and IPHC are working through the Council on how to manage this fishery in the future, there may need to be changes for 2014. We will be asking for public input on this in August of 2013.

Sports boats launching out of Newport over the past weekend took easy limits of ocean crab. With the delay in commercial efforts until late December, it's looking like a crabby Christmas (if ocean conditions allow).

Siuslaw steelheaders have been picking up a few winters this week. Lake Creek has been productive albeit crowded at times. It's still early in the run here. Hell, it's still early for winter steelhead everywhere in Oregon but we're still going to try.

While the coho troll fishery at Tenmile Lakes is slow this late in the season, Tenmile Creek will be getting winter steelhead. Be sure to check the regulations regarding the legal stretch to fish.

Speaking of wild coho, stocks have been improving which has allowed for selective recreational wild coho angling in various rivers and lakes around Oregon. Steps are being taken to improve it further, allowing sports fishing in additional locations and possibly to the point that commercial

harvest, outlawed since 1990, may once again be a viable possibility. See **Random Links**, below for more information regarding what's being done.

Winchester Bay has apparently yet to recover from the last round of storms as crabbing has been slow. As the salinity level rises, sea spiders will once again take up residence. Winter crabbing can be terrific when conditions are good. With the Umpqua mainstem water level forecast to be dropping over the coming weekend, winter steelhead will be available although the vast majority will be wild fish which must be released here. The curtain is falling on summer steelheading on the North Umpqua, There are better opportunities elsewhere at this time of year. While worthwhile South Umpqua winter steelheading is about six weeks away, this will be a promising river for hatchery fish when they arrive in fishable number.

Crabbing out of Charleston hardly skipped a beat from recent rain storms due to the immense water mass of Coos Bay. Recently, takes of large, hard Dungeness have been good. While fishing was slow over the past weekend, Coos and Millicoma rivers have produced some hatchery winter steelhead with more on the way as the season progresses.

As the Coquille recovers from weeks of high water condition, fresh winter steelhead will be available.

Plunkers have been picking up winter steelhead on the lower Rogue this week with opportunities improving as the water drops over the coming weekend. Flows at Grants Pass have been about 6,800 cfs this week and are not predicted to change much for the next few days. Water temperature is a bit cool at 45 degrees and dropping. On the upper Rogue, some steelhead are being taken despite higher than optimum water conditions. While fishing in the stretch from Shady Cove to Coles River has been the most productive as bait is allowed, it may be in angler's best interest to try above the Shady Cove Boat ramp as water conditions will be better although only lures and flies are allowed.

The Chetco River is a fishable level at this writing at mid-day Thursday, December 13th, and is forecast to be dropping for the next few days. Predictions indicate it will be on the rise again starting late Sunday and into the week to come.

While there are still late Chinook around that are chrome bright, most anglers on the Elk and Sixes Rivers will shift to winter steelhead. The latest reports indicate decent, stable conditions on the Elk with fair to good results while the Sixes has been slow. The trick is to catch one of the other of these volatile systems when the level and color is decent. With these small ocean tributaries changing quickly at the whim of the elements, there's only a narrow window of opportunity. Latest conditions at the Elk River may be obtained by calling 541-332-040.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Water conditions on the lower Deschutes are good with lower flow, decent clarity and just below the 50-degree mark near Maupin. Patience is required to hook steelhead but there are summers in the system. Dry midge, Blue-winged-olive and small caddis patterns are taking reddsides.

Crescent Lake is giving up large mackinaw to trollers. Winter fishing is often rewarding here but be prepared for chilly conditions even on sunny days.

Lake Billy Chinook, which boasts 300 sunny days per year, is producing fair to good numbers of bull trout on the troll but few of these are keepers of 24 inches or better. Don't bet on those sunny days being any too warm at this time of year.

