

The Guide's Forecast - volume 15 issue number 1

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 28<sup>th</sup> – January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2013**

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** Anglers are reminded that a new 2013 license and tag are required after January 1<sup>st</sup>. Licenses are available both online and in most sporting goods stores.

Rain has kept the local rivers up, yet fishable. The Clackamas and Sandy have both put out decent numbers of steelhead this past week although pressure has been light. The upper sections of both rivers have produced best. Expect effort to increase after the New Year and the catch rates will likely coincide as we approach peak timing.

Eagle creek also kicked out a few fish, although anglers shouldn't expect anything "banner" from this little stream as plants are a small fraction of what they used to be.

The Willamette River remains on the high side and turbidity is limiting, but steelhead can still be caught in the less than ideal conditions at Meldrum Bar and the Black-Top at the mouth of the Clackamas. The season's first spring chinook could be caught here or at Sellwood in the next four weeks. Effort has dropped recently, but sturgeon are still being caught and released in the Portland Harbor and Milwaukie area. Few to no anglers are fishing the Columbia River.

McKenzie River levels have been dropping steadily for over a week but remains too high to fish well.

The Santiam system is forecast to drop and clear although numbers of steelhead in the river are fairly low.

**Northwest –** Inclement weather and a sub-par early season bite didn't stimulate hoards of anglers over the weekend and early this week but interest is still visible on most north coast streams that harbor early returning hatchery fish. The North Fork Nehalem, often the harbinger of north coast streams, is producing fair results with lots of activity on Christmas morning.

Other good options over Christmas break include Three Rivers, the Necanicum, Wilson, Kilchis and Trask Rivers in that order. Anglers may start to see some spawned out steelhead as high flows have enabled fish to reach smaller tributaries for spawning.

Remaining North Coast rivers and estuaries will close to the taking of chinook salmon beginning January 1<sup>st</sup>. Cutthroat trout are also abundant in many streams this time of year and are often intercepted while steelhead fishing. They too must be released until late May.

Tides are favorable for sturgeon anglers on Tillamook Bay. The season so far has been fair but remains in question for 2013 as managers decide consumptive opportunity for the future. The middle and west channels should produce some action if the weather permits.

A predicted east wind may calm ocean conditions by the weekend but commercial crabbing gear may be deployed as early as December 29<sup>th</sup> so the lower Columbia and offshore opportunity will wane quickly. Bottomfishing should be excellent if weather permits.

A taming swell may produce good razor clam digging for Clatsop area diggers but the most productive part of the tide will be after sunset.

**Southwest-** Stormy offshore conditions have prevented charter and recreational craft from enjoying the excellent bottom fishing available this time of year. The long-range forecast shows a rough ocean all week.

This week is the best for whale-watching along the Oregon coast, This can be an impressive sight and an enjoyable fishing-alternative activity for the family.

Umpqua water levels are high and rising. The mainstem is unlikely to recover sufficiently to fish this week.

The Coos and Coquille Rivers were blown on Tuesday this week but will be dropping into the coming weekend.

As the Rogue drops back into shape late this week, the upper river will fish first and should fish well. The hatchery recycled over 2,000 steelhead in this stretch on Christmas Eve. As the lower river becomes fishable, fresh winters will be available. Fresh winters have entered the Applegate River which opens for steelheading January 1.

Steelhead numbers have been decent on the Chetco with catch results mirroring water conditions. Unfortunately, the river is rising early this week but it should be fishable by the coming weekend if NOAA forecasts remain accurate. Plunkers using Spin-N-Glos will be the first to hook up as the water drops.

Rain in southwest Oregon has the Elk River too high to fish earlier this week while the Sixes was running muddy. Cured roe has been taking winters on the Elk recently.

Diamond Lake opens to year-around fishing on January 1, 2013. It will be an ice-fishing scene if the ice is safe to access.

**Eastern –** Dedicated trollers have continued to fish Green Peter for kokanee but the water level this week is too low to launch.

Lake Billy Chinook has been fishing well for bull trout. Be prepared for chilly weather and probable snow.

