

**Oregon Fisheries Update:**

**Willamette Valley/Metro-** Spring salmon fishing is underway on the Willamette and Columbia Rivers. Both rivers offer good opportunity as salmon are hitting decks with more frequency. The Willamette had a bump up in turbidity but it didn't slow the effort and catches were still reported from the head of the channel, Willamette Park and Sellwood. The river is now clearing again and fishing should only improve through April. On the Columbia most effort is from the Portland Airport down to St. Helens with the I-5 troll getting the most attention. On either river, green label plug cut herring, fished with or without a flasher is the primary trolling rig. Cured prawns are getting a few fish as well. Anchor fishermen will use K-14 or K-15 Kwikfish, wrapped with sardine fillets and beach anglers use spin n glows almost exclusively. Remember to pinch your barbs with the new 2013 "barbless" rule. Catch and release sturgeon fishing has taken back seat since the arrival of salmon, but opportunity still exists.

McKenzie water flow has continued to gradually moderate, setting the stage for good fishing for reddsides. Try BWO imitations or Mayfly nymphs to connect.

The steadily dropping waters of the North Santiam offers a little more reason for optimism that the South Santiam as the clarity is better. With about 200 summers upstream of Willamette Falls along with over 2,000 winters, the odds of a hookup have improved. Only 10 winters had been counted at Foster Dam as of March 11.

The Clackamas River continues to produce both winter and a few summer steelhead, despite the coast-wide low return. Fishing is far from hot, but worth the effort. The river remains at a very fishable level, but is running on the clear side. Most action is above Carver, with fish being taken from both bank anglers and boater alike. Expect action to hold up through mid-April.

Despite low, clear water on the Sandy River, fishermen continue to catch handfuls of both winter and summer steelhead. The river could use a shot of rain to add color and flow. Although fish are present, the river above Oxbow Park is extremely clear, making for very tough fishing. Below Oxbow, the river picks up flow and a bit more silt, offering friendlier opportunity. Expect the run to hold up through the first week of April, when summer steelhead will begin to dominate the catch.

**Northwest –** Although steelhead fishing remains fair during what most deem peak season, anglers shouldn't expect double digit opportunities for the remainder of the season. The Wilson and Nestucca will remain primary targets into early April but anglers are already putting in more time for Willamette Valley early spring chinook than peak season coastal steelhead.

Another hydrologic bump is forecast for mid-week, which could boost steelhead numbers in the major river systems just prior to the weekend. Anglers have noted that some of the best steelheading of the season has actually taken place on river rises; an unusual circumstance.

Sturgeon effort in Tillamook Bay remains light but morning tides are favorable for west channel pursuit if anglers are motivated.

Anglers never got the opportunity to take advantage of the calm ocean over the weekend. Despite an inviting ocean, bar conditions remained too rough for safe or legal crossing. There may be another window by the weekend. Anglers will be anxious to get offshore in pursuit of bottomfish, crab and yes, even salmon. The recreational chinook season opens on March 15<sup>th</sup> from Cape Falcon south to Humbug Mountain and will likely last well into the fall as large numbers of California stock fish are forecasted to be available. The fin-clip rule remains in effect in the nearshore. Check regulations for detail.

Although not minus tides, morning tides through the weekend should allow diggers access to bay and razor clams. Digging won't be excellent but limits are attainable if you bring your waders.

**Southwest-** Bottom fishing was excellent out of Newport in mild seas and soft breezes over the past weekend. Limits of rockfish and ling cod were taken with both deep water and nearshore reefs productive. Chinook salmon from Cape Falcon to Humbug Mt. will open March 15 and run through April 30 for adults 24 inches or larger.

Pinkfin perch fishing has been good on area beaches. It's early for this fishery which will improve over the next six weeks or so but decent catches now are indicative of a banner year for them.

Earlier this week the ODFW confirmed Spring all-depth halibut dates as May 9-11, May 16-18, May 30-June 1, and June 6-8. Additional days will be added as available quota allows.

As water and flow moderated on the Umpqua, steelheaders have been taking a mix of hatchery and native fish. The North and South Umpqua rivers should be fishing well this week as they drop in the absence of rain.

Lower Rogue water levels rose late last week but are on the drop this week. While no confirmed catches of spring Chinook had been reported at this writing, there may well have been some taken by now. Either way, steelheading is worthwhile following the freshet and even better on the middle river where winters are heading for the Applegate River. With decent numbers of steelhead showing at Cole River Hatchery, fishing on the upper river is also good.

While The Chetco fished well for winter steelhead after rainfall raised water levels last week, the river has been dropping since that time and is getting too low to fish at its best.

Elk River steelheaders did pretty well over the past weekend but without precipitation this week, the water is getting skinny.

**Eastern –** Blue-Winged-Olive hatches continue to dominate on the lower Deschutes but March Browns, which usually start in early April, were popping up over the past weekend. Redside dishing has been fair to good for fly anglers fishing near the banks. Level, flow and color have been excellent.

The Crooked River is fishing well with Mayfly and midge nymphs most effective.

**SW Washington-** District anglers remained focused on early spring chinook on the mainstem Columbia. Catches are ramping up with good water conditions and larger numbers of fish present. Many of the districts rivers will be closed or heavily restricted to the take of spring chinook so the mainstem fishery may offer up the best opportunity for most anglers, both boat and bank.

Steelhead remain an option on the Cowlitz, Kalama and mainstem Lewis Rivers. The Washougal is also producing a few wild and hatchery fish but regulations on this system change on March 15<sup>th</sup> so check them out.

## **Soapbox Update:**

### **INFORMATION ON THE FORAGE FISH ANIMATION**

The PFMC released its [Fishery Ecosystem Plan](#) (FEP) and accompanying appendix of concrete ecosystem initiatives. There is a web [feature](#) with the video animation on Pew's website. It's also on Pew's YouTube page [here](#). Pew released an action alert calling on people to [ask](#) the council to adopt the plan in April and move expeditiously to its first initiative -- extending management protection to vulnerable species of forage fish. Please push the video far and wide through whatever networks you see fit. I have included some social media suggestions below in case you want to use them.