Muskellunge in Oregon? A good idea, according to the ODFW, which would like to stock tiger muskies in Phillips Reservoir, located in northeast area of the state. Overrun with stunted yellow perch, if all goes as planned, these hybrid (sterile) predators will feed selectively on the Prolific Phillips spiny rays while leaving the rainbow trout population alone to recover and prosper. It will be interesting to see how this tale unfolds.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report for December 2012

North Puget Sound

(Island, King, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish and Whatcom counties)

Regional waters offer plenty of gifts for fishers — from river steelhead fishing to Puget Sound's crab and blackmouth salmon.

Marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands) and 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) are open for hatchery chinook **salmon** fishing in December. Anglers fishing those marine areas have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook salmon.

Traditionally, anglers find success fishing for blackmouth in the San Juans at this time of year, depending on weather conditions. Before heading out, anglers can check [creel reports](#) for information on catch and effort in Puget Sound. Recreational fishery samplers with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) collect the information each week at fishing access sites throughout Puget Sound.

Crabbing is open throughout December in some marine areas of Puget Sound, including marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu), 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 7, 8-1 (Deception Pass), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) and 9 (Admiralty Inlet).

In each area, crabbing is allowed seven days a week through Dec. 31.

The daily catch limit in Puget Sound is five Dungeness crab, males only, in hard-shell condition with a minimum carapace width of 6¼ inches. In addition, fishers may catch six red rock crab of either sex per day, provided those crab measure at least 5 inches across. Additional information is available on the [WDFW website](#).

All crab caught in the late-season fishery must be recorded on winter catch cards, which are valid until Dec. 31. Winter cards are available at fishing license vendors across the state. Catch reports are due to WDFW by Feb. 1, 2013. For more information on catch record cards, visit WDFW's [catch record card webpage](#).

For a change of pace, anglers in the region may want to venture out in the evening to jig for **squid**. Good spots include the Elliott Bay Pier in Seattle and the Edmonds Pier. Check the WDFW website for information on [squid](#) and [fishing piers](#).

In freshwater, several rivers are open for hatchery **steelhead** fishing — including the Skagit, Snohomish, Skykomish, Snoqualmie and Green (Duwamish) — although recent heavy rains have hampered activity, said Bob Leland, WDFW's steelhead program manager. "When the high waters recede, opportunities should be good as fish move upstream toward hatcheries," Leland said. "Fishing for hatchery steelhead picks up around mid-December, when we traditionally see the peak of the run.

Rainbow trout are another option for freshwater anglers, who might want to try casting for lunkers at Beaver Lake near Issaquah. About 2,000 hatchery rainbows — averaging 2 to 3 pounds each — were released into the lake in late October. Beaver Lake, which is one of several westside lowland lakes open to fishing year-round, is best fished by small boat, although anglers also can be successful fishing from shore.

Other good bets during December are Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish, where anglers can hook **perch**, **cutthroat** and **smallmouth bass**. Anglers targeting perch should fish near deep ledges, using nightcrawlers. For cutthroat or smallmouth bass, try trolling deep, 30-100 feet or more. Anglers may have to put in some time to hook a smallmouth, but they could catch a big fish.

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

(Clallam, Grays Harbor, Jefferson, Kitsap, Mason, Pierce, Thurston and Pacific counties)

The holiday season has arrived and with it comes opportunities to hook hatchery steelhead on several coastal streams, catch crab and salmon in Puget Sound and dig razor clams on ocean beaches.

Early in December, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) will proceed with an evening razor clam dig at several ocean beaches. Opening dates and evening low tides are:

- Dec. 11, Tuesday, 4:51 p.m., -1.1 ft., Twin Harbors
- Dec. 12, Wednesday, 5:40 p.m., -1.6 ft., Twin Harbors
- Dec. 13, Thursday, 6:29 p.m., -1.9 ft., Twin Harbors
- Dec. 14, Friday, 7:15 p.m., -1.8 ft., Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Dec. 15, Saturday, 8:01 p.m., -1.6 ft., Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Dec. 16, Sunday, 8:47 p.m., -1.0 ft., Twin Harbors, Mocrocks

Another digging opportunity is tentatively scheduled later in December. Tentative opening dates and evening low tides for that dig are:

- Dec. 28, Friday, 6:42 p.m., -0.3 ft., Twin Harbors
- Dec. 29, Saturday, 7:15 p.m., -0.3 ft., Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
- Dec. 30, Sunday, 7:47 p.m., -0.2 ft., Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Dec. 31, Monday, 8:20 p.m., 0.0., Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks

Clam diggers are reminded that they should take lights or lanterns for nighttime digs and check weather and surf forecasts before heading out. No digging will be allowed before noon on any of the razor-clam beaches. Harvesters are allowed to take no more than 15 razor clams and must keep the first 15 they dig, regardless of size or condition. Each digger's clams must be kept in a separate container.

All diggers age 15 or older must have an applicable 2012-13 fishing license to harvest razor clams on any beach. Licenses, ranging from a three-day razor clam license to an annual combination fishing license, are available on [WDFW's website](#) and from license vendors around the state.

Meanwhile, fishing for **hatchery steelhead** in the region is usually at its best in December. "Of course weather is always a big factor this time of year," said Kirt Hughes, regional fishery manager for WDFW. "As long as the weather cooperates and the rivers stay in shape, fishing should be pretty good throughout the month."

Anglers fishing the Quillayute and portions of the Bogachiel, Calawah, Hoh, and Sol Duc rivers have a daily limit of three hatchery steelhead. In the Grays Harbor area, anglers fishing the Chehalis, Humptulips, Satsop and Wynoochee have a daily limit of two hatchery steelhead.

Rather catch **salmon**? Anglers can find **late-run hatchery coho** salmon in some of the region's rivers, including the Chehalis and Satsop. For **winter chum** salmon, anglers might want to try fishing the Nisqually River. The late-chum run hits full stride mid- to late December and generally remains strong until at least mid-January, said Hughes.

Portions of Puget Sound also are open for salmon. In the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Marine Area 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca) reopens for salmon Dec. 1. Anglers fishing that area have a daily limit of two salmon, but must release wild chinook. Marine Area 5 (Sekiu) remains closed for salmon fishing.

Farther south, anglers fishing marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon Island) and 13 (South Puget Sound) can keep one chinook as part of a two-salmon daily limit. On Hood Canal (Marine Area 12), anglers have a daily limit of four salmon, but only two of those fish can be a chinook, and all wild chinook must be released.

"This time of year anglers fishing for blackmouth need to put some time in on the water," said John Long, statewide salmon manager for WDFW, who recommends fishing the waters around Point Defiance. "But it can be worth it for an opportunity to hook a nice-size fish."

Before heading out, anglers can check [creel reports](#) for information on catch and effort in Puget Sound on WDFW's website.

Crabbing also is open in some marine areas of Puget Sound, including in marine areas 4 (Neah Bay), 5 (Sekiu), 6 (eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca), 7 (San Juan Islands), 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island, and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner), 9 (Admiralty Inlet), 12 (Hood Canal), and 13 (South Puget

Sound).

In each area, crabbing is allowed seven days a week through Dec. 31.

The daily catch limit in Puget Sound is five Dungeness crab, males only, in hard-shell condition with a minimum carapace width of 6¼ inches. In addition, fishers may catch six red rock crab of either sex per day, provided those crab measure at least 5 inches across. Additional information is available on the [WDFW website](#).

All crab caught in the late-season fishery should be recorded on winter catch cards, which are valid until Dec. 31. Winter cards are available at license vendors across the state. Those catch reports are due to WDFW by Feb. 1, 2013. For more information on catch record cards, visit WDFW's [catch record card webpage](#).

Southwest Washington

(Clark, Cowlitz, Klickitat, Lewis, Skamania and Wahkiakum counties)

This year's **winter steelhead** season got off to a promising start just before Thanksgiving, when the first wave of fish started taking anglers' lures in several tributaries to the lower Columbia River. With decent river conditions, catch rates should continue to improve in the weeks ahead, said Joe Hymer, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

"Despite recent high water, that first jag of winter steelhead was definitely on the bite," Hymer said. "So long as the rivers don't rise too high or fall too low, we could be looking at a darn good fishery this year."

