

The Guide's Forecast - volume 15 issue number 6

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **February 1st – February 7th, 2013**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro- Precipitation and the rising freezing level has brought the valley rivers to just above prime. With this rise comes the hope of more fresh steelhead entering the system. The Willamette remains at a good fishable level and rumors of a couple of spring chinook have surfaced from Meldrum bar. More impressive is the confirmed wild spring chinook caught and released at Sellwood last week. Expect conditions to hold up through the week, barring any unforeseen rainstorms. Catch and release sturgeon fishing in the harbor remains good and should continue to hold up through April. A limited catch and keep fishery on the Willamette and lower Columbia is likely to be set at today's compact meeting.

The Bonneville Pool continues to put out fair sturgeon fishing with a keeper for every 7 boat rods last week. Bank anglers continue to struggle however.

While levels continued to rise early this week, waters of the McKenzie will be dropping with dry weather but will still be high over the coming weekend. Winter trout fishing can be good when conditions are right.

The Santiams are high but will be dropping through the week. With fewer than 750 winter steelhead counted at Willamette Falls, the only catches reported recently were of spawned-out summers.

The Clackamas is running above optimum level, but anglers can find some fishable water in the four miles below Rivermill dam. Expect the river to slowly drop and get back to prime by the weekend, then steelhead fishing will resume. February, March and April are the top months for Clackamas winter steelhead.

Before the rise in water level, the Sandy River was giving up respectable numbers of fresh winter steelhead. Expect a quick rise and fall mid-week and fishing will be back on by Friday or Saturday. Fish have been spread throughout the system, but the stretch from Dodge Park to Dabney has been producing best.

Northwest – The much needed weather change brought better steelheading for north coast anglers with the Wilson and Nestucca producing the best results. Although there were a fair number of down-running steelhead in the catches, some fresh, quality broodstock fish also appeared in the catches.

If the river forecast remains accurate, most north coast systems should see another shot of fish under good water conditions through the weekend. We're still a few weeks away from more consistent catch rates however, at least for quality steelhead.

The North Fork Nehalem reported working up around 200 fish on Monday so even the smaller streams remain an option.

Steelhead will remain the top prospect on the north coast but sturgeon fishing should remain a fair option into April. Tides are fair through the weekend and the weather should be too. Unfortunately, Friday may be the only day for an offshore opportunity but ocean conditions change very frequently.

Southwest- When ocean conditions cooperate, excellent bottom fishing awaits winter anglers who may take up to seven rockfish and two lingcod 22 inches or better. Check regulations for other species, especially cabezon.

Fresh water flowing into Winchester Bay is likely to slow crabbing in all but the lower estuary. The mainstem Umpqua shot from 7,000 cfs to over 29,000 cfs late last week but is currently recovering. Hatchery steelhead fishing will improve in February on the South Umpqua.

Crabbing has been quite productive for those launching out of Charleston to fish Coos Bay. Dungeness are running large hard, and full of meat. Coos River steelheaders are once again taking fish now that water conditions are on the mend.

As lower Rogue water levels rose over the past weekend, plunkers caught good numbers of winter steelhead. Flows are predicted to be moderating over the coming weekend with fresh winters in the system from the last freshet. Anglers running plugs from anchored boats have been doing best this week with the water level falling. Flows at Grants Pass, moderately impacted by rainfall, will be dropping this week. There is a mix of spawned-out summers and fresh winters available. Only dark steelhead are in the upper Rogue with few trying for these older fish.

As anticipated, precipitation over the past week improved water temperatures and flows and along with it, catches of fresh, bright winter steelhead on the Chetco. The river was dropping on Tuesday this week and with marginal conditions forecast for the coming weekend.

Eastern – The Metolius has delivered some beautiful fish recently to anglers who can fool those crafty rainbows. Try stonefly imitations.

Crooked River flows are low again this week, offering reason for optimism to fly fishers.

SW Washington- For steelhead, the Cowlitz River remains the best option, and fishing is fair at best on this system. More fish should enter the system in late winter.

Other nearby tributaries such as the Kalama and Lewis remain slow but the Washougal has some spent hatchery fish in it. These fish are less than ideal for table fare.

Sturgeon fishing has slowed in the Kalama area and likely won't pick up for several months.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Fishing on the mainstem remains predictably stagnant, even with good news a few weeks ago of some sturgeon caught in the Columbia around Kalama. Temperatures have warmed but fish remain mostly in the Willamette River where temperatures are only slightly higher than the mainstem.

The one exception is the Bonneville Pool where fish and wildlife checkers tallied some fair results over the weekend. The check showed one sublegal sturgeon released for 17 bank anglers; and seven legal white sturgeon kept, plus 49 sublegal sturgeon released for 10 boats (47 anglers). That's almost a fish for every 7 boat rods. This type of catch rate isn't uncommon for this time of year and the Bonneville Pool is often the most productive in the winter time. The John Day Pool tallied just one keeper for 16 boats.

The bigger news is that the compact come to consensus on season setting for the 2013 spring chinook and sturgeon seasons. That was decided on Wednesday and here are the results:

NEWS RELEASE

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Jan. 30, 2013

States set spring chinook, sturgeon seasons for Columbia and Willamette rivers

Willamette sturgeon retention season announced for July

PORTLAND, Ore. – Fishery managers from Oregon and Washington set spring chinook salmon and sturgeon fishing seasons for the Columbia and Willamette rivers today during a joint state hearing.

The Columbia River spring chinook seasons are based on a forecast of 141,400 returning upriver spring chinook. This compares to a 2012 actual upriver return of 203,100 and leaves a harvest guideline of 5,010 upriver fish in the sport fishery downstream of Bonneville Dam. The spring chinook season for the lower Columbia opened Jan. 1 under permanent rules. The season adopted today will take effect March 1 and is expected to extend the fishery through April 5.

On the Willamette, the spring chinook forecast is 59,800. This is below last year's actual return of 65,100 but is still enough to allow for a full chinook retention season as described under permanent regulations.

The Columbia and Willamette sturgeon seasons set today are based on a reduced total guideline of 7,796 harvestable fish for recreational fisheries in 2013. This reflects a 15 percent conservation buffer adopted in response to recent declines in the abundance of legal-sized fish.

Oregon fishery managers also announced the sturgeon retention season for the Willamette River will occur in July with the intent of maximizing the number of fishing days.

In addition to the seasons set today, anglers are reminded of two new rules for 2013. There is now a one sturgeon annual bag limit in Oregon for all zones statewide. Under this bag limit, anglers may record just one sturgeon on their 2013 Oregon Combined Angling tag, whether caught on the Columbia River, Willamette River or elsewhere in the state.

Also new for 2013 is a barbless hook requirement when fishing for salmon, steelhead or trout on the Columbia and Willamette (below the falls) rivers and selected tributaries.

The following is a summary of recreational fishing seasons adopted at today's meeting.

CHINOOK SALMON

Columbia River from Buoy 10 to Bonneville Dam

Prior to March 1, permanent rules, as outlined in the 2013 Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations, remain in effect.