It's time to take a minute to think about the bottom of the food chain. Learn about the little fish that iconic creatures like whales and tuna depend on for survival, and why it's so important to protect them. <http://bit.ly/VZBJG0>

#CA, #OR, #WA & #ID residents: Take action to protect the #forage fish of the Pacific Ocean! <http://bit.ly/ZwogXu>

**House Bill 2252** which would allow the ODFW to issue fishing licenses for multiple years, moved swiftly through the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee and is now recommended for passage. This would allow anglers to purchase a license for five years (for instance) and potentially to do so at a discount. The bill, if passed, would also make the offer available to hunters (excluding controlled-hunt tags) and allows non-residents in service as active military to purchase licenses and harvest permits at resident cost. Currently, ten other states offer a multi-year license option at discounts of 10 to 15 percent.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – Spring chinook anglers are further ramping up their effort on the mainstem Columbia. Promising water conditions are enabling anglers to pursue spring chinook unlike the previous couple of years when cold, wet, late winter precipitation has hampered success. Although clearly far from peak still, catches are improving, especially in the I-5 to Longview reach. One springer tipping the scales at 32 pounds was recently taken at Willow Bar on a trolled herring. Despite the clear water conditions, anglers are typically employing flashers with the use of their trolled herring. Green label herring remains the ticket for these smaller sized chinook salmon but some guides are also using fresh/frozen anchovies jigged up in the lower Columbia River estuary last summer. Regardless of what baits you use, you have to fish it "on-the-deck". On the deck means so close to the bottom that your lead commonly drags the bottom of the river where you are fishing. Davis Bar is seeing more activity but catches remain sporadic there. Boaters are witnessing a high percentage of steelhead in their catch, indicating that we may get another strong return of summer steelhead this year.

Bank anglers are more likely to harvest steelhead than salmon and also more likely to harvest steelhead than the boat fleet because steelhead travel very close to shore in the higher flows. For

that reason, it is wise to fish your spin-n-glos or offerings only a few feet from shore (8 to 15 feet), especially in minus tides when velocities are even higher. Plunkers should definitely scent their offerings liberally as plunking is the only technique we use that the fish have to come to you.

Here's the weekend catch stats from the ODF&W creel checks:

**Gorge Bank:**

No report.

**Gorge Boats:**

No report.

**Troutdale Boats:**

Weekend checking showed two adipose fin-clipped spring chinook kept for 17 boats (31 anglers).

**Portland to Longview Bank:**

Weekend checking showed two adipose fin-clipped spring chinook and two adipose fin-clipped steelhead kept for 110 bank anglers.

**Portland to Longview Boats:**

Weekend checking showed five adipose fin-clipped spring chinook kept and one unclipped spring Chinook released for 68 boats (159 anglers).

**Estuary Bank (Clatsop Spit to Wauna Powerlines):**

Weekend checking showed no catch for one angler.

**Estuary Boats (Tongue Point to Wauna Powerlines):**

Weekend checking showed one adipose fin-clipped spring chinook kept for 11 boats (31 anglers).

Sturgeon fishing in the lower Columbia below Bonneville remains pathetic.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Anglers will see a significant rise in effort this week on the lower Columbia. More consistent catches and premium water conditions are contributing to a better catch this year than we have seen in the previous two despite larger run sizes predicted. Although there is a lot of good water downstream of the Longview Bridge, most of the effort is taking place between Kalama and the I-5 Bridge. Persistent anglers fishing in that particular reach are tallying season numbers of 7 to 8 fish per boat so far this year. The bulk of the anglers are catching fish trolling although anchor effort using plugs is starting to ramp up too. A stronger tidal influence is also contributing to better success rates and that feature should continue to happen through the weekend. Anglers are seeing a mix of both upper Columbia Basin fish, denoted by their black chins and snow-belly Willamette bound fish which typically average larger in size. Trolled green label sized herring is responsible for the bulk of the catch and will likely continue to be the case for the remainder of the season.

With the lower flows this year, trollers have to pay attention to the fact that on the stronger tides, they will have to be spending more time trolling than they would get to fish on anchor. Also due to lower flows, trollers will find fish a bit further offshore where in high water years, they troll closer to the bank.

As we get closer to the peak part of the run, anglers should feel good about spreading out their effort with higher concentrations of fish beginning to show downstream of the Longview Bridge. Clifton Channel at Tenasillahe Island is a favorite lower river trolling area and anglers often take

advantage of outgoing tides by sitting on anchor in that area. I have had measureable success trolling on the lower end of Tenasillahe Island on the outgoing tide however.

Anglers should also see effort ramping up at Davis Bar where catches are reportedly picking up almost daily. Trollers are working the 18 to 20 foot line with green label herring right on the bottom.

Over 30 fish have crossed Bonneville Dam; a testament to the low water conditions that are inspiring fish to move quicker. If these conditions persist, and they are likely to, anglers may find themselves short-changed on the modeled closure date for the mainstem Columbia. Of course every year is different but these low-water conditions will contribute to better catch rates jeopardizing opportunity in the latter part of the season.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** reports, "Spring salmon fishing is underway on the Willamette and Columbia Rivers. Both rivers offer good opportunity as salmon are hitting decks with more frequency. The Willamette had a bump up in turbidity but it didn't slow the effort and catches were still reported from the head of the channel, Willamette Park and Sellwood. The river is now clearing again and fishing should only improve through April. On the Columbia most effort is from the Portland Airport down to St. Helens with the I-5 troll getting the most attention. On either river, green label plug cut herring, fished with or without a flasher is the primary trolling rig. Cured prawns are getting a few fish as well. Anchor fishermen will use K-14 or K-15 Kwikfish, wrapped with sardine fillets and beach anglers use spin n glows almost exclusively. Remember to pinch your barbs with the new 2013 "barbless" rule. Catch and release sturgeon fishing has taken back seat since the arrival of salmon, but opportunity still exists."

For those interested in catching spring chinook from a kayak, there will be a free clinic on the subject on Thursday, March 21st from 7 PM to 9 PM at Hoggs Hardcore Tackle, 382 Oak Street in Hillsboro. Experts Mark Veary and Michael Rischer will reveal how, when and where for kayak springer success. An on-the-water clinic will be held on the weekend following (tentative depending on weather).

Following a spike in water levels around the first of March, the McKenzie has been dropping into good conditions for fishing.

Waters of the North and South Santiam rivers are fairly stable and will be gradually dropping through the coming weekend. The ODFW warns of a reported downed tree obstructing the Lower Bennett dam boat slide on the North Santiam at Stayton and advises use of the South Channel and the boat slide at Bonnet Dam. The safest stretch for boaters is below Green's Bridge and above Stayton. Avoid the stretch from Niagara Park and Packsaddle Park on the North Santiam while construction of the fish hatchery above Packsaddle County Park is taking place. It should be completed by April 1, 2013. The portage trail is being used to get around the fish hatchery dam.

Trout fishing has been slow to fair at Hagg Lake. With the water temperatures hovering in the high 40s, very few bass have been caught.

Benson Lake, Bethany Pond, Blue Lake, Canby Pond, Commonwealth Lake, Dorman Pond, Huddleston Pond, Mt. Hood Pond, Progress Lake and Sheridan Pond Are scheduled for trout stocking.

**The Guide's Forecast – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** predicts, "If the weather isn't an indicator, the boat traffic on the Willamette River is. Springers are in and the

tastiest salmon of the year are hitting decks and beaches from Rice Island on the lower Columbia, to Meldrum Bar at Oregon City. The Willamette River below Oregon City is running at 46 degrees and has far better clarity than most years. The turbidity website is reading between 5 and 6 (for March 13), and anything below 10 is very fishable, as long as it is on the drop. The Columbia is running a couple degrees cooler but has excellent clarity and the water level is optimum, hovering just above 10 ft. on the Vancouver gauge. All this makes for excellent early spring Chinook fishing and results are starting to show. Just about all the favorite haunts on both rivers are giving up fish.