**SW Washington-** With early returns on most systems clearly depressed, the Cowlitz will remain the best option until later returning wild and broodstock fish return later in January through March. The Cowlitz has remained high for much of the winter season so large baits and scented lures will produce the best results.

Several regulation changes occur on January 1<sup>st</sup> so check local listings before heading out.

District razor clam diggers have options this week:

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

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – Another quiet week for mainstem anglers with just fair steelhead fishing in the John Day Pool and Arm (see more info below regulations in the forecast section) and next to no sturgeon action in the high, roily waters of the Columbia. It will remain this way for quite some time. On deck is spring chinook, which isn't looking too promising. A break-down of the 2012 adult return results and the 2013 outlook for Columbia/Willamette and tributary fisheries:

**2012 ADULT RETURNS AND 2013 EXPECTATIONS  
COLUMBIA RIVER  
PRELIMINARY DRAFT – DECEMBER 12, 2012**

<b>ADULT RETURNS EXPECTATIONS</b>	<b>RESULTS</b>	<b>2013</b>
WILLAMETTE SPRING CHINOOK	83,400 PREDICTED RETURN TO CR (21% WILD) 65,100 ACTUAL RETURN TO CR (~18% WILD) 42,600 AGE-4; FAIR JACK RETURN (2,078) 59,600 ACTUAL RETURN TO WILLAMETTE R 37,200 COUNT AT FALLS 5,800 ACTUAL RETURN TO CLACKAMAS 3,000 CLACKAMAS HATCHERY RETURN	59,800 PREDICTED (~2,100 JACKS) ~30,600 AGE-4 (24K HATCHERY) ~26,700 AGE-5 (21K HATCHERY) ~21% WILD ~47,300 HATCHERY RUN ~7,300 CLACKAMAS RETURN
COWLITZ RIVER	8,700 PREDICTED ADULT RETURN VS 9,200 ACTUAL	5,500 PREDICTED
KALAMA RIVER	700 PREDICTED ADULT RETURN VS 600 ACTUAL	700 PREDICTED
LEWIS RIVER	2,700 PREDICTED ADULT RETURN VS 1,800 ACTUAL	1,600 PREDICTED
UPRIVER SPRING CHINOOK	314,200 PREDICTED ADULT RETURN 203,100 ACTUAL RETURN (65% OF FORECAST) 10,200 JACKS (LOWEST SINCE 2006)	141,400 PREDICTED
UPPER COLUMBIA SUMMER CHINOOK	91,200 PREDICTED ADULT RETURN 58,300 ACTUAL RETURN (64% OF FORECAST) 9,600 JACKS	73,500 PREDICTED MARK RATE LIKELY ~60%
SOCKEYE	462,000 PREDICTED RETURN	180,500 PREDICTED INCLUDING

UPRIVER SUMMER STEELHEAD	515,700 COUNTED AT BONNEVILLE 470 SOCKEYE COUNTED AT LWG 380,300 PREDICTED RETURN AT BONNEVILLE DAM 230,800 COUNTED AT BONNEVILLE BELOW 10-YEAR AVERAGE	1,250 SNAKE R.  TBD
BRIGHT FALL CHINOOK	466,500 PREDICTED ADULT RETURN ACTUAL RETURNS LESS THAN PREDICTED JACKS HIGHEST SINCE '85 & '86	IMPROVED COMPARED TO 2012
TULE FALL CHINOOK	188,400 PREDICTED ADULT RETURN ACTUAL RETURNS LESS THAN PREDICTED	SIMILAR OR LESS THAN 2012
COHO	240,800 PREDICTED ADULT RETURN ACTUAL RETURNS LESS THAN PREDICTED	IMPROVED OVER 2012
SHAD	~2.3 MILLION RUN VS.10-YR AVERAGE OF 3.1 MILLION 2012 INCREASED AFTER 6 YEARS OF DECLINE	POSSIBLE REBUILDING TREND
SMELT	APPARENTLY GOOD. LARVAL SAMPLING RESULTS 2ND BEST IN PAST 8 YEARS	ABUNDANCE INDICATORS MIXED
WHITE STURGEON	LEGAL ESTIMATE 72,700 (VS 80,500 IN 2011)	LEGAL ESTIMATE 74,300