From March 1 through April 5, boat fishing will be allowed seven days per week from Buoy 10 upstream to Beacon Rock. Bank fishing will be allowed during the same timeframe from Buoy 10 upstream to Bonneville Dam. This fishery will be managed to the available guideline of 5,010 upriver spring chinook and may be shortened or extended depending on catch and effort. The recreational fishery will be closed on March 26 and April 2 (Tuesdays) to allow for potential commercial fisheries.

The daily bag limit will be two adipose fin-clipped adult salmon or steelhead in combination, of which no more than one may be a chinook. The rules also allow retention of up to five adipose fin-clipped jack salmon per day.

Columbia River from Bonneville Dam to the Oregon/Washington border

Effective March 16, this area will be open to retention of adipose fin-clipped chinook through May 5. This fishery will be managed to the available guideline of 670 upriver spring chinook and may be shortened or extended depending on catch and effort.

The daily bag limit is two adipose fin-clipped adult salmon or steelhead in combination, and up to five adipose fin-clipped jack salmon per day.

Fishing for salmon and steelhead from a boat between Bonneville Dam and the Tower Island power lines, approximately six miles downstream from The Dalles Dam, is prohibited. Bank fishing is allowed throughout this area.

Select Areas

Permanent fishing regulations for recreational harvest in Oregon waters within the Youngs Bay and Blind Slough/Knappa Slough are listed in the 2013 Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations.

Effective March 1 through June 15, on days when the lower mainstem is open to recreational chinook harvest, the daily salmonid bag limit will be the same as mainstem Columbia bag limits. On days the mainstem Columbia is closed to chinook retention, the permanent bag limits for select areas will apply.

Willamette River

The Willamette River remains open to retention of adipose fin-clipped adult chinook salmon and adipose fin-clipped steelhead seven days a week.

The bag limit on the Willamette below Willamette Falls is two adipose fin-clipped chinook. Above the falls, one additional adipose fin-clipped steelhead may be retained under regulations for the combined salmon/steelhead bag limit.

STURGEON

Columbia River from Buoy 10 to Wauna power lines (River Mile 40)

Retention of white sturgeon is allowed seven days a week Jan. 1 – April 30 with a daily bag limit of one fish with a fork length of 38 to 54 inches. This area is closed to retention of white sturgeon May 1-May 10. The season reopens seven days a week from May 11 through June 30, with a daily bag limit of one fish with a fork length of 41 to 54 inches.

This fishery will be managed to the available guideline of 4,042 fish and may be shortened or extended, depending on catch and effort.

Columbia River from Wauna power lines upstream to Bonneville Dam (including all adjacent Washington tributaries)

Retention of white sturgeon is allowed three days a week on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays Jan. 1 – June 15 and Oct. 19 – Dec. 31. This fishery will be managed to a harvest guideline of 2,021 fish and may be shortened or extended, depending on catch and effort. Angling for sturgeon is prohibited from the upstream end of Skamania Island at River Marker #82 upstream to Bonneville Dam May 1 – Aug. 31.

The daily bag limit is one white sturgeon with a fork length of 38 to 54 inches.

Sand Island Slough remains closed to angling Jan. 1 through Apr. 30. The Sandy River is closed to sturgeon retention.

Columbia River from Bonneville Dam to The Dalles Dam

The white sturgeon retention season in Bonneville Pool will consist of winter and summer periods. The winter retention period will take place from Jan. 1 through Feb. 10, and the summer season is expected to begin in June.

The total harvest guideline for both seasons combined is 1,100 fish. The harvest guideline was reduced from an earlier-announced 2,000 fish quota at a Jan. 22 meeting of the Sturgeon Management Task Force.

Columbia River from The Dalles Dam to John Day Dam

This area is open to retention of white sturgeon seven days a week under permanent rules from Jan. 1 until the annual harvest guideline of 300 fish is met. The legal size limit for retention in this area is 43-54 inches fork length.

Columbia River from John Day Dam to McNary Dam

This area is open to retention of white sturgeon seven days a week under permanent rules from Jan. 1 until the annual harvest guideline of 500 fish is met. The legal size limit for retention in this area is 43-54 inches fork length.

Willamette River downstream of Willamette Falls including the Multnomah Channel and Gilbert River

Oregon fishery managers announced a retention season with a harvest guideline of 1,733. The proposed season would be Thursday through Saturday, July 11-13 and Thursday through Saturday, July 18-20. Staff will review catch rates after each retention period and may adjust seasons, if necessary, to stay within allowable harvest.

On the Willamette, angling for sturgeon is prohibited from the I-205 Bridge upstream to Willamette Falls May 1 – Aug. 31.

STEELHEAD/SHAD

Effective March 1 – May 15, 2013 the mainstem Columbia River will be open for retention of shad and adipose fin-clipped steelhead ONLY during days and in areas open for retention of adipose fin-clipped spring chinook. Beginning May 16 permanent rules resume as listed in the 2013 Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations.

The Guide's Forecast – No need to waste your time on any species, from fish to crab, on this system this week. There are salmon in the system as evidenced by limited catches in the Willamette mainstem but it will be like finding a needle in a haystack. These early run fish clearly prefer small herring under these cold conditions but green labels will be hard to come by.

Beach plunkers may take a rare steelhead downstream of the mouth of the Willamette. Colored water may limit success but anglers fishing close to the riverbank have the best chance to intercept.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reports, "Precipitation and the rising freezing level has brought the valley rivers to just above prime. With this rise comes the hope of more fresh steelhead entering the system. The Willamette remains at a good fishable level and rumors of a couple of spring

Chinook have surfaced from Meldrum bar. More impressive is the confirmed wild spring Chinook caught and released at Sellwood last week. Expect conditions to hold up and for good water conditions through the week, barring any unforeseen rainstorms. Catch and release sturgeon fishing in the harbor remains good and should continue to hold up through April."

Winter trout anglers have been taking advantage of rainbows on the middle Willamette over the past few weeks whenever water conditions have been conducive. Nymphs and egg patterns have been producing some very nice rainbows. The Middle Fork is closed above Hills Creek Reservoir.

Water levels at the McKenzie are dropping but remain too high to fish well at this writing on the last day of January.

The Santiam system took quite a hit from rain storms earlier this week but has been recovering with levels coming down rapidly since Tuesday, January 29th. Plans remain in place to make the boat ramp on the Santiam at I-5 but repeated setbacks have delayed this project. A decision regarding a permit modification will determine whether or not work will resume this summer.

Walter Wirth Lake is scheduled to be planted with trout this week. E. E. Wilson Pond opens on Friday, February 1st and has been stocked with approximately 1,200 brook trout ranging from half-pound up to two-pounds, 1,200 one-pound rainbow trout and 500 legal-size rainbows over the past several weeks in anticipation of the opener.

Rod builders and those who would like to be, mark your calendars. The Custom Rod Makers Seminar hosted by Lamiglas will take place in Woodland, WA, on April 5th and 6th. Details to follow when available.