"Oregon City is still very sporadic, but that is to be expected for March.

The trolls along the Sauvies Island beaches are seeing nets, as is I-5 and the Airport. Over on the Willamette, fish are being reported from Multnomah Channel and up at Fred's Marina. At the head of Multnomah Channel, the power lines are an excellent early season spot and an easy place to learn the ins and outs of big river springer fishing. Here, beginners and seasoned salmon fishermen alike, use relatively the same tactics to get the elusive springer's attention. Trolling herring is the best, whether it be plug cut or whole. Brined or thawed bait will both get bit, but many anglers are pulled into the hype of all the new pre-mixed brines on the market. They do work and will consistently catch fish, but thawed, right out of the package has worked well for me for many years.

"The gist is that you have to change baits a bit more often, but I have always been a fan of the fresh blood and guts herring. A good bait should last 30 minutes, any longer than that and it's getting pretty washed out. If you go 20-30 minutes and your bait still rolls good, you might give it a blast of your favorite scent and fish it for another ten minutes. Garlic and anise are favorite salmon scents, as are all of the Pacific bait-fish flavors. Spinning plastic flashers are optional too and much of the craze is created by the tackle companies insisting that you have to fish this or that color in the spring versus the fall. Don't get me wrong, almost everybody is using them and fish don't seem to mind them, but they have only been around for 15 or so years and we caught plenty of fish before the introduction of the Big Al's Fish Flash. Whether or not to use one is totally up to you and if you have confidence in it, you are most of the way there (just make sure all your bead chain/ball bearing swivels are good working order). What depth to fish is the million dollar question for springer newbies. My rule is that if the water is less than 25 ft deep, you should be fishing the bottom. Anything deeper than that and you can suspend your offering anywhere from the surface down. Early in the morning or on dark days, start at ten pulls of your reel (about 20 ft on a line counter). If its brighter out, fish deeper, say 15-30 pulls. But the 25 ft rule should be considered most of the time."

Mild weather and moderate rainfall has the McKenzie River in excellent shape this year. As spring rapidly approaches, fly fishers are anxious to see large March Browns on the wing. A few can be seen here and through mid-afternoons although Blue-Winged-Olives remain the predominant pattern and nymphs have been most effective recently. In the next few weeks, March Brown hatches will increase as will action for reddsides. Spring Chinook fishing should be worthwhile here in May.

Passage of summer steelhead at Willamette Falls has improved from single digits daily to low double digits but still fewer than 250 had been counted as of March 14th. Winter steelhead totals were 2167 on that date. There have been reports of a few summers caught on the North Santiam but obviously numbers are too low for much optimism. There have been a half-dozen springers counted at the Falls but that upriver fishery is a ways off.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-**

**1377)** reports, "steelhead fishing is good, despite the coast-wide low return. Fishing is far from hot, but worth the effort. The river remains at a very fishable level, but is running on the clear side. Most action is above Carver, with fish being taken from both bank anglers and boater alike. Expect action to hold up through mid-April.

"Despite low, clear water on the Sandy River, fishermen continue to catch handfuls of both winter and summer steelhead. The river could use a shot of rain to add color and flow. Although fish are present, the river above Oxbow Park is extremely clear, making for very tough fishing. Below Oxbow, the river picks up flow and a bit more silt, offering friendlier opportunity. Expect the run to hold up through the first week of April, when summer steelhead will begin to dominate the catch."

**The Guide's Forecast – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** predicts, "The Clackamas River is still booting out both native and hatchery broodstock steelhead. Also, a few summers are showing up in the catch and that number will build as the winter comes to an end. Water conditions are holding steady around 12.5 feet (about perfect,) but it has been running on the clear side. Bank fishermen are fishing at Rivermill, McIver Park, Dog Creek, Barton and Carver, while most boaters are working the beats between Barton to Riverside Park. The NightMare jig has developed a heck-of-a following on the Clack and local retailers are having trouble keeping them in stock. The combination of red, white and black, put together in a small package, really seems to get a steelhead's attention.

"The fish have also been responding well to hardware, like spinners and spoons. A #4 or #5 Blue Fox spinner fished in the flats, or boulder runs has been getting bit as do spoons like the Little Cleo in the 2/5 ounce size. Expect the action to hold up through mid-April for winter fish, after that, there will be more summers present and the first of the springers will start to show.

"On the Sandy River, low clear water has been the norm for the last week and tough fishing has followed. Warmer temperatures are starting to melt snow in the upper drainage and a slight rise is to be expected. Stealthy anglers are still getting a few fish on bobber and jig set-ups and some boaters are having some action on plugs. The upper river above Oxbow Park is air clear, making for challenging fishing. Better opportunity is from Oxbow Park downstream and both boaters and bank fishermen are encouraged to practice stealthiness if they want to have any success. Lighter, longer leaders and smaller offerings that are leaning more towards "pastel" rather than "fluorescent" are called for. Fish will be in the heads of the runs, in the riffles and in the broken water behind boulders. The nightmare jig will work well here too as do size 3 and 4 spinners in brass or nickel. Small sized corkies in red with black scale and a touch of "champagne" colored glo-bug yarn is a killer when the water gets low. Add a dab of shrimp smelly jelly and you are in business. Winter steelhead will continue to test Sandy River anglers through the first week of April. Summer steelhead have already made a presence and their numbers will build through May/June. Expect conditions to hold as they have been for the next week, with a slight rise from the melting glacier."

**North Coast Fishing Report** – Steelhead fishing on the north coast remains less than impressive for most anglers in pursuit. With the lack of rain this week, anglers have been forced to stick to the larger systems, two of which on the north coast still are producing last season hatchery options. The Wilson and Nestucca Rivers are still getting the highest pressure but hatchery fish remain somewhat rare in the catches in these systems. Again, recent low water is keeping effort focused in the lower reaches where anglers bank on tidally influenced waters to bring in fresh fish.

Guide activity on the two main systems, the Wilson and Nestucca, are mixed. It seems guides are largely leaving the Wilson River alone, not just because of higher effort but catches have been fair at best. It seems guides are focusing more on the Nestucca River where catches have only been slightly more consistent. Water conditions on both systems have been fair and fish are certainly trickling in on a daily basis. The highest amount of effort is taking place from First Bridge downstream and anglers are lightening up their offerings with tiny baits or even just single beads producing results. In the lower flows, fish are certainly more concentrated in the deeper, broken surfaced water awaiting another major rain freshet in order to move.

The Nehalem mainstem is quickly becoming a fair option as we enter peak season on this system but anglers have next to no hope for hatchery fish in this watershed. This system typically fishes well when other north coast systems are too low to produce good numbers.