**The Guide's Forecast** – With not a lot to look forward to in the coming weeks, fishing is mostly off the table right now. Some sturgeon may be available and 2013 regulations are currently under permanent rule so it is open to retention but only 1 keeper may be retained per year. Here are the current regulations for the Columbia River mainstem for sturgeon:

**Recreational sturgeon fisheries on the lower Columbia River will begin under permanent regulations for 2013 except the annual bag limit in 2013 will be one white sturgeon total in all zones statewide. Modifications to the 2013 sturgeon fishery will be considered at the January 30 Compact/Joint State Hearing.**

**BUOY 10 UPSTREAM TO THE OREGON/WASHINGTON BORDER:**

The retention of sturgeon is prohibited seven days per week through the remainder of 2012. Catch and release of sturgeon may continue during sturgeon retention closures.

**BUOY 10 UPSTREAM TO WAUNA POWERLINES:**

**Effective Jan. 1, 2013**, regulations for sturgeon from Wauna Powerlines (River Mile 40) downstream to Buoy 10, including Youngs Bay include the following:

- ◆ Retention of white sturgeon allowed seven days per week until further notice with a daily bag limit of one white sturgeon between 38 and 54-inches fork length and an annual Oregon limit of one legal white sturgeon total for all zones statewide.
- ◆ Retention of green sturgeon is prohibited.
- ◆ Catch and release of sturgeon may continue during retention closures.

**WAUNA POWERLINES UPSTREAM TO BONNEVILLE DAM:**

**Effective Jan. 1, 2013**, regulations for sturgeon from Wauna Powerlines (River Mile 40) upstream to Bonneville Dam, including Oregon tributaries upstream to the mainline railroad bridges, except Willamette River downstream of Willamette Falls (including Multnomah Channel and Gilbert River) include the following:

- ◆ Retention of white sturgeon allowed three days per week on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday until further notice with a daily bag limit of one white sturgeon between 38 and 54-inches fork length and an annual Oregon limit of one legal white sturgeon total for all zones statewide.
- ◆ Retention of green sturgeon is prohibited.
- ◆ Catch and release of sturgeon may continue during sturgeon retention closures.
- ◆ Until further notice, retention of sturgeon prohibited in the Willamette River downstream of Willamette Falls to the mouth including Multnomah Channel and Gilbert River. See Willamette Zone for more information regarding the Willamette River.

**BONNEVILLE DAM UPSTREAM TO THE DALLES DAM:**

**Effective Jan. 1, 2013, regulations for sturgeon in** this section of the Columbia River will include the following:

- ◆ Retention of white sturgeon allowed seven days per week through Sunday Feb. 10, 2013 or until a winter harvest guideline of approximately 1,150 legal white sturgeon has been met. The daily bag limit is one sturgeon between 38-54 inches fork length. The annual bag limit for Oregon in 2013 is one legal white sturgeon total for all zones statewide.

**THE DALLES DAM UPSTREAM TO THE JOHN DAY DAM:**

**Effective Jan. 1, 2013, regulations for sturgeon in** this section of the Columbia River will include the following:

- ◆ Retention of white sturgeon allowed seven days per week until the catch guideline has been met. The daily bag limit is one sturgeon between 43-54 inches fork length. The annual bag limit for Oregon in 2013 is one legal white sturgeon total for all zones statewide.

**JOHN DAY DAM UPSTREAM TO MCNARY DAM:**

**Effective Jan. 1, 2013, regulations for sturgeon in** this section of the Columbia River will include the following:

- ◆ Retention of white sturgeon allowed seven days per week until the catch guideline has been met. The daily bag limit is one sturgeon between 43-54 inches fork length. The annual bag limit for Oregon in 2013 is one legal white sturgeon total for all zones statewide.