Many were sorry to hear in October that Rainbows End Tackle in Vancouver, WA, was closing. This week, we learn that John Williams, the well-respected owner of the shop and a man who touched and positively influenced many of us, has passed away. We wish his family and friends well at this difficult time.

The Guide's Forecast – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) predicts, "Persistent rain and a high freezing level will keep the Willamette valley rivers up and rolling through the weekend. The Willamette river remains very fishable for bank anglers at Meldrum bar and sporadic catches of winter steelhead have been the norm. Also, rumors of a couple springers being brought to the bank have circulated but have been difficult to confirm. Backtrollers had been catching a few steelhead on K-11X Kwifish and 3.5 Maglips, but with the rising water level and the additional sediment load, expect action to fall off till it begins to recede and clear again. Down at Sellwood, we now have a confirmed spring Chinook, caught and released by the more than reputable "Sultan of Sellwood". The lucky angler who did the actual catching was Bob Ross of Portland, he was accompanied by fellow anglers John Laing and John Shmilenko (the Sultan), who captained the vessel and managed the net. This was most likely the first Willamette springer of the season to come to hand, but the lower Columbia river has already given up a couple. As would be expected the wild springer was taken on a naked green label herring. From here on out, more rumors of early spring Chinook will surface from Oregon City, Meldrum bar, Sellwood and of course the lower Columbia, but half will be just that, "rumors" and the other half will be flesh and blood springers. Water conditions dictate everything and the next dry period will give up a couple more and by the end of February, a half dozen or so will be confirmed with some of being weighed in at Fisherman's Marine and Outdoor in Oregon City. Finding quality green/blue label herring has so far eluded most anglers, so when the truck comes in, stock up. Catch and release sturgeon fishing further down river in the harbor remains good and there's plenty of room, even on weekends. Anchoring in the deeper holes is producing best, looking for depths of

40-80 ft. Smelt, squid, sandshrimp and earthworms are all good baits and combinations of said baits are always a hot ticket. Expect this fishery to hold up well through the spring."

Now that spring Chinook have made their presence known in the lower Willamette, the ODFW announced on January 29th that hazing of California sea lions will commence on February 4th. For the third year, non-lethal fireworks will be discharged from the falls to the I-205 Bridge in an effort to determine if doing so will reduce mortality of springers. Most of us who have fished the area have witnessed these pinniped predators with a salmon or steelhead in their mouth, only to rear back their head, point the fish skyward tail-up and gulp it down whole. It is an amazing, if disturbing, sight. Efforts to reduce predation will continue through April 30th.

Flows of the McKenzie River may come into shape as soon as the coming weekend. When this does occur, fly anglers targeting winter trout should hookup with nymphs and egg patterns.

With Willamette Falls counts yet to hit the 800 mark, there's not much reason to anticipate decent catch-and-release steelheading on the North Santiam for a while although there are a few around.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reports, "The Clackamas is running above optimum level, but anglers can find some fishable water in the four miles below Rivermill dam. Expect the river to slowly drop and get back to prime by the weekend, then steelhead fishing will resume. February, March and April are the top months for Clackamas winter steelhead so let the games begin.

"Before the rise in water level, the Sandy river was giving up respectable numbers of fresh winter steelhead. Expect a quick rise and fall mid-week and fishing will be back on by Friday or Saturday. Fish have been spread throughout the system, but the stretch from Dodge park to Dabney has been producing best."

The Guide's Forecast – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) predicts, "For many anglers, the Clackamas river produced well before the rains hit. Healthy numbers of steelhead running larger than average size are abundant this season, indicating a good escapement of three salt fish and healthy ocean conditions. Until the river drops a foot or two, focus all efforts on the river between River Mill dam and Eagle creek as this section fares better during high water. When the Clackamas drops back down to between 13.5 and 12 feet on the gauge at Estacada, the river below Eagle creek begins to fish well again.

The Sandy river had a few glory days last week right as the temperature started to warm up. Some anglers reported double digit days, hooking and landing a 50/50 mix of wild and hatchery steelhead. Fish here have been a few pounds larger than average as well and this is beginning to be a theme coast wide. But as would be expected, the rains filled the creeks, the river proper began to rise and swell again, turning off the bite. Bobber fishermen had been scoring well, using jigs, yarn and beads prior to the high water. Although not as popular the last few years, a few pluggers scored well during the low clear flows. When the river starts to drop again, the catch should pick up again."

North Coast Fishing Report – After a prolonged period of dry weather, the first rain freshet in a while brought a welcome change to water conditions on the north coast. Some of the best action began last weekend when water temperatures began to creep up and water levels did too. There were a few days during the week when most folks were still working and unaware of the prime conditions that anglers posted double-digit opportunities.

Once flows began to stabilize, so did the catches with some guides pretty pleased with half-a-dozen opportunities for steelhead. The Wilson remained the most popular although the Nestucca is starting to draw more interest as well. Most recently, the upper reaches have been accessible but savvy anglers stuck to the lower reaches for the best catches. Sweeping tail-outs have been holding fish, especially in the higher flows.

Most recently, the Wilson fished well on Tuesday but tapered on Wednesday with the slight rise in river levels. The unstable weather is about to get more consistent, making the weekend look pretty good for anglers ready to deploy the side-drifting technique. One 21-pound wild fish was reported on Tuesday; thankfully, that went into the broodstock tank.

Be sure to view the forecast section of this newsletter, we'll give much more detail on the week ahead!

Smaller streams are now in good shape but may almost drop too low by the weekend. The Necanicum, North Fork Nehalem and Three Rivers all have fish but most of them are spent since they are early season systems. The North Fork Nehalem hatchery reported working up around 200 fish earlier this week but also reported slow fishing at mid-week despite good water conditions.

With the broodstock options coming on line, most anglers stayed away from the Trask River although this system should start to come on strong in the coming weeks.

The Nehalem also saw limited interest as the wild run starts to get underway.

Cold, wet weather kept open boat anglers under cover. In other words, sturgeon and bottomfishing effort was low and justifiably so.

The Guide's Forecast – Although still a few weeks away from what I'd call a top prospect, the north coast will start to see more wild and broodstock fish come back their respective rivers this weekend and the week ahead. It's just time for a stronger showing after the expected lull from early to late season steelhead. Here is the river-by-river break-down of our north coast systems:

Highway 30 streams (Klaskanine, Big Creek, Gnat Creek)- Spent early run steelhead here, fresh fish will be an anomaly. There should be a fair number of willing biters however as these fish clearly bite better on the down-run than they do on their upstream migration (unfortunately).

Necanicum River- Same as the Highway 30 streams. A strong showing of spent fish with an occasional fresh wild one and maybe even a fresh hatchery fish. It's common to come across a bright hen that will be spent and have a lighter orange grade of flesh. There's still a possibility of downed trees but my sources say that it's pretty clear for the drifting. Bait will rule the day here with Friday likely the best day to fish. It will be getting pretty low by Sunday so plan on dragging the boat by then if you float. Bankies will rule the day after the weekend and should do fair over the weekend as well.