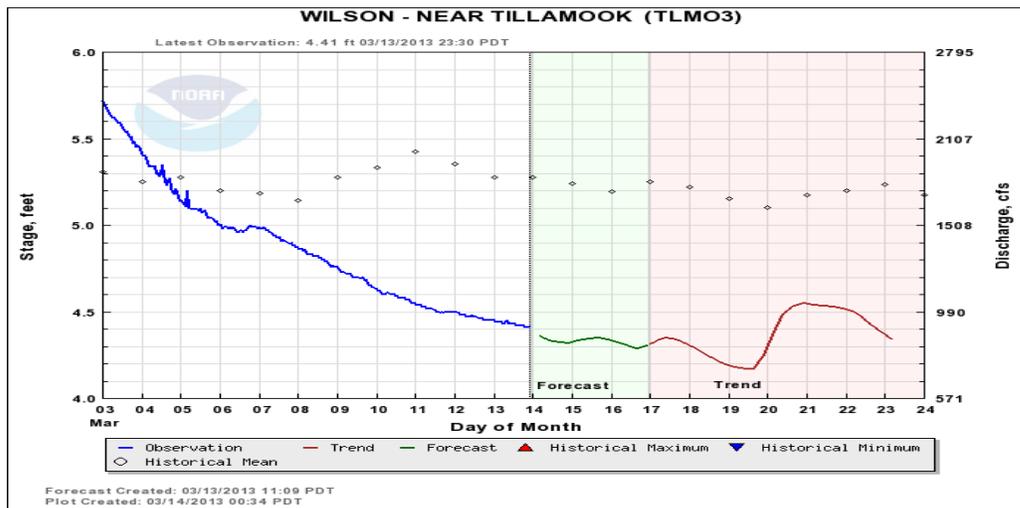
Fish are likely staging in the tidewaters of smaller north coast systems as another good shot of wild fish are due back on these systems too.

Anglers were hopeful for offshore opportunities this weekend but the Tillamook Bay Bar remained too treacherous to cross. The dory fleet at Cape Kiwanda was able to launch on Sunday taking advantage of calm seas that produced good catches of lingcod but only fair catches of sea bass. Anglers may have more opportunity by the weekend.

Crabbing in north coast estuaries is depressing. We put out a 5-pot effort on Sunday with quality bait yielding mostly undersized and female crab. The net total for the 5-pot, 4 hour soak was 2 keepers.

**The Guide's Forecast** – Now that steelheaders are in peak season, more consistent catches are likely however as we've mentioned several times before, the run this year is a far cry from the success of the previous two. Hopefully this was just a one year blip as coho forecasts and early summer steelhead indications on the Columbia system are already indicating a marked improvement.

Given the upcoming prediction for river levels over the weekend, anglers will be forced to continue to employ subtle tactics in pursuit of steelhead. Tiny baits, light leads and even just single beads will likely produce the best catches. Plug pullers also have an advantage in these lower flows but be sure to utilize the shallower diving, more subtle colors under these conditions.



The Wilson and Nestucca will be the only hatchery fish options while the Trask and mainstem Nehalem should be fair wild fish options. Again, lower in the systems will produce the best results and unfortunately, the early bird is likely to get the most worms. Don't overlook plugs as a viable option in these dropping flows.

There might be another offshore option over the weekend. Offshore anglers are getting pretty antsy to pursue lingcod and sea bass as well as soak some pots for Dungeness crab. Here is the offshore forecast:

**FRI**

S WIND 5 TO 10 KT...BECOMING SW 10 TO 15 KT IN THE AFTERNOON. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 7 FT AT 15 SECONDS. CHANCE OF SHOWERS.

**FRI NIGHT**

SW WIND 10 TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 6 FT AT 8 SECONDS. CHANCE OF SHOWERS.

**SAT**

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

**SAT NIGHT**

W WIND 10 TO 15 KT...BECOMING NW 15 TO 20 KT AFTER MIDNIGHT. WIND WAVES 3 FT. W SWELL 5 FT. SHOWERS LIKELY.

**SUN**

NW WIND 10 TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 3 FT. W SWELL 7 FT.

**MON**

NE WIND 5 TO 10 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 4 FT.

Cape Meares Lake, Coffenbury Lake, Hebo Lake, Lake Lytle, Lost Lake (Clatsop County), Town Lake and Vernonia Pond are scheduled for planting with hatchery trout.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – Recreational boats launching out of Depoe Bay & heading north took limits of lingcod and rockfish earlier this week. Limits have pretty much been the rule for several weeks whenever the ocean has allowed launches.

Catches of pinkfin surf perch have been good off many south coast beaches from Lincoln City to Gold Beach.

Siletz steelheaders have been doing pretty well for a mix of late winters and the occasional summer fish. The river is getting pretty low and drift baits will probably do some bumping and grinding until the next round of rainfall hits in the coming week.

Good weather and mild ocean conditions encouraged a number of anglers to try their luck off the South Jetty at Winchester Bay. A number of lingcod were caught, only a few of which measured the minimum 22 inches. Catches of striped surf perch were fair to good. One rock fisher tossed a spinner, managing to hook (but lose) a spring Chinook in the bay. A few springers have been caught on the Umpqua near Scottsburg but it seems there just aren't many springers in the river yet. More steelheaders are trying their luck in the flies only stretch of the North Umpqua as there

has been a decent showing of primarily wild steelhead, providing a rewarding catch and release fishery. Mid-March into April is considered the peak of the hatchery steelhead run on the South Umpqua which should be worth a shot for those with a desire to bonk a keeper.

Crab traps and nets are luring good numbers of Dungeness at Coos Bay although the majority have been females with few legal males in the mix. Jetty fishing has been fair for greenling and rockfish. While finding a hatchery steelhead on the Coos River is challenging this time of year, a few anglers are enjoying the much lighter pressure and the decent prospect of catching (and releasing) large natives.

Steelheading has been decent on the South Fork Coquille although most of the fish being hooked are spawned-out down-runners, dark or of non-hatchery origin.

The first Rogue spring Chinook of 2013, a 20-ounder, was a surprise to everyone, including the angler who caught it. Not because of the time of year as it's actually late for this occurrence. The steelheader who hooked it on Tuesday this week was fishing the Hatchery Hole on the upper river. Usually, springers are taken initially down at Rainie Falls, but this is an odd year. Now that the water temperature in the lower Rogue has topped 50 degrees, the Chinook fishery will be getting underway. In the meantime, winter steelheading is fair in the lower River and better in the middle stretch but will receive a boost from rain which is predicted to raise water levels starting Tuesday, March 20th. The upper Rogue is stable and is producing fair catches of winter steelhead. Fly fishers hooked up winters on Wednesday this week using fairly small nymphs.

The Chetco is low and clear at this writing and will continue dropping through the weekend. Steelheaders should get another flush of fresh winters if rainfall resumes as forecast on Tuesday next week.