**MCNARY DAM UPSTREAM TO THE OREGON/WASHINGTON BORDER:**

**Effective Jan. 1, 2013, regulations for sturgeon in** this section of the Columbia River will include the following:

- ◆ Retention of white sturgeon prohibited through Jan. 31, 2013.
- ◆ Retention of white sturgeon allowed seven days per week Feb. 1, 2013 through July 31, 2013. The daily bag limit is one sturgeon between 43-54 inches fork length. The annual bag limit for Oregon in 2013 is one legal white sturgeon total for all zones statewide.

Catch and release of sturgeon may continue during sturgeon retention closures.

Steelhead anglers in the John Day Pool still posted fair results however with 4 boats tallying 4 hatchery steelhead and 5 wild ones for release. The fish are starting to degrade but this still remains a viable fishery through the winter months. Trollers will take the bulk of the fish as winter weather often impedes anglers on the mainstem John Day, as in ice flows.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** reports, "Rain has kept the local rivers up, yet fishable. The Clackamas and Sandy have both put out decent numbers of steelhead this past week although pressure has been light. The upper sections of both rivers have produced best. Expect effort to increase after the New Year and the catch rate will likely coincide as we approach peak timing. Eagle Creek also kicked out a few fish, although anglers shouldn't expect anything "banner" from this little stream as plants are a small fraction of what they used to be. The Willamette River remains on the high side and turbidity is limiting, but steelhead can still be caught in the less than ideal conditions at Meldrum Bar and the Black-Top at the mouth of the Clackamas. The season's first spring Chinook could be caught here or at Sellwood in the next four weeks. Effort has dropped recently, but sturgeon are still being caught and released in the Portland harbor and Milwaukie area. Few to no anglers are fishing the Columbia River and there is nothing to report."

North Santiam flows will be dropping but will remain too high for decent fishing conditions. While the South Santiam is forecast to be dropping into the New Year, there are a not lot of steelhead in the system.

**The Guide's Forecast – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** predicts, "Stable water conditions have been and should remain the norm for the coming week. The valley has had just enough rain to keep things interesting, yet not enough to blow the Sandy and Clackamas out. Steelhead have been reported in decent numbers from both the Clackamas and Sandy Rivers. A small handful have been taken at Meldrum Bar on the Willamette despite high and off colored water. All the valley rivers have been receiving light pressure but that will likely increase as we put the holidays behind us.

"In last week's edition, we discussed steelhead fishing options for the bank fisherperson. This week I will go over the basic techniques that boat anglers employ, keeping in mind that many tactics that work for the boat fisher, will work for the bank angler alike. As mentioned in last week's edition, sometimes boaters can simply drop the anchor and use the same "tricks" that shore fishermen use. In doing so, one important consideration is that you don't impede others who are using other popular methods such as side-drifting (aka free-drifting, boon-dogging or dragging) or plugging. One quick way to make enemies on a river is to drop the hook in the middle of a popular sidedrifting haunt on a busy day. Common courtesy should prevail and if you come upon a drift being utilized by drifters in motion, it's best to do as one does in Rome or move along to the next un-occupied drift. Same goes for boaters who come upon bank anglers, if they were there first, give the "bankies" the right of way.

"So as not to re-hash the same methods mentioned in last week's column, I'll just mention the two methods used by boaters, that are not typically available to bank bound fishermen.

"First let's go over back-trolling. This method that has been around since the sixties has accounted for bunches and bunches of boated steelies. The basic premise is to hold the boat, either by oar power or motor power, into the current and slowly back the bait or lures straight down into the steelhead's holding water. With bait, a diver like a Hot N Tot or Jet diver is used to get your offering down to fish-eye level and when referring to "lures", a diving plug such as a Flatfish or Hot Shot can be employed by itself to will wiggle and hunt the bottom. The two can be used alone or together if multiple rods are being fished from the boat. Three anglers in a boat will often fish two plugs and one diver/ bait set-up, giving fish a couple of options. It's important to consider that a steelhead will often try to swallow a sand shrimp or gob of roe, so when fishing during times when the "nates" are present, the diver and bait method is NOT kosher as it will deeply and often mortally hook fish that have to be released. The diver and bait method should only be used early in the winter when hatchery steelhead are prevalent and few natives are present. Back-trolling is an easy method to master and is very popular with novice and expert steelhead anglers alike.