North Fork Nehalem – Effort will remain strongest at the hatchery and there are still fish coming in. The bulk of the fish however have come and gone but it may still be worth the effort, especially on Thursday and Friday. Again, bait will rule the day here.

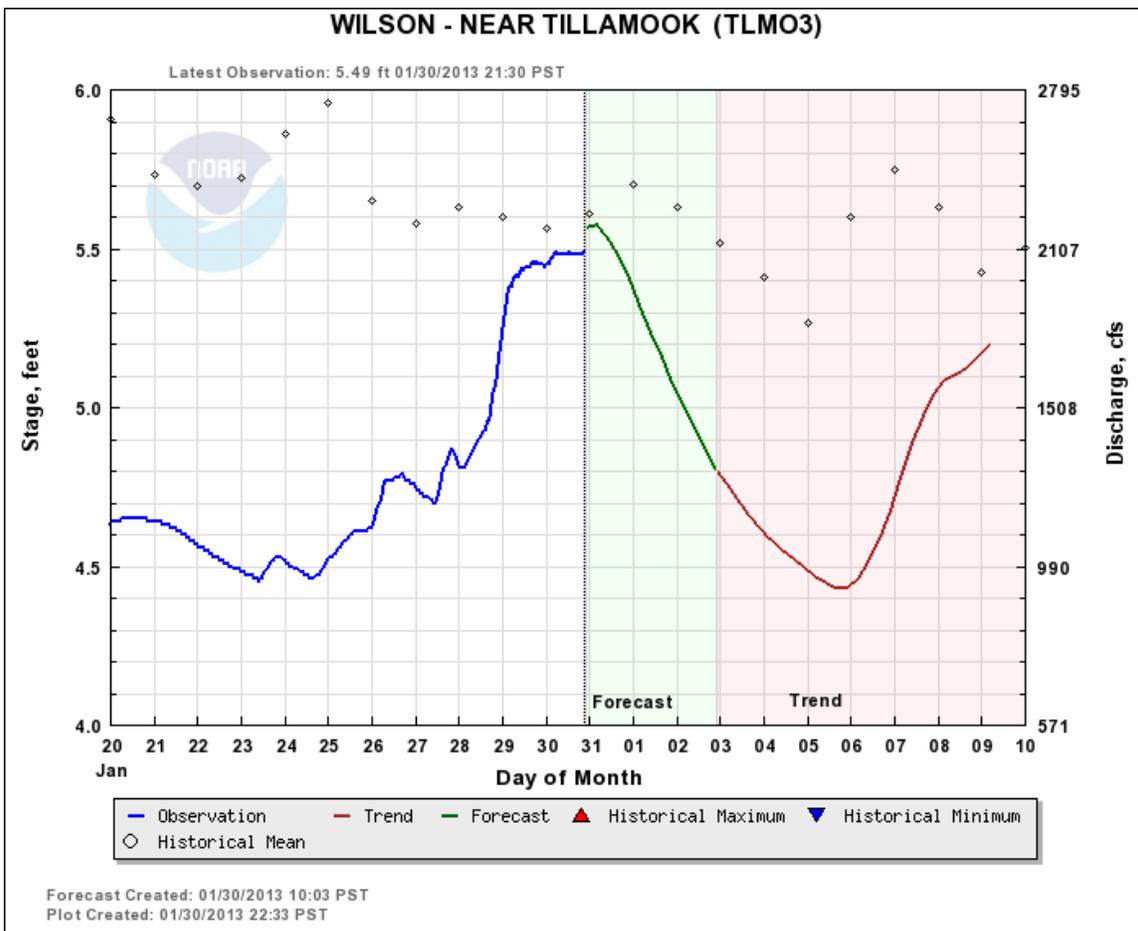
Mainstem Nehalem – Off the table once again with the recent rain freshets. It fishes better in late February and March anyway.

Kilchis River- Definitely high on Wednesday but it will drop rapidly, especially with the drier weather. This system should fish well by Friday and over the weekend but don't expect any hatchery fish. Hatchery fish that you do intercept there will very likely be spent. This should start to see a fair native run beginning anytime now however. Again, bait but plugs may become effective by Sunday and Monday.

Wilson River – It'll be crowded this weekend and justifiably. The broodstock fish are beginning to show although weekend anglers will likely get the left-overs from a more likely producer such as Friday. The upper reaches were in good shape, although just a bit high, on Wednesday. Thursday and Friday should produce well. From here on out, the bulk of the fish will be either broodstock fish or wild ones but it seems lately that broodstock fish are dominating the catches. We'll know after the weekend if the broodstock fish are going to make a strong showing this spring.

Side-drifted bait will produce the best results and maybe plugs by Sunday and early next week. There are some bruisers working the river right now so plan your gear accordingly. As the flows drop, so should the size of your offerings. The upper reaches will produce through the weekend but as the weekend approaches, targeting the lower reaches will get you the best catches. Boaters would even be wise to start working the water below Sollie Smith Bridge.

Here's the hydrograph model for the Wilson River this week, plan your outing accordingly, things should start to get interesting even before the weekend:



Trask River – Definitely some wild fish around, this system will buck the north coast trend and see far fewer anglers than the other systems. The upper reach (Stone's camp) should produce catches prior to the weekend but after the weekend, look to the Cedar Creek to Highway 101 Bridge for output. Bait.....do you see a theme here? Maybe plugs after the weekend.

Three Rivers/Nestucca system - Well, let's just get Three Rivers out of the way. It's a poor option unless your hunting spawned-out fish. This system really just receives the early run fish and that run is over.

The Nestucca on the other hand should begin the "All hands on deck" call. The wild and maybe more so, broodstock run should begin on this system. There has certainly already been fish caught and water conditions dictate an all-out assault from head to toe. The upper reaches (from 6th Bridge to 1st Bridge) will be good bets Friday and Saturday and the lower reaches after that (1st Bridge to Cloverdale). This should be the week where we see the systems first significant catches of broodstock fish. The good news: it will only get better from here.

Sturgeon tides are favorable though the weekend and into next week. Action on Tillamook Bay should be good throughout the outgoing tide. The weather sure looks to be nice to fish on the bay over the weekend. Too bad the crabbing won't be very good.

And here's a thought, if the bar is open on Friday and Saturday, why not go offshore in pursuit of hungry sea bass and lingcod? Check out this forecast, especially for Friday:

FRI

NE WIND 5 TO 10 KT. WIND WAVES 1 FT. W SWELL 7 FT AT 18 SECONDS.

FRI NIGHT

E WIND 5 TO 10 KT. GUSTS TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 7 FT AT 20 SECONDS.

SAT

SE WIND 5 TO 10 KT...RISING TO 10 TO 15 KT IN THE AFTERNOON. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 10 FT. PATCHY FOG.

SAT NIGHT

SW WIND 5 TO 10 KT WITH GUSTS TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 12 FT.

SUN

S WIND 10 TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 11 FT.

MON

S WIND 15 TO 20 KT. WIND WAVES 4 FT. W SWELL 8 FT.