Trout fishing remains fair but steady through the ice at Diamond Lake where each rod is averaging two trout per hour. Most of these fish are in the 12-inch range but most stringers contain a couple 18 to 20 inchers.

Butterfield Lake, Middle & Lower Empire Lake and Mingus Park Pond are scheduled for hatchery trout planting.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – Pro guide Mac Huff (800-940-3688) reports, "The current information on the Grande Ronde River is conditions are excellent and the fish are biting. After a dismal fall, the fish are finally showing some interest. On Sunday the river level was 2,560 cfs. and dropping, although, that trend is likely to at least level out early this week as a wet weather system moves into the region. Watch the water levels and as long as it stays under 3,000 cfs or when it stabilizes below 6,000 cfs fishing will be on. There is about 3' visibility and the temp is about 40.

"Boggan's Oasis in Washington is hosting a steelhead derby through March 23, and fish will be available through the end of the season on Apr. 15. Good fishing!

Fishing for reddsides on the lower Deschutes has been slow this week.

Trout fishing remains worthwhile on the Crooked River where nymphs have been most effective. Some of the trout and whitefish will be sporting orange tags. The ODFW encourages anglers to release these fish after making note of the tag number and reporting the information by phone at 541-296-4628 or on [\\*this online form\\*](#).

[http://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/The Dalles/fish\\_tag\\_returns.asp](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/fish/The Dalles/fish_tag_returns.asp)

Most fly fishers consider it a little early for the Owyhee River and there is still a little snow on the ground in places but rainbows and the occasional large brown trout were taking emerger patterns this week.

The Metolius Arm of Lake Billy Chinook is open but with water temperatures still cold, deep trolling at the 60 to 80 foot level has been required to dredge up bull trout although results for those doing so have been fair to good. Kokanee fishing has been slow.

Kokanee fishing has shown some improvement at Green Peter. Trolling at the 30-foot level has been producing about a dozen a day with kokanee running 10 to 12 inches.

Fishing for Mackinaw has been fair but steady at Crescent Lake with some good-sized fish landed recently. Anglers targeting brown trout are taking some nice ones here.

### **Washington fishing reports:**

***From the WDF&W Weekender Report for March 2013***

*Last updated March 4, 2013*

### **North Puget Sound**

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

With steelhead fishing closed in the region, anglers are now turning to other species, including rainbow trout in many of the region's lakes and blackmouth salmon in Puget Sound.

Anglers fishing marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands), 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner), and 9 (Admiralty Inlet) have a two-**salmon** daily limit, but must release wild chinook salmon. Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) is closed to salmon fishing.

Steve Thiesfeld, Puget Sound salmon manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), said anglers fishing for blackmouth have had the most success in the San Juan Islands. "Central Puget Sound has been slow, but anglers fishing the San Juans have done really well this winter," he said.

Before heading out, anglers can check [creel reports](#) for information on catch and effort in Puget Sound. Catch samplers with WDFW collect the information each week at fishing access sites throughout Puget Sound.

Anglers looking for some competition might want to enter the **Everett Blackmouth Derby** on March 16. Prizes include \$3,000 for the largest fish, \$1,500 for second place and \$500 for third place. For details, visit the [derby's website](#).

Looking forward to the **summer salmon fishing** season? Several public meetings have been scheduled throughout March as fishery managers continue to develop the 2013 salmon seasons, which will be finalized in early April. For more information on the meetings, visit WDFW's [North of Falcon website](#).

Rather catch **trout**? The lowland lakes trout season doesn't officially get under way until late-April, but anglers in the region can get an early start on the action. Twenty-three lakes that are open to fishing year-round will be stocked with 97,000 fish in March. Those lakes include:

- **Island County:** Cranberry and Lone.
- **King County:** Alice, Angle, Beaver, Green, Meridian, Rattlesnake (selective gear rules, catch-and-release only), and Sawyer.

- **Snohomish County:** Ballinger, Blackmans, Cassidy, Chain, Flowing, Gissberg Ponds (Twin Lakes), Ketchum, Loma, Lost (Devil's), Martha (Warm Beach), Panther, Shoecraft, Silver, and Tye.

Other good bets include lakes Goodwin and Roesiger in Snohomish County, where several thousand rainbow trout that were stocked in December should be growing to catchable size this spring and summer.

"Whether you're new to the sport or a veteran, there are plenty of fishing opportunities for both boat and shore anglers," said Justin Spinelli, fisheries biologist for WDFW.

Fishing for **kokanee** should pick up this month, particularly at Angle, Stevens, Cavanaugh and Samish lakes. "Because kokanee feed near the surface in low light conditions and then move deeper as the day progresses, successful anglers vary their depth and tackle throughout the day," said Spinelli.

Fishing for **bass, yellow perch, catfish, black crappie,** and **bluegill** is also an option. In March, these species can still be found around bottom structure (rocky outcroppings, points, and humps) in deep water, said Danny Garrett, fisheries biologist for WDFW.

"Anglers should slowly work their gear and plan to change location regularly because these fish are on the move in spring," Garrett said. "As water temperatures warm later in the month, yellow perch begin to congregate in schools in shallower depths to spawn, while bass and other warmwater species aggressively feed in preparation for spawning in May and June."

Before heading out, anglers should check the [Sportfishing Rules Pamphlet](#) for more information on fishing regulations.

## **South Sound/Olympic Peninsula**

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

Blackmouth salmon fisheries are in full swing in Puget Sound, the lingcod season gets under way mid-March in ocean areas south of Cape Alava and several ocean beaches are scheduled to open for razor clam digs this month.

State fishery managers have approved an evening razor clam dig that will run March 7-11 at Twin Harbors, March 8-10 at Long Beach and March 9-10 at Copalis and Mocrocks. No digging will be allowed at any beach before noon.

In planning a trip to the beach, all diggers should be aware that Daylight Saving Time starts March 10, said Dan Ayres, coastal shellfish manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "If you forget to set your watch ahead, you could miss an hour of prime digging," he said, noting that the best digging occurs an hour or two before low tide.

Evening low tides for the upcoming dig are as follows:

- March 7, Thursday, 3:06 p.m., +0.3 ft., Twin Harbors
- March 8, Friday, 4:01 p.m., 0.0 ft., Twin Harbors, Long Beach
- March 9, Saturday, 4:50 p.m., -0.2 ft., Twin Harbors, Long Beach, Copalis and Mocrocks
- March 10, Sunday, 6:33 p.m., -0.2 ft., Twin Harbors, Long Beach, Copalis and Mocrocks
- March 11, Monday, 7:12 p.m., 0.0, Twin Harbors

WDFW also plans to open second dig later in the month, provided that marine toxin tests show the clams are safe to eat. The timing of that time reflects the seasonal switch to morning low tides, Ayres said.