"Second is Side-drifting, but that title alone doesn't always ring a bell with all NW anglers. Others call it free-drifting, dragging or boondoggling or even boondogging. No matter what you call it, it's all basically the same minus a couple very minor variations. The idea is to glide small baits off to the side of the boat, maintaining a natural drift that is near the bottom. Since sidedrifting has taken hold here in steelhead country, experienced drifters are frequently having double digit days, only showing how deadly this technique can be. Steelhead respond very well to a "natural" drift, or a presentation that is delivered at a free, un-inhibited drifting speed. Side-drifting takes more practice to master than other methods but after a handful of attempts and some sound training and advice, the novice angler will be on his/her way to some success. The devil is in the details and the details will make you or break you. Sinker size, line size, baits size and boat speed are all very important factors to consider. Consistency in your tackle and gear is paramount and if two guys in the boat are fishing 10lb test and a third is fishing 12, you're going to find out in a hurry that it pays to have a set of "like" rods, all rigged exactly the same way. Whole books have been written on the subject of side-drifting and it would be difficult to put all the important details into a 600 word fishing report, but this is the main jest of it.

"As noted earlier, the tactics listed in last week's edition will often work for the boat angler as well. Master a couple of those, employ the boat fishing methods mentioned here to your arsenal and you will be well on your way to being a successful steelheader.

Good Luck!"

There may be a few late, colorful summers in the Santiams but too few winters have crossed Willamette Falls to create any kind of a fishery here even if flows drop to fishable levels.

**North Coast Fishing Report** – North coast rivers are uncharacteristically stable, even with the upcoming dry weather pattern. Most systems are expected to remain level with possible slow declines in river heights through the weekend.

Reports throughout the north coast are similar with anglers reporting only fair success for winter steelhead this week. The only difference from previous weeks is that some dark steelhead should start to show as the season seemed to start early this year. Smaller tributaries on these streams have been high enough for steelhead to access and begin their spawning cycle.

Fresh steelhead should still be available on many north coast rivers but we will begin a slow transition time while anglers await later returning wild and broodstock winter steelhead.

We will update your river by river forecast in the next section.

Few anglers are still pursuing winter chinook mostly due to the fact the run has been less than expected. Winter chinook will remain an option on the Wilson and Kilchis Rivers also Tillamook Bay for herring trollers. The Wilson will likely remain the best option as it receives the largest return of late running salmon. The Trask will also be an option but few people will intercept them over there mostly due to the fact that steelhead pressure is low on this system.

Despite the good tides few people were pursuing chinook the bay mostly due to hazardous travel conditions and inclement weather. In recent days, the tides have been right for good sturgeon fishing but again with the weather being the way it is, not many anglers have been motivated.

Despite having favorable tides, crabbers have not been participating in this fishery. With all the additional freshwater inundating estuary from recent rain freshets, it's another reason to focus your efforts on other winter activities. The lower Columbia River offers the best chances for limits of crab but most people chose to enjoy the holidays indoors and justifiably so when the weather sucks.

Razor clam diggers had some favorable tides to work with this week. The forecasted swell later this week may provide better opportunities in the later part of this week for those willing to dig after the sun sets.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Anglers will have an array of streams to choose from in pursuit of the last remaining winter steelhead returning to north coast systems. Each of the below listed systems offer different options for steelheaders but they will all produce consistently, the same results. Anglers will find a smattering of both fresh steelhead and near-spawn, if not spawned out steelhead in the system.

Tillamook Bay trollers still have a late season advantage but the extreme tide series and the fact that river levels remain elevated may not produce the results one wants. Herring will remain the obvious choice targeting the Ghost Hole and the Bay City piling during high tide and the first part of outgoing tide.

Those wishing to take on end of season sturgeon should target keepers in the west channel or the middle channel of Tillamook Bay. Sand shrimp is the obvious choice targeting the latter half of outgoing tide but by the weekend that will happen well after sunset.