Although bottomfishing is likely to be better in the spring, this is a rare opportunity for sure. Don't expect great crabbing but you should be able to get some keepers if you have quality bait.

Central & South Coast Reports – The 2013 halibut quota has been set at 990,000 pounds for the west coast (area 2A0, down only a little from 2012). A meeting will be held February 4th at the Holiday Inn at Newport where public input will contribute to the decision regarding this year's all-depth fishing schedule.

Ocean conditions are likely to keep boats at bay over the weekend to come.

A reminder to saltwater anglers that no cabezon may be retained. While this restriction has pertained to boat anglers in the past, allowing bank fishers to keep them, it is now closed to all and will remain so until the 1st of July.

While spring Chinook fishing is underway in the Willamette Valley, south coast springer activity doesn't generally get started until March, most notably on the Umpqua and Rogue rivers.

Expect to find the Siletz River at optimum level and flow for winter steelheading with the water level dropping over the next several days. Use caution when boating this or any river and wear a PFD. Another boat went down at Moonshine on Wednesday this week.

Crabbing in Yaquina Bay has been poor this week with several reports of no keepers whatsoever.

Water conditions are improving on the Siuslaw with visibility about a foot. Winter steelhead are in the system, but weekend pressure can be fairly heavy.

Steelheading is expected to improve on Tenmile and Eel creek following rainfall earlier this week. The peak of steelhead season on Tenmile occurs in February.

With the recent freshet, Crabbing has slowed at Winchester Bay although a few Dungeness are being taken at Half Moon Bay. Jetty fishing has been worthwhile but sand shrimp have been in short supply. Steelheaders on the mainstem Umpqua have been enjoying fair to good results for winter steelhead but the vast majority have been natives which must be released here. Many of these fish have been large, however. Look to the South Umpqua for hatchery steelhead as numbers improve into February and March. Fishing should improve on the North Umpqua around mid-February although this arm gets few hatchery fish.

Crabbing out of Charleston remains the best on the south coast due to the ability of the vast, deep waters of Coos Bay maintaining decent salinity levels even following heavy rain. The Coos River should be fishing well over the coming weekend as water drops and clears with the Millicoma offering fresh winters as well.

With water levels dropping and visibility improving, Coquille steelheaders should enjoy some action with winters over the weekend. Steelheaders on the lower Rogue have been experiencing spotty results over the past week. Plug-pullers on the middle Rogue have been hooking up on a mix of spawned-out summer fish which are heading back to the ocean and fresh winters bound for the upper river. While summers are still being hooked on the upper Rogue, there are few here that would qualify as table fare this late in the season.

Steelheaders using pink plastic worms have been hooking up on the Applegate River but this has been mostly a catch-and-release fishery for native steelhead.

The Chetco is dropping and clearing and although at 3,400 cfs on Thursday this week, is fishing well, and is a good prospect for the weekend. Scented yard and small baits of cured eggs have been most productive with both boat and bank fishers taking fresh winter steelhead.

Elk and Sixes rivers are low and clear and will remain that way until the next round of rainfall. When that occurs, winter steelheading will resume. It's been decent when water levels have cooperated with anglers.

The ice on Diamond Lake is now five inches thick. With temperatures below freezing most of the time, the foot of packed snow atop the ice remains in place and ice fishers are averaging one rainbow for about every two hours of effort. Caution is still advised for those who try it.

While the 2012 trout stocking schedule is not yet posted, planting of southwest area lakes historically begins in the first couple of weeks in February.

Central and Eastern Oregon – The Metolius has been producing well at times for persistent fly fishers. This river can be a challenge but achieving success here is quite rewarding.

At 71 cfs, the Crooked River is fishing well with nymphs and periodically dries when BWOs are hatching.

Washington fishing reports:

From the WDF&W Weekender Report for January 2013

Updated on December 28, 2012

North Puget Sound

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

Winter has arrived, but anglers still have opportunities to hook hatchery steelhead on several streams and blackmouth salmon in Puget Sound. Weather will be a major factor in deciding where to fish; if rivers are out of shape from heavy rain, anglers may want to head out onto Puget Sound for blackmouth salmon.

The San Juan Islands traditionally reward salmon fishers with some of the highest catches during winter months. Before heading out, anglers can check [creel reports](#) for information on catch and effort in Puget Sound. Recreational fishery samplers with WDFW collect the information each week at fishing access sites throughout Puget Sound.

Areas open throughout January for **salmon** fishing include marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands), 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner), Edmonds Fishing Pier in Marine Area 9 and Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton). Anglers fishing those marine areas have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook salmon. The rest of Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet) opens for salmon fishing Jan. 16 under the same rules.

In freshwater, several rivers are open for hatchery steelhead fishing, including the Nooksack, Skagit, Stillaguamish, Snohomish, Skykomish, Snoqualmie and Green rivers. "If the rivers fall back into shape, fishing for hatchery steelhead should be decent in early January," said Bob Leland, steelhead program manager for WDFW. "Anglers usually find bright fish through the month."

Leland reminds anglers that fishing for steelhead and other game fish will close in January in Puget Sound and along the Strait of Juan de Fuca to protect wild steelhead. The early closures will affect the Nooksack, Skagit, Stillaguamish, Snohomish, Green and Puyallup river systems, along with several streams along the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Most river systems will close Feb. 1. However, the Puyallup River system and the lower section of the Green River will close Jan. 16, and some waters near WDFW fish hatcheries are scheduled to close Feb. 16.

Pre-season estimates developed by WDFW last fall indicate that wild steelhead will return to those watersheds in numbers far short of target levels, said Leland. "By taking this action, we can protect wild steelhead that do make it back to these river systems," he said.

Meanwhile, a section of Tokul Creek – from the Fish Hatchery Road Bridge to the posted cable boundary marker downstream of the hatchery intake – has opened for trout, hatchery steelhead and other game fish, ahead of its Jan. 15 scheduled opening date. The early opener was possible because the hatchery facility is ahead of schedule collecting winter steelhead broodstock.

For more information on Puget Sound and Strait of Juan de Fuca steelhead seasons, check fishing regulations and emergency rule changes on the [WDFW website](#).

Winter is prime time to jig for **squid** in Puget Sound. Good spots include the Elliott Bay Pier in Seattle and the Edmonds Pier. More information is available on the department's [squid fishing webpage](#). Information on fishing piers is available [here](#).

The **Puget Sound crab fishery** closes at sunset Dec. 31. Crab fishers are required to report their activity to WDFW by Feb. 1, whether or not they actually fished or caught Dungeness crab. To submit catch reports, crabbers may send their catch record card to WDFW by mail or file their report on the department's licensing website. The mailing address is WDFW CRC Unit, 600 Capitol Way N., Olympia, WA 98501-1091. The [online reporting system](#) is available Jan. 1-Feb. 1. For more information on catch record cards, visit WDFW's [catch record card webpage](#).