"Every year in late March, the lowest low tides switch from evenings to mornings, so we structure razor clam digs accordingly," Ayres said. Tentative opening dates and morning low tides for late March are:

- March 28, Thursday, (7:57 am -0.3 ft.): Twin Harbors
- March 29, Friday, (8:40 a.m., -0.6 ft.): Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks
- March 30, Saturday, (9:26 a.m., -0.7 ft.): Twin Harbors, Long Beach, Copalis, Mocrocks
- March 31, Sunday, (10:16 a.m., -0.6 ft.): Twin Harbors

Under state law, diggers can take 15 razor clams per day, and are required to keep the first 15 they dig. Each digger's clams must be kept in a separate container.

All diggers age 15 or older must have a valid fishing license to harvest razor clams on any beach. Licensing options range from a three-day razor clam license to an annual combination fishing license, which can be purchased on [WDFW's website](#) and from license vendors around the state.

Meanwhile, fishing for **blackmouth** – resident chinook – is an option in several areas of Puget Sound. Anglers fishing marine areas 6 (eastern Strait), 11 (Tacoma-Vashon) and 12 (Hood Canal) have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook. Those fishing marine areas 5 (Sekiu) and 13 (South Puget Sound) have a daily limit of one chinook salmon.

“Fishing has been really good in the straits,” said Steve Thiesfeld, Puget Sound salmon manager. “The straits and Hood Canal are the places to be for blackmouth fishing now.”

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

Rather hook a **lingcod**? Fishing for lingcod gets under way March 16 in marine areas 1-3, south of Cape Alava. The minimum size for lingcod in these areas is 22 inches, with a daily limit of two fish per angler. For lingcod fishing regulations, check the [Fishing in Washington pamphlet](#).

In the rivers, wild **steelhead** returns to northern peninsula streams reach their peak in March. As in years past, anglers may retain only one wild steelhead per license year on the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc rivers. On all other rivers, anglers may retain only hatchery-reared steelhead marked with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar. For more information on steelhead fishing regulations, check the [Fishing in Washington pamphlet](#). Information on weekly steelhead catches in the Quillayute River system and the Hoh River are available on [WDFW's website](#).

Meanwhile, there's still time to provide input on the **summer salmon fishing** seasons. Several public meetings have been scheduled throughout March as fishery managers continue to develop the 2013 salmon seasons, which will be finalized in mid-April. For more information on the meetings, visit WDFW's [North of Falcon website](#).

## Southwest Washington

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

Despite modest run-size forecasts, this year's **spring chinook** fishery got off to an early start on the lower Columbia River, where anglers were reeling in ocean-fresh “springers” by mid-February. Fishing will continue to ramp up through March, as the bulk of the run moves in from the ocean, said Joe Hymer, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

“The fishery got off to a fairly quick start, no doubt due to favorable weather and river conditions through late February,” Hymer said. “If those conditions continue, anglers should do well in the weeks ahead.”

Sport fishing for salmon and steelhead has been open since Jan.1 below the Interstate 5 bridge, but expands upriver to Beacon Rock beginning March 1. Bank anglers can fish up to the fishing boundary below Bonneville Dam but boats will be limited to Beacon Rock downstream.

The fishery below Bonneville Dam is scheduled to run through April 5, but will close on two Tuesdays – March 26 and April 2 – to accommodate possible commercial fisheries.

Above Bonneville Dam, the fishery will be open to boat and bank anglers on a daily basis from March 16 through May 5 between the Tower Island powerlines six miles below The Dalles Dam and the Washington/Oregon state line, 17 miles upriver from McNary Dam. Bank anglers can also fish from Bonneville Dam upriver to the Tower Island powerlines during that time.

Effective March 1, the daily limit is six adipose-clipped salmonids, including no more than two adult fish and no more than one adult chinook below Bonneville Dam. The limit is the same above the dam, except that anglers may keep two adult chinook starting March 16.

To facilitate the release of wild, unmarked fish, anglers fishing for salmon, steelhead or cutthroat trout are now required to use **barbless hooks** on the mainstem Columbia River downstream of the Washington/Oregon state line.

Barbless hooks are not currently required on Columbia River tributaries, but that issue will likely be considered during this year's North of Falcon season-setting process. The public will have an opportunity to comment on that and other issues at a meeting scheduled March 12 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Vancouver Water Resources Education Center, 4600 SE Columbia Way, Vancouver, Wash.

Based on this year's preseason forecast, 141,400 upriver spring chinook will return to the Columbia River in 2013 – about 25 percent below the 10-year average. That forecast follows three years of strong returns of fish destined for waters above Bonneville Dam, including last year's run of 203,000 upriver fish.

"The preseason forecast is definitely down this year, but – for perspective – it is still twice as large as those we saw in the 1990s," Hymer said.

Based on that forecast, the initial harvest guideline allows anglers fishing below the dam to catch up to 5,000 hatchery-reared upriver chinook before the run update in late April or early May. Another 670 adult fish will be reserved for anglers fishing between Bonneville Dam and the Washington/Oregon state line, 17 miles upriver from McNary Dam.

Fishery managers expect anglers fishing below Bonneville to reach the 5,000-fish guideline by April 5, but could extend the season if enough fish are still available for harvest, said Ron Roler, WDFW Columbia River policy manager. "Salmon returns are highly variable, and we'll have a better idea what the season holds once the bulk of the run starts moving upriver," he said

While upriver fish make up the bulk of the catch, spring chinook returning to the Willamette, Cowlitz and other area tributaries also contribute to the mainstem fishery. However, due to subpar run projections, in-river fisheries for spring chinook will be closed or curtailed in several of those rivers this year to meet spawning goals at area hatcheries. Rivers affected by emergency rules are:

- **Lewis River:** All chinook must be released from the mouth upstream to the mouth of the East Fork until further notice. The mainstem Lewis remains open for hatchery steelhead.
- **North Fork Lewis River:** All chinook must be released from the mouth of the East Fork upstream to Merwin Dam until further notice. Through May 31, fishing is closed for all species from Johnson Creek (located downstream from the Lewis River Salmon Hatchery) upstream to Merwin Dam. The North Fork Lewis from Johnson Creek downstream remains open to fishing for hatchery steelhead.
- **Kalama River:** All chinook must be released from the boundary markers at the mouth upstream to the upper salmon hatchery (Kalama Falls Hatchery). The Kalama River remains open to fishing for hatchery steelhead.
- **Wind River:** The entire river will be closed to fishing March 16-31. From April 1 through July 31, anglers will be limited to one hatchery chinook or one hatchery steelhead per day from the mouth (boundary line/markers) upstream to 400 feet below Shepherd Falls. Wild chinook and wild

steelhead must be released. All fishing is closed until further notice from 400 feet below Shipherd Falls upstream, including all tributaries.

For additional information, see the [rule change notices](#) on the WDFW website.

Hymer said WDFW will monitor returns to all four rivers to determine if the emergency restrictions can be lifted. No emergency restrictions are currently planned for the Cowlitz River, Klickitat River, or Drano Lake, where fishing regulations for spring chinook and steelhead are consistent with those in the [Fish Washington](#) rules pamphlet.