Serious clam diggers should take advantage of tides sooner rather than later as a predicted southeast wind may blow quelling the swell, prompting clams to be near the surface where diggers have better access to them.

Crabbing will be less than ideal this week with the extreme tide series. Crabbers may want to take advantage of the small window of opportunity that exists around the tide changes. These optimum opportunities will not last long and crabbers need to make sure they have all their gear aboard before the tide turns and starts to run out.

The offshore weather forecast does not look favorable despite the fact the southeast wind often tames a strong westerly swell which is in the forecast. If the ocean becomes a surprise option, the nearshore crabbing should be good with crabs in a high quality state. The commercial fleet

will begin their harvest on January 1 but are allowed to drop their gear three days prior to the opener.

Bottom fishing and whale watching should be great options if the ocean calms but don't count on that happening as this is typically the roughest time of the year.

For steelheaders, here is the river-by-river break-down on the north coast:

Highway 30 streams (Klaskanine, Big Creek, Gnat Creek)- These systems should be fading but fresh steelhead should still be available with no one system out-producing the other. There should still be some fresh fish come in with this upcoming tide series but the bulk of the returns are likely already near the hatchery. The upper reaches, near the liberation sites, will produce the best.

Necanicum River- Along with the North Fork Nehalem, a top option on the north coast and with dropping flows, should provide some good opportunity for bank anglers. Boaters will likely already have some drifting issues by the weekend but those willing to bump through the tail-outs and dodge sweeper logs in the lower flows should be rewarded. Both bankies and boaters should find a mix of fresh fish and some spawned out ones too. Bait will produce the best but boaters should also have some fair luck using plugs on this smaller system. Fresh fish won't be available much longer.

North Fork Nehalem – Still getting some fresh fish, like many north coast streams, the peak is over here and fish will be spawning in the coming weeks. The bulk of the effort and catch will take place near the hatchery. Bait will be key here, both shrimp tails and small clusters of bait. Use bigger baits in the higher flows. Fish are being recycled on a fairly regular basis, including into the nearby lakes (Coffenbury and Lake Lytle). Surplus steelhead were stocked into Coffenbury Lake (~40) and Lake Lytle (~60) on Wednesday, December 26<sup>th</sup>.

Mainstem Nehalem – Still not an option; remains high and off-color. Wild fish should start showing with more regularity in late January.

Kilchis River-In ideal shape now, it will drop and clear by the weekend. Chinook remains an option here until January 1<sup>st</sup> but along with steelhead, action will be fair at best. As flows drop, concentrate your efforts in the lower reaches the most. Plugs will become an effective tool by the weekend.

Wilson River – This system will remain the best option on the north coast for fresh run steelhead, including an occasional surprise early returning broodstock fish. These are quality fish now and through March. Definitely the best (and last) opportunity for late season chinook. Even bright hens will likely cut pale so anglers should consider releasing these late-season fish. Bucks should remain in high quality however. Many of the chinook are destined for the Little North Fork of the Wilson River so if you're targeting them, fish below Mills Bridge.

Bait should produce best for both steelhead and salmon in these higher flows but plugs should become effective early next week as fish settle into traditional holding water. It will be cold out there but anglers may be rewarded with fair to good results.

Trask River – Not many anglers look to the Trask this time of year but anglers can intercept a few hatchery steelhead over here, both Alsea stock fish as well as quality broodstock fish. A few late-season chinook are also available but anglers targeting both species should stick to the water below the hatchery. The bulk of the steelhead will return to this system after mid-January with most of those being wild fish.

Three Rivers/Nestucca system – Three Rivers will be the primary target for most anglers as these early returning fish are typically destined for the hatchery there. Anglers fishing the mainstem should spend most of their time near the mouth of Three Rivers.

Mainstem steelheaders will start to reap higher rewards towards February. There should be a rare late chinook available but serious salmon fishers would look to the Wilson over the Nestucca this time of year. Salmon fishing closes on January 1<sup>st</sup>.