South Sound/Olympic Peninsula

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

Anglers have several winter fishing opportunities, including salmon in the marine waters of Puget Sound, hatchery steelhead on several streams, and razor clams at ocean beaches. Early in January, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) will proceed with an evening **razor clam** dig at several ocean beaches if marine toxin tests are favorable. The tentative opening dates and evening low tides are:

- Jan. 8, Tuesday, 3:44 p.m., -0.2 ft., Twin Harbors
- Jan. 9, Wednesday, 4:38 p.m., -0.9 ft., Twin Harbors
- Jan. 10, Thursday, 5:27 p.m., -1.3 ft., Twin Harbors, Long Beach, Copalis,
- Jan. 11, Friday, 6:14 p.m., -1.6 ft., Twin Harbors, Long Beach, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Jan. 12, Saturday, 6:58 p.m., -1.5 ft., Twin Harbors, Long Beach, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Jan. 13, Sunday, 7:41 p.m., -1.2 ft., Twin Harbors
- Jan. 14, Monday, 8:22 p.m., -0.6 ft., Twin Harbors

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

- Jan. 25, Friday, 5:44 p.m., +0.0 ft., Long Beach, Twin Harbors
- Jan. 26, Saturday, 6:18 p.m., -0.2 ft., Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- Jan. 27, Sunday, 6:50 p.m., -0.2 ft., Long Beach, Twin Harbors

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, January is typically one of the best months for **hatchery steelhead** fishing on the north coast rivers, said Kirt Hughes, regional fishery manager for WDFW. "The rivers are running cold and the snow is sticking to the higher elevations," he said. "If the weather holds up, fishing for hatchery steelhead should be great through 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**. Information on weekly steelhead catches in the Quillayute River system and the Hoh River are available on [WDFW's website](#).

Hughes reminds anglers that they will not be allowed to catch and keep **wild steelhead** on eight Olympic Peninsula rivers until mid-February. The annual opening date for wild steelhead retention is Feb. 16 on the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc rivers. Those eight rivers are the only waters in Washington where wild steelhead retention is allowed.

Later in January, anglers might want to try fishing for hatchery steelhead in the Chehalis River Basin, said Hughes. "Anglers who don't want to make the trip to the north coast rivers should find some good fishing for hatchery steelhead in the basin, particularly at the Chehalis, Satsop and Wynoochee rivers," he said.

Freshwater anglers looking to hook salmon also have opportunities in January. Anglers can find **late-run hatchery coho** salmon in some of the region's rivers, including the Humptulips, Satsop and Willapa, said Hughes.

On Puget Sound, Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound) remains open for **salmon**. However, regulations for Marine Area 13 change Jan. 1, when anglers will have a daily limit of one salmon. Anglers should be aware that salmon fisheries in marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon Island) and 12 (Hood Canal) are closed in January.

In the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Marine Area 6 (Eastern Strait) remains open for salmon through April 10. Anglers fishing Marine Area 6 have a daily limit of two salmon, but must release wild chinook. Marine Area 5 (Seiku) is closed to salmon fishing.

Before heading out, anglers should check [WDFW's sportfishing regulations pamphlet](#) for details. Anglers can also check [creel reports](#) for information on catch and effort in Puget Sound. Recreational fishery samplers with WDFW collect the information each week at fishing access sites throughout Puget Sound.

The **Puget Sound crab fishery** closes at sunset on Dec. 31, and crabbers are reminded that they are required to report their winter catch to WDFW by Feb. 1. Reports are due for the winter season, whether or not crabbers actually fished or caught Dungeness crab. To submit catch reports, crabbers may send their catch record card to WDFW by mail or file their report on the department's licensing website. The mailing address is WDFW CRC Unit, 600 Capitol Way N., Olympia, WA 98501-1091. The [online reporting system](#) is available Jan. 1-Feb. 1. For more information on catch record cards, visit WDFW's [catch record card webpage](#).

Southwest Washington

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

Winter steelhead are still the name of the game for many anglers in the lower Columbia River Basin, although several other fisheries are beginning to compete for anglers' attention. Sturgeon

fishing reopens Jan. 1 from the mouth of the Columbia to McNary Dam, and more than 30,000 catchable-size rainbow trout will be planted along with any excess broodstock in lakes and ponds around the region by the end of the month.

Anglers opting to fish for steelhead, salmon, or cutthroat trout should be aware that **barbless hooks** will be required on a large section of the mainstem Columbia River starting Jan. 1. The new rule issued by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) in late December will be in effect from the mouth of the river – including the north jetty – to the state border with Oregon, 17 miles upstream from McNary Dam.

Anglers may still use single-point, double-point, or treble hooks in those waters, so long as any barbs have been filed off or pinched down.

State fishery managers said the rule is necessary to make Washington's fishing regulations consistent with those in Oregon, where that state's fish and wildlife commission recently banned the use of barbed hooks on the Columbia River as part of a broad-based measure to restructure the fishery.

"Fisheries can be very difficult to manage under two different sets of rules," said Guy Norman, WDFW southwest region director. "The two states have worked together for nearly a hundred years to maintain regulatory consistency on the river that serves as a common boundary."

In recent months, both states have discussed a ban on barbed hooks as part of the restructuring plan, which also includes phasing out the use of gillnets by non-tribal fishers in the mainstem Columbia River. The rule issued in December will remain in effect until further notice.

For **steelhead**, the Cowlitz River is still the best bet in January, although the Lewis, Kalama, Grays, Washougal, Elochoman rivers – and Salmon Creek in Clark County – are also producing fish, said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist stationed in Vancouver.

As usual, river conditions basically determine success at this time of year," Hymer said. "Most anglers do best when water levels are rising or dropping. It's a lot harder to catch steelhead in the peaks and troughs."

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. The daily limit on all area rivers is two marked, hatchery-reared steelhead.

Starting Jan. 1, anglers may also retain up to two hatchery adult **chinook salmon** per day on the mainstem Columbia from the I-5 Bridge downstream and in the Cowlitz and Deep rivers. On the Lewis and Kalama rivers, the daily limit is one hatchery adult chinook per day.

While the bulk of the **spring chinook** run isn't expect to arrive until March, Hymer said anglers will likely start catching early-arriving fish by late January or early February. "It's good to keep the chinook regulations in mind, even if you're fishing for steelhead," he said. "Somebody has to catch the first springer of the year, and it could be you."

WDFW recently released preliminary forecasts of Columbia River salmon and steelhead returns for 2013, predicting an upriver run of 141,400 adult spring chinook, down from last year's return of 203,100 fish. Approximately 180,500 sockeye and 73,500 summer chinook are also expected to return at levels below last year. However, the outlook for upriver bright fall chinook shows improvement over 2012.

The preliminary forecasts, along with anticipated fishing seasons, are posted on [WDFW's website](#). Current fishing rules are described in 2012-13 [Fishing in Washington](#) pamphlet and river conditions are available from the [Northwest River Forecast](#).

Rather catch **sturgeon**? All fishing areas will open to anglers Jan. 1 from the mouth of the Columbia River to McNary Dam under the rules outlined in the 2012-13 [Sport Fishing Rules](#) pamphlet. Like last year, retention fishing is allowed daily in all waters except the stretch from the Wauna powerlines upstream to Bonneville Dam (including all adjacent Washington tributaries), where retention is limited to Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. The daily limit is one white sturgeon per day with an annual limit of five fish.