In other waters, anglers should be aware that March 15 is the last day to fish for **steelhead** on Abernathy, Cedar (Clark Co.), Germany, Mill (Cowlitz Co.), Rock (Skamania Co.), and Salmon (Clark Co.) creeks and on the Coweeman, Elochoman, Grays, East Fork Lewis, South Fork Toutle, and Washougal rivers.

Meanwhile, anglers can catch and keep **white sturgeon** from Buoy 10 upstream to Bonneville Dam, and in The Dalles and John Day pools. Fishing has been slow, but anglers have been landing a few legal-size fish, particularly in the John Day Pool.

The daily limit is one white sturgeon per day in all waters where retention is allowed. The annual retention limit is currently five fish in Washington, although the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission recently voted to reduce the annual limit to one fish starting May 1. Watch the [WDFW website](#) for more information on the new annual retention limit in the weeks ahead.

Fishery managers from Washington and Oregon reduced this year's harvest rate for white sturgeon by 15 percent on the lower Columbia River, but that reduction is largely offset by a slight increase in the legal-size sturgeon population – the first indication of improvement in five years. As a result, the harvest guideline for the recreational sturgeon fishery below Bonneville Dam will remain virtually unchanged at 7,790 fish.

As in years past, 80 percent of the allowable catch will be allocated to the sport fishery and 20 percent to the commercial fishery. Under the new harvest rate, the portion of the catch available to recreational fisheries will be allocated as follows: 4,040 fish in the estuary, 2,020 above the Wauna powerlines, and 1,730 in the Willamette River.

Fishing seasons approved for 2013 in the lower Columbia River are as follows:

- **Buoy 10 to the Wauna powerlines:** Retention of white sturgeon is allowed daily from Jan. 1 through April 30 and from May 11 through June 30. From Jan. 1 through April 30, sturgeon must measure between 38 inches and 54 inches (fork length) to be retained. From May 11 through the end of the season they must measure between 41 inches to 54 inches (fork length) to be retained. Catch-and-release fishing is allowed on days when retention is prohibited.
- **Wauna powerlines to Bonneville Dam:** Retention of white sturgeon is allowed three days per week (Thursday through Saturday) from Jan. 1 through June 15 and from Oct. 19 through Dec. 31. Sturgeon must measure between 38 inches and 54 inches (fork length) to be retained. Catch-and-release fishing is allowed on days when retention is prohibited. Effective through April 30, angling is prohibited from a line between the upstream end of Sand Island, located east of Rooster Rock State Park, to a marker on the Oregon shore downstream to a line between the lower end of Sand Island and a marker on the Oregon shore.
- **Pools above Bonneville Dam:** Fishery managers reduced the harvest guideline for the Bonneville Pool from 2,000 fish to 1,100, because monitoring data indicate that the sturgeon population did not increase over the past three years as expected. Sturgeon retention was allowed through Feb. 10, with additional days possible in June. Retention fisheries in the two reservoirs between The Dalles and McNary dams are scheduled to proceed until their respective 300 fish and 500 fish guidelines are met.

Another option is **walleye**, which are now on the bite above Bonneville Dam. The **kokanee** fishery is also picking up in Merwin Reservoir and should improve throughout the month. For other freshwater fishing options, check the [stocking schedule](#) on WDFW's website for **trout** plants throughout the region.

## Eastern Washington

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

About a dozen lakes throughout the region open to fishing March 1, and all should be ready for action.

Six Tucannon River impoundments on WDFW's Wooten Wildlife Area in Columbia County – Big Four, Blue, Deer, Rainbow, Spring and Watson lakes -- are looking good, said area manager Kari Dingman. "It already looks like spring on the Wooten," Dingman said. "The lakes are all stocked and the campgrounds are cleaned up and ready for opening day. There is still snow up high on the ridge tops, and it's still a little muddy along the lake shorelines, but the sun has been shining and the pussy willows are starting to bud."

Big Four Lake received its allotted 2,000 "catchable" rainbow trout (10- to 12-inch, one-third pounders) and 300 "jumbo" rainbows (measuring more than 14 inches and weighing one pound each). By the opener the other five lakes will receive the first of several plants of similar sized rainbows, with subsequent stocking periodically through June.

Glen Mendel, WDFW district fish biologist, said because Beaver Lake, a seventh Tucannon River impoundment, is weedy and shallow it will not be stocked for the third consecutive year. Fish Hook Pond in Walla Walla County also will not be stocked this year, he said.

WDFW Tucannon Fish Hatchery Manager Doug Maxey reports that other year-round-open fisheries in southeast Washington will be stocked. Asotin County's Golf Course and West Evans ponds; Columbia County's Dam, Dayton Juvenile and Orchard ponds; and Walla Walla County's Bennington Lake and Hood Park, Jefferson Park, Lions Park and Quarry ponds, are all receiving initial trout plants. Quarry and Dalton lakes, as well as Marmes Pond in Franklin County, will be stocked by March 1, as will Golf Course and West Evans ponds in Asotin County. Pampa Pond, in Whitman County, opens March 1 and will be well-stocked with catchable-size rainbows.

Anglers can find the total trout allotments for these and other fisheries, as well as weekly catchable trout plant reports, on WDFW's [website](#).

Other fisheries in the region that open March 1 rely more on "put, grow and take" trout stocking, says Randy Osborne, WDFW central district fish biologist. "These are about eight-inch trout stocked last fall or spring that have grown and are ready to harvest this season," he said.

Amber Lake, in southwest Spokane County, was stocked with 5,000 rainbows and 1,000 **cutthroat trout** last May. It opens for catch-and-release only fishing March 1, and then shifts to a two-trout-per-day harvest season April 27.

Medical Lake, in southwest Spokane County, was stocked with 2,500 rainbows last May, and will be stocked with another 1,000 rainbows, plus 2,500 **brown trout**, this spring. Medical Lake is under selective gear rules, motors are prohibited, the minimum size limit for trout is 14 inches, and the daily catch limit is two trout.

Downs Lake, east of Sprague on the Lincoln/Spokane county line, should be stocked with 5,000 rainbows by the March 1 opener if weather allows. Downs also has warmwater fish species, and there is a minimum size limit of nine inches for black crappie and a daily catch limit of 10.

Liberty Lake, in eastern Spokane County, received 45,000 brown trout fry last fall and 700 "jumbo size" (at least one-pound) browns this spring. Liberty is also being stocked this spring with 5,000 catchable size (one-third pound or 10-inch) rainbows, and 100 jumbo size rainbows.

Coffeepot Lake in Lincoln County received 5,000 “put, grow and take” rainbows last spring, and will receive another 5,000 this year. Selective gear rules are in effect, plus an 18-inch minimum size and one-fish daily catch limit.