### **Central & South Coast Reports**

Offshore conditions have been variable (but mostly unfriendly) and forecasts have been largely unreliable. It's always a challenge to get an opportunity to access the ocean off the Oregon coast in mid-winter but bottom-fishing is generally great. All depths will remain open until April of 2013.

Tenmile Lakes remain open for wild coho fishing through December 31st and according to the ODFW, trollers are still catching a few. We can only think that, at this time of year, if silvers are being taken they are well past their prime. A few winter steelhead have been caught in lower Tenmile Creek but the run here is just starting. Starting January 1st, the bag limit for winter steelhead goes to three per day. Eel Creek opens to steelheading on the first day of 2013.

The Siletz will be dropping and clearing into the coming week. It's a good time of year to fish it and it traditionally produces some larger winter steelhead.

Despite recent rain, Yaquina Bay crabbing has been fair to good. Reports from dock and boat are of catches short of limits but numbers well worth the trip. Dungeness are running large, full and hard.

Long-range forecasts indicate the Siuslaw may dip into fishable levels over the first couple of days of the New Year. If do, it will still be a high optimum but there are fish in the river.

Almost no effort is taking place for crab in Winchester Bay. Boats have been trying for sturgeon although in 2013, only one fish may be kept from any Oregon waters for the year. The water is high on the mainstem Umpqua although is forecast to be dropping through Monday next week. Summers are mostly into the tributaries on the North Umpqua and winter steelheading won't get underway here until late January or February next year. There are a few hatchery winters in the South Umpqua although fishing won't really get underway until January with best results in February and March.

While few are trying for Dungeness in Coos Bay, boaters dropping nets or traps in deep water are taking fair to good numbers of crab. Coos River levels remained high at mid-week but the West Fork Millicoma was dropping into shape and a few steelhead had been caught. As conditions continue to improve this week, catches will follow. Starting Tuesday, January 1st, the bag limit on the Coos system will increase to three hatchery steelhead per day. Plunking will be the first option, followed by pulling plugs as water conditions improve.

The Coquille has been running high and muddy but is forecast to drop and clear later this week and should be productive. Three fin-clipped winter steelhead may also be kept on the Coquille starting on the first day of 2013.

The Rogue River is a premier destination for steelheaders and winters have been entering for several weeks. It's getting to that time of year when fishing should be getting really worthwhile.

Unfortunately, water conditions have been challenging much of the time this season. This week, however, with drier weather in the forecast, the lower Rogue is dropping into shape and is expected to fish through New Year's Eve. On the middle Rogue, while the level is dropping it has been muddy and will have to do some serious clearing to fish over the long holiday weekend. Summers are still available in the upper Rogue and bait may be used from the Shady Cove Boat Ramp to Coles River Hatchery but only flies and artificial lures are allowed from Shady Cove downriver the old Gold Ray Dam site. This stretch of the river is predicted to be in good condition for fishing over the next several days.

Waters of the Chetco are dropping and clearing. Fresh winter steelhead are in the system and plunkers are pursuing them with Spin 'n' Glos.

The Elk River was rising and off-color at mid-week but with a break in the weather forecast for the next several days, it should clear and produce fresh winter steelhead. Opportunities on the Sixes have been brief but productive. There may be a few bright Chinook lingering in these rivers but the smart money says to target winter steelhead.

Diamond Lake has been open historically a portion of the year but starting on Tuesday, January 1, 2013, it will open for year-around fishing. Many anglers are hoping to make an ice-fishing foray on the opener but this will depend on the thickness and safety of the ice. The lake is completely frozen and without an update since last week, we will wait and see right along with everyone else.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – Trollers using whole or plug-cut herring are having fair to good success with bull trout at Lake Billy Chinook, often in some challenging weather conditions.

### **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 Kline 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**

A timely collection of winter steelheading wisdom at ifish.net:

<http://www.ifish.net/board/showthread.php?p=4392386#post4392386>

Good knot that's fast to tie:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=mks9W1oYt0I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=mks9W1oYt0I)

**GOOD LUCK!**