Before planning a steelheading trip, anglers should be aware that WDFW plans to stock 10,000 rainbow trout in Lacamas Lake this month, 5,000 in Battleground Lake and another 5,000 in Klineline Pond. At Scanewa Lake (Cowlitz Falls Reservoir), the daily limit for adipose-clipped rainbows is 10 fish through the last day in April.

In addition, the department has scheduled two multi-day razor clam digs at Long Beach and other razor clam beaches this month. For current information, check WDFW's [razor clam website](#).

But for those intent on catching steelhead, Hymer recommends the the Cowlitz, Lewis (including north and east fork), Kalama, Grays, Washougal, Elochoman rivers, along with Salmon Creek in Clark County. All have a two-fish daily limit, but anglers should check the [Fishing in Washington](#) rules pamphlet for additional rules specific to each river.

As with all steelhead fisheries in southwest Washington, only hatchery fish with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar may be retained. All wild steelhead must be released.

Hymer notes that water conditions – often highly variable at this time of year – can make a big difference when it comes to catching fish. "If the water is too low, the fish get spooky – if it's too high it can be dangerous to be out there," he said.

As basic preparation for a steelheading trip, Hymer recommends checking the [Northwest River Forecast](#) or other sources for river conditions before heading out. "Most anglers do best when water levels are rising or dropping," Hymer said. "It's a lot harder to catch steelhead in the peaks and troughs."

In deciding where to fish, it also helps to know how many smolts were planted in specific rivers and how many adult fish have returned to area hatcheries. In the first case, Hymer recommends checking WDFW's [smolt-planting schedule for 2011](#). WDFW also posts [hatchery returns](#) on a weekly basis.

While winter steelhead are the main attraction right now, **late-stock coho** will continue to bite through December. Most of those fish are too dark for consumption, but Hymer said some bright fish are still available. As he sees it, the best bet for coho is the Cowlitz River where over 9,000 fish returned through the middle of November. For **fall chinook**, the North Fork Lewis should continue to produce catchable fish through December. Any chinook, adipose fin clipped or not, may be retained on the Lewis.

Hymer flagged several new fishing regulations that take effect Dec. 1 on those and other rivers:

- **Grays River** – Opens to fishing for hatchery steelhead, hatchery coho and adipose and/or ventral fin clipped chinook from the Highway 4 Bridge to the South Fork. Also on Dec. 1, the open area on the West Fork also expands from the hatchery intake/footbridge to the mouth that day.
- **Green River, North Fork Toutle River, and the mainstem Toutle** from the mouth to the forks will all be closed to fishing for steelhead and salmon.

- **South Fork Toutle River** – Closes to fishing for steelhead from the 4100 Bridge upstream. Fishing remains open from the mouth to the bridge under selective gear rules.
- **North Fork Lewis River** – The night closure and anti-snagging rules are lifted from Johnson Creek to Colvin Creek. In addition, the area from Colvin Creek upstream to the overhead powerlines below Merwin Dam reopens for hatchery steelhead, chinook, and hatchery coho Dec. 16.
- **Cowlitz River from Mill Creek to the barrier dam** – Night closure and anti-snagging rules are lifted.
- **Mill and Blue creeks (tributaries to Cowlitz River)** – Mill Creek opens to fishing for hatchery steelhead under permanent rules. Blue Creek opened to fishing for hatchery steelhead and sea-run cutthroats from the mouth to the posted signs just above the rearing pond outlet in mid-November. Night fishing closures and anti-snagging rules are in effect on both streams.
- **Wind River** – Catch-and-release fishing closes for game fish above Shipherd Falls.
- **Klickitat River** – Closes to fishing for trout, hatchery steelhead and salmon, except for salmon fishing from the Fisher Hill Bridge downstream, which remains open through January. The night closure remains in effect. The whitefish-only fishery opens from 400 feet upstream from #5 fishway upstream to the Yakama Reservation. Whitefish gear rules will be in effect.
- **Merwin Reservoir** – Trout daily limit (including kokanee) goes back to five fish.
- **Swift Reservoir** – Closes to fishing.