Osborne also notes that March is the last month to fish the winter-only lakes in the region – Hog Canyon Lake in Spokane County, Fourth of July Lake in Lincoln County, and Hatch and Williams lakes in Stevens County. These Dec. 1-March 31 fisheries are mostly ice-fishing opportunities, but Osborne notes recent mild weather has probably left ice conditions dangerous.

Year-round-open waters in the region can be very productive during March. Lake Roosevelt is still providing catches of rainbow trout and **kokanee**, mostly in the Grand Coulee Dam area. Rock Lake in Whitman County is still producing decent catches of rainbow and brown trout. Silver Lake in Spokane County has been yielding **yellow perch** up to nine inches through the ice, although ice conditions are likely deteriorating.

Another kind of fishing is available at the Inland Northwest Wildlife Council’s 53rd annual [Big Horn Outdoor Adventure Show](#), March 21-24, at the Spokane County Fair and Expo Center. Some 5,000 trout are stocked in three huge indoor lakes for kids to catch at “Fishing World,” as well as a “Virtual Reality Fishing Simulator,” a fishing demonstration tank, lots of fishing seminars by experts, and hundreds of fishing equipment and charter service vendors. WDFW staff will be on site selling fishing licenses and talking with visitors about all things fish and wildlife.

## **Northcentral Washington**

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

Fishing for **whitefish** and **hatchery steelhead** opens March 1 on the Methow River, from the mouth at the Highway 97 bridge to the confluence with the Chewuch River in Winthrop.

The re-opening of the steelhead fishery will help reduce the proportion of hatchery fish on the spawning grounds and further reduce competition between natural origin and hatchery juvenile production.

Steelheaders have a daily limit of two fish, with a minimum size of 20 inches, and must keep hatchery steelhead – identifiable by a missing adipose fin. Adipose-fin-present steelhead must be released unharmed and cannot be removed from the water prior to release. Night closure and selective gear rules are in effect. Anglers are required to possess a Columbia River Salmon/Steelhead Endorsement as part of their valid fishing license.

Whitefish anglers must follow selective gear rules in areas open to steelhead fishing, and the daily limit is 15 whitefish.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) district fish biologist Bob Jateff said the Methow and other steelhead fisheries may be closed on short notice depending on participation and catch rates of natural origin fish. He advises anglers to regularly check the fishing hotline at 360-902-2500 or the [WDFW webpage](#).

Also opening March 1 are dozens of Columbia Basin lakes stocked with **rainbow trout**, and WDFW District Fish Biologist Chad Jackson reports almost all are ice-free and fishable.

“Anglers should expect to have good catch rates on 12-inch yearling rainbows in Upper Caliche, Martha, Burke, and Quincy lakes,” Jackson said. “Upper Caliche and Quincy lakes will be the best bets for carryovers. Burke Lake was rehabilitated last October and restocked with about 12,000 catchable size rainbows in mid-February, so it should fish well, but there will be no larger carryover fish there.”

Jackson said another March 1-opening fishery -- Lenore Lake, near the town of Soap Lake in Grant County - still had about 20 percent ice coverage in late February.

"But with all the wind and warmer weather, I wouldn't be surprised if Lenore is ice free on the opener," he said. "Either way, it's still fishable." Lenore is on a catch-and-release only season through May. Big **Lahontan cutthroat trout** are the draw there.

March 17 marks the close of steelheading on two sections of the Okanogan River to protect natural origin steelhead. The sections are from the first powerline crossing downstream of the Highway 155 Bridge in Omak (Coulee Dam Credit Union Building) to the mouth of Omak Creek, and from the Tonasket Lagoons Park boat launch to the Tonasket Bridge (4th Street).

Other northcentral region waters that will continue to be open for steelhead angling until further notice include:

- Mainstem Columbia River from Rock Island Dam to boundary markers below Wells Dam and from Highway 173 Bridge at Brewster to 400 feet below Chief Joseph Dam.
- Wenatchee River from the mouth to 400 feet below Tumwater Dam, including the Icicle River from the mouth to 500 feet downstream of the Leavenworth Fish Hatchery Barrier Dam.
- Okanogan River from the mouth to the Highway 97 Bridge in Oroville, except for the two sections that close March 17.
- Similkameen River from the mouth to 400 feet below Enloe Dam.

March is the last month for the catch-and-keep fishing season at several Okanogan County lakes that shift to catch-and-release April 1. Big and Little Green lakes near Omak, Rat Lake near Brewster, and Davis Lake near Winthrop have been producing **rainbow trout** catches through the ice. Year-round-open Patterson Lake near Winthrop has also been a good trout ice fishing spot. But Jateff warns anglers to use caution as the weather starts to warm this month and ice thickness diminishes.

## **Southcentral Washington**

(Benton, Franklin, Kittitas and Yakima counties)

Spring chinook salmon are moving up the Columbia River, steelhead fishing should pick up soon and trout fishing will definitely improve starting early this month.

"We start stocking **trout** in year-round lakes in early March and continue right through June," said Eric Anderson, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "This fishery is really our bread and butter, and anglers look forward to it all year."

In March, WDFW will stock 20 lakes and ponds in Yakima, Kittitas, Franklin and Benton counties with thousands of "catchable size" rainbows, along with hundreds of jumbo trout weighing 1 to 1½ pounds. For more information, see the regional [trout stocking report](#) on the department's website.

Paul Hoffarth, another WDFW fish biologist, said anglers should also be aware fishing for **hatchery steelhead** usually picks up right before the season closes March 31. Some of the highest catch rates of the season are often recorded in March near the Ringold Springs Hatchery, he said.

"A lot of steelhead that have been hanging out all winter will make their final spawning runs," Hoffarth said. "That's when catch rates start rising again."

Fisheries for hatchery steelhead are open through March on the Snake River and on the Columbia River downstream from the wooden powerline towers at the Old Hanford townsite. Steelhead fishing is not permitted anywhere on the Yakima River.

Rather catch **white sturgeon**? The retention fishery for sturgeon is expected to run through July 31 above McNary Dam (Lake Wallula). Lake Umatilla, which extends from John Day Dam to McNary Dam, is also expected to remain open through March for white sturgeon.

Hoffarth notes, however, that the Lake Umatilla fishery is managed on a quota system and could close abruptly when the quota is reached. Anglers planning to fish the lake should keep an eye on the WDFW website for possible updates.

In both areas, anglers may retain only those white sturgeon that measure between 43 inches and 54 inches when measured from the tip of the snout to the fork of the tail.

Hoffarth also reminds anglers that some of the year's biggest **walleye** are caught in the spring. These fish are now preparing to spawn and are nearing their highest weight of the year, he said. Once commonly caught in Lake Umatilla below McNary Dam, walleye are now routinely caught above McNary Dam in Lake Wallula, including the lower Snake River and the Hanford Reach.

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#### **Random Links**

Billfish Conservation Act Signed Into Law: <http://joincca.org/articles/592>

A Guide to Help Understanding Kokanee:

<http://oregonfishingnews.com/ReadArticle.aspx?id=478>

**GOOD LUCK!**