Angling will be prohibited in the slough formed by Sand Island along the Oregon shore east of Rooster Rock State Park on the Columbia River.

One change adopted by fishery managers from Washington and Oregon in December establishes a winter season in the Bonneville Pool that will run through Feb. 10 or until 1,150 sturgeon are caught, whichever comes first. The goal of that fishery is to preserve an estimated 850 fish for a summer fishery.

But broader **regulatory changes** may lie ahead when fishery managers meet Jan. 30 to establish new guidelines for the 2013 sturgeon and spring chinook seasons. In December, the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission held back 10 percent of the lower-river sturgeon quota for conservation purposes and reduced the annual catch limit to one legal-sized fish per angler in response to ongoing concerns about declining sturgeon populations. The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission has directed WDFW Director Phil Anderson to seek an even tighter catch quota during upcoming negotiations.

"Washington anglers won't be affected by any of these developments in January, but should keep an eye on the department's website for possible changes in the months ahead," said Brad James, a WDFW fish biologist. The upcoming season-setting meeting, which is open to the public, will be held Jan. 30 at 10 a.m. at the Sheraton Portland Airport Hotel, 8235 Northeast Airport Way, in Portland.

Another option is to head for a local lake and catch some **trout**. Through January, WDFW plans to stock more than 30,000 catchable-size rainbows – plus any available excess broodstock – in 13 lakes and reservoirs around the region.

Those trout were raised at state hatcheries in Goldendale and Vancouver with the intent of providing winter fishing opportunities in the southwest region, said John Weinheimer, another WDFW fish biologist.

"We want to give area anglers a chance to get outdoors in the wintertime and catch some fish," Weinheimer said. "All of these waters can be fished from shore, so you don't need a boat and a lot of gear to get in on the action."

Weather and road conditions allowing, WDFW plans to stock catchable-size rainbows in Fort Borst Park Pond (1,500) in Lewis County; Silver Lake (4,000), Sacajawea Lake (3,000), Horseshoe Lake (2,000) and Kress Lake (2,000) in Cowlitz County; Battleground Lake (2,000) and Klineline Pond (2,000) in Clark County; Icehouse Lake (817) and Little Ash Lake (1,000) in Skamania County; and Rowland Lake (3,000), Spearfish Lake (1,800) and Maryhill Pond (500) in Klickitat County.

But when it comes to **eulachon smelt**, Hymer said there will be no fishing of any kind this year. Once abundant in the Columbia River Basin, eulachon were listed for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act in May 2010. Since then, Washington and Oregon have closed all sport and commercial dipping in the Columbia River system. All marine and freshwater areas in Washington are also closed to fishing for eulachon smelt.

Eastern Washington

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

As wintery weather waxes and wanes throughout the month of January, anglers need to be careful about ice conditions on waterways. "Shelf ice" along the shorelines of rivers and streams can be hazardous and lake fishing on and through ice is only safe after extended day and nighttime below freezing temperatures.

Randall Osborne, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) central district fish biologist in Spokane, reports winter season **rainbow trout** lakes – Hog Canyon and Fourth of July – had been fishing well in late December when ice started forming near the shorelines.

"Given the nighttime freezing/daytime thawing patterns we've had, I'm pretty sure any ice out there is not safe to fish on yet," Osborne said. "Until we get a week or more of continued freezing and ice is deep enough to safely support anglers, the fishing will be from shore if open spots can be found for casting. Finding those spots will probably require a bit of hiking."

WDFW Enforcement Sgt. Mike Sprecher, said Hog Canyon Lake is almost completely covered with thin ice and Fourth of July Lake has thin ice on about the north third and open water on the south two-thirds. Fishing activity was very light due to those ice conditions, he said.

Bill Baker, WDFW northeast district fish biologist, relays similar caution to anglers seeking rainbows at Stevens County's two winter-only fisheries – Hatch and Williams lakes. It may not be long, but in late December ice was still not thick enough on either lake for safe ice fishing.

WDFW does not measure ice on fishing lakes and cannot guarantee ice fishing safety. But here are a few tips to help keep an outing safe:

- Don't fish alone. Let others know exactly where you and your fishing partners are going and when you plan to return.
- Keep fishing holes small and few. When drilling fishing holes with an ice auger, keep the diameter under eight inches. Bigger holes are not necessary to land fish and can create a safety hazard for others.
- Watch your step. Avoid ice fishing near feeder streams or known springs; brush, logs, plants or docks; multiple ice cracks or ice that is popping or otherwise audible; and dark-colored ice that may be weak.
- Spread out. Too many people congregated in one area may be more than the ice can safely support. Disperse weight and fishing holes.
- Be prepared for weather conditions and emergencies. Dress in layers and wear thermal underwear, fleece or wool, and wind and waterproof outerwear, especially for feet, hands and head. Take extra clothes, food, water, sand for on-ice traction, and a sled for easy on-ice transport of all equipment. Carry equipment such as ice picks or awls, rope, and personal flotation devices. Also pack a first-aid kit and matches for starting a fire.

January is a good time to fish year-round-open Lake Roosevelt, the Columbia River reservoir off Grand Coulee Dam. Anglers are catching 16- to 18-inch rainbow trout from Seven Bays

downstream. "Fishing is not red-hot at Roosevelt," said Osborne. "But for those willing to put in a little time, limits of trout in that size range are not uncommon."

Osborne also reports anglers on year-round-open Long Lake (Lake Spokane) have been doing fairly well on **crappie** and **yellow perch**. Year-round Sprague Lake, on the Lincoln-Adams county line, can be good for **bluegill**, **crappie** and **trout**, but ice is forming on much of the lake and may not yet be safe for ice-fishing.

Snake River **steelhead** fishing continues, although participation has been low with recent wintery conditions. Best catch rates in late December were on the Grand Ronde River, a tributary of the Snake, where creel checks indicate about three hours of fishing effort per steelhead caught (including both released wild fish and kept hatchery-marked fish.) Anglers checked on most stretches of the mainstem Snake River have averaged about 20 hours of fishing effort per steelhead caught.

Northcentral Washington

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

Some traditional year-round fisheries in Okanogan County may now be through the ice catches – Patterson and Davis lakes in the Winthrop area, Rat Lake near Brewster, and Big and Little Green lakes west of Omak.

"It's mostly a rainbow trout show at Davis, Rat, and Green lakes, with fish in the 10- to 12-inch range," said Bob Jateff, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (WDFW) Okanogan District fish biologist. "Patterson Lake has **yellow perch** in the seven- to eight-inch range. Powerbait works well for trout, and small jigs tipped with mealworms work well for perch."