Meanwhile, catch-and-release rules are in effect through December for sturgeon fishing in all waters below McNary Dam. Fishery managers from Washington and Oregon are scheduled to meet in mid-December to discuss retention rules for the pools above Bonneville Dam, but the outlook for retention fisheries below the dam is less certain.

Following declines in the white sturgeon population below Bonneville, both states are considering a proposal to keep catch-and-release rules in place in those and other waters as part of a broad-based effort to restructure fisheries in the lower Columbia River. Information about that effort and its implications for the sturgeon fishery is available on the [WDFW website](#).

Eastern Washington

(Asotin, Columbia, Ferry, Garfield, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens, Walla Walla and Whitman counties)

Rainbow trout are healthy, hungry, plentiful and waiting to be caught during the winter-only fishing season that opens Dec. 1 at four lakes in the region.

That's the report from Randy Osborne, fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, who recently sampled the catch at Hog Canyon Lake and Fourth of July Lake near Sprague.

"Anglers can expect to catch rainbows at Hog Canyon ranging from nine to 21 inches," Osborne said. "The average size of fish we caught Nov. 26 was 16.4 inches. All the fish look great and are in top condition."

At Fourth of July Lake, the rainbows sampled Nov. 27 ranged from 12 to 23-inch rainbows, with an average size of 17.8 inches, Osborne said.

"With rain in the forecast and temperatures reaching to the mid 40s, it looks like anglers will have open water conditions for the opener," said Osborne, noting that neither lake had any ice at the time of the sampling effort.

The daily limit on both Hog Canyon Lake and Fourth of July Lake is five trout, but only two fish catch over 14 inches may be retained. Both lakes offer shoreline and boat access, but boaters should be aware that internal combustion motors are prohibited on Fourth of July Lake.

"Also, with the colder water temperatures at this time of year, boaters should make sure that everyone on board wears a life jacket," Osborne said.

WDFW northeast district fish biologist Bill Baker of Colville also recently sampled Hatch and Williams lakes in Stevens County, which also open Dec. 1.

“Anglers at Hatch Lake can expect to catch 12 to 17-inch rainbow trout that are healthy and fat,” Baker said. “The average size of fish we caught Nov. 26 was 14.5 inches. At Williams Lake you can expect to catch rainbows from 13 to 17 inches, also in good condition. Our test fishing averaged catches of 15.5 inch trout. Catch rates on the opener should be high because these fish are actively feeding.”

The daily trout limit at both Hatch and Williams lakes is five fish. Once that daily limit is caught, fishing is catch-and-release.

Baker found no ice on either lake, and forecasts in the northeast district are also relatively mild for opening day. The season should start, with open water, so both shoreline and boat anglers will do well.

“The usual bait, like nightcrawlers, Powerbait, and marshmallows, or lures like Mepps or Roostertails, or flies like Bionic or San Juan worms, should all be good producers,” Baker said.

Three year-round trout lakes also look promising: Rock Lake in Whitman County, Sprague Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line, and Lake Roosevelt.

WDFW enforcement officer Doug King said recent catches at Rock Lake are showing more rainbows and fewer **brown trout** in recent weeks. Boat fishing tends to be most productive, but King said anglers have also been catching fish from the shore at the roadside access site.

WDFW Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area manager Juli Anderson reports trout fishing also has been good at Z-Lake, located off Telford Road on the wildlife area in Lincoln County.

But Snake River **steelhead** action was slow as of late November. WDFW fish biologist Joe Bumgarner said the best catch rates recently recorded in the mainstem river were in the section between Little Goose and Lower Granite dams, where steelheaders averaged almost 15 hours per fish. The Grand Ronde River creel in Washington last showed close to 14 hours per steelhead caught.

Northcentral Washington

(Adams, Chelan, Douglas, Grant and Okanogan counties)

Three lakes in Okanogan County – Rat Lake near Brewster and Big and Little Green lakes near Omak – open for “catch and keep” trout fishing Dec. 1, switching from catch-and-release rules to a five-trout daily limit.