Anglers are cautioned to be alert and aware of changing ice conditions at these and other waters. WDFW does not measure ice on fishing lakes and cannot guarantee ice fishing safety. But here are a few tips to help keep an outing safe:

- Don't fish alone. Let others know exactly where you and your fishing partners are going and when you plan to return.
- Keep fishing holes small and few. When drilling fishing holes with an ice auger, keep the diameter under eight inches. Bigger holes are not necessary to land fish and can create a safety hazard for others.
- Watch your step. Avoid ice fishing near feeder streams or known springs; brush, logs, plants or docks; multiple ice cracks or ice that is popping or otherwise audible; and dark-colored ice that may be weak.
- Spread out. Too many people congregated in one area may be more than the ice can safely support. Disperse weight and fishing holes.
- Be prepared for weather conditions and emergencies. Dress in layers and wear thermal underwear, fleece or wool, and wind and waterproof outerwear, especially for feet, hands and head. Take extra clothes, food, water, sand for on-ice traction, and a sled for easy on-ice transport of all equipment. Carry equipment such as ice picks or awls, rope, and personal flotation devices. Also pack a first-aid kit and matches for starting a fire.

Okanogan County's Leader Lake, located three miles west of the town of Okanogan on Hwy. 20, opens Jan. 1 for an extra four months of fishing. This mixed-species fishery is usually open from late April through September, but if new proposed regulations are adopted next spring, it would be open year-round.

Jateff says the new winter fishery at Leader Lake provides extra opportunity to fish for an abundance of **crappie, bluegill, largemouth** and **smallmouth bass**, and **rainbow trout**. Statewide gear and freshwater species rules are in effect for all game fish.

Rufus Woods reservoir, on the Okanogan County south boundary off Chief Joseph Dam on the Columbia River, has big **triploid rainbow trout** that can be caught throughout the winter months.

Jateff notes there are several areas upstream of Chief Joseph Dam that can be accessed by the shore angler. Boat anglers can launch at the Army Corps of Engineers boat ramp and can explore upstream any one of numerous back bays and shorelines that could hold triploids.

Steelhead fishing remains open on the Okanogan and Similkameen rivers, and parts of the mainstem Columbia River.

Southcentral Washington

(Benton, Franklin, Kittitas and Yakima counties)

Anglers continue to reel in hatchery **steelhead** from portions of the Columbia and Snake rivers, although the lure of bigger fish will undoubtedly prompt some to switch gears. Starting Jan. 1, the John Day Pool (Lake Umatilla) will reopen for retention of **white sturgeon** that measure 43 to 54 inches from their snout to the fork in their tail.

Anglers planning to go after sturgeon should be aware there is a 500-fish annual quota for sturgeon on Lake Umatilla, said Paul Hoffarth, a regional fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "In recent years, the quota has been reached in a couple of months, so I'd advise anglers to get out early if they want to take a sturgeon home for dinner," he said.

Another option is McNary Pool (Lake Wallula), including the Snake River below Ice Harbor Dam, which reopens for sturgeon retention Feb. 1. There is no quota on that pool, which often keeps anglers busy up until the area closes to sturgeon retention Aug.1.

Walleye fishing can get slow in winter, but there's always a chance of catching a lunger. Some of the largest walleye of the year are boated during the winter months near the Tri-Cities – including the 19.3-pound state record taken in Lake Wallula in 2007.

Typical of the winter fishery, **steelhead** fishing has been up and down, said Hoffarth, noting that some of the best catches on the Columbia River have been reported in the Ringold area. In the Tri-Cities area, the fishery is open for retention of hatchery steelhead from John Day Dam upstream to the wooden power line towers at the old Hanford town site through March 31, 2013.

The lower Snake River is also open for the retention of hatchery steelhead through March 31. The daily limit in the Snake is three hatchery steelhead. Barbless hooks are required.

Winter **whitefish** seasons are currently open on the Yakima, Naches, Tieton, Cle Elum and Bumping rivers. Whitefish gear rules are in effect on the Yakima River from the Highway 223 Bridge at Granger to Keechelus Dam through Feb. 28. Whitefish seasons for the other rivers run Dec. 1 to March 31. Anglers are advised to check the Fishing in Washington [rules pamphlet](#) for regulations that apply to specific river reaches.

Eric Anderson, a WDFW fish biologist stationed in Yakima, recommends that anglers fishing for whitefish concentrate their fishing efforts in deep pools below riffles. Whitefish gear is restricted to one single-point hook with a maximum hook size of 3/16-inch from point to shank (hook size

14), and bait is allowed. Anderson said most whitefish are caught with a small fly, tipped with a maggot. The individual limit is 15 whitefish per day, most of which range from 10 to 15 inches long.

Rather catch **trout**? A catch-and-release trout fishery is open year-round above Roza Dam under selective gear and whitefish gear rules. Above Easton Lake, there is no size or catch limit for eastern brook trout.

Those interested in fishing local ponds near Yakima should know that WDFW recently stocked several of them with more than 400 brood stock rainbows, averaging 5 to 10 pounds apiece. I-82 Pond #4, Rotary, and Myron lakes and the pond at Sarg Hubbard Park all received some of the lunkers in December. Sarg Hubbard Park Pond is open only to juvenile anglers under 15 years old and anglers with a disability and reduced fee license.

Several other waters stocked with big trout in November are also still worth a try, Anderson said. North Elton Pond near Selah got 2,000 jumbo rainbows (1.5 lbs. each), while North Fio Rito and Mattoon Lakes in the Kittitas Valley got 250 rainbow brood stock (5-10 lbs. each). Anglers are reminded to check the Fishing in Washington [rules pamphlet](#) for special gear and catch limits that apply on lakes and ponds.

TGF Inbox - Reader E-mail

Posted as a reply to the our weekly report on ifish, a fellow calling himself 'two feathers' wrote, "who makes these reports? had a great day on Monday. when you can hook 11 fish, that's a great day.. there is plenty of fish around."

Pro Guide Bob Rees who is also one of the TGF co-founders (with his brother Doug) and co-editor of the newsletter replied, "We make these reports; Bob Rees, Michael Teague and Chris Vertopoulos. Our combined knowledge and expertise are credible.

"What's posted here on ifish is our standard free version of our newsletter. It gives some great information but our paid subscribers get the best value with much more detail in the full length (paid) version of our newsletter but most importantly, a "Forecast" of the fishing to come. If you are a paying customer, you would have known that there was going to be good steelheading this week with the weather change. Higher water temps, a rain freshet and even though we're between peak early season steelheading and peak late season steelheading, there was still going to be some decent steelheading.

"11 fish is certainly better than I would have anticipated however! I would be surprised if they were all "fresh" fish as there should be a fair number of downrunners in the systems now. Glad you had good luck!

Have a great season everyone!"

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Michael Teague: TGFMichael@gmail.com

Chris Vertopoulos: chrsv@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com

Random Links

Who knew? Whale vomit worth big bucks: <http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/sideshow/man-finds-valuable-whale-vomit-english-beach-165619292.html>

Fly fishing film tour comes to Portland on February 9th. Trailers here and info here: <http://flyfilmtour.com/2013-films>

Here's one of the films from the above tour:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=bh4bZyXVR4Y

GOOD LUCK!