WDFW Okanogan district fish biologist Bob Jateff of Twisp says these fisheries provide good angling throughout the winter months, either open water as they mostly are now, or iced-over later in the month or season.

“Expect **rainbow trout** in the 10 to 12 inch range,” Jateff said. “Catches are made on all kinds of bait, lures, and flies.”

Fish Lake and Roses Lake in Chelan County usually provide good fishing during December and throughout the winter. WDFW Chelan district fish biologist Travis Maitland of Wenatchee said **yellow perch** and rainbow trout are the main winter targets at both lakes, which are open year-round.

Meanwhile, **steelhead fishing** on the upper Columbia River will close one hour after sunset on Dec. 1 from Wells Dam to the Highway 173 bridge at Brewster and on the Wenatchee, Icicle, Entiat, and Methow rivers.

Several whitefish fisheries scheduled to open that day will also close an hour after sunset Dec. 1, including those on the Wenatchee and Entiat rivers, as well as on the Methow River downstream from the confluence with the Chewuch River in Winthrop.

Jeff Korth, Regional Fish Manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), said the closures are necessary to keep impacts on wild steelhead within limits established under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).

He notes, however, that the closures will not affect steelhead or whitefish seasons on the mainstem Columbia River from Rock Island Dam to Wells Dam, or from the Highway 173 Bridge in Brewster to 400 feet below Chief Joseph Dam. Those fisheries, plus steelhead and whitefish seasons on the Okanogan and Similkameen rivers, will remain open until further notice under previously published rules.

“This year’s run is smaller than in recent years and contains a relatively high proportion of wild steelhead,” Korth said. “Those factors, combined with steady angler effort, increased the rate of encounters with natural-origin fish in some fishing areas this year.”

For more information see the [fishing rule change](#) notice on the WDFW website.

Southcentral Washington

(Benton, Franklin, Kittitas and Yakima counties)

Catch rates for **hatchery steelhead** have picked up in the Hanford Reach, but are still running a little slower than normal. Paul Hoffarth, a district fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), said fishing should remain productive through March as steelhead mill around waiting for the spring spawn.

The question, though, is whether anglers will brave the elements to catch those fish as they move upriver. “Angler participation definitely drops off as we head into the winter months,” Hoffarth said. “The fish are still out there, but fishing tends to get spotty – good one day, bad the next.”

As with all area steelhead fisheries, only hatchery fish with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar may be retained. All wild steelhead must be released.

The Yakima River Basin is closed to steelhead fishing, but the **whitefish** season opens Dec. 1 on both the Yakima and Naches rivers. As in years past, the catch limit is 15 fish per day, but anglers are required to use a single-point hook, measuring no more than 3/16 inch from point to shank (hook size 14).

Anglers fishing the Yakima River from Easton Lake to Keechelus Dam can catch **eastern brook trout** under selective gear rules. No size or daily limits are in effect for eastern brook trout, but fishing is strictly catch-and-release for all other species of trout.

In other waters, WDFW will stock **half-pound rainbows** in the North Elton Pond near Selah, which opens to fishing Dec. 1 with a two-fish daily limit. In addition, the department recently planted excess rainbow trout brood stock weighing 5-10 pounds apiece in North FioRito and Mattoon Lakes near Ellensburg.

Additional waters may be stocked with the large rainbow trout brood stock in the next few weeks, depending on availability. Watch for further word on [weekly fish plants](#) on WDFW’s website.

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Random Links

Improving wild coho populations in Oregon:

http://theworldlink.com/news/local/what-came-first-the-coho/article_29ed3b81-6aed-5ac1-8471-df2aeb038dc7.html

Steelhead Fly tying videos - Over 70 Patterns:

<http://oregonflyfishingblog.com/fly-tying-videos/fly-tying-videos-oregon-steelhead-patterns/>

Ridiculously cool toy: <http://www.wimp.com/boatramp/>

GOOD LUCK!