

The Guide's Forecast - volume 15 issue number 52

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **December 27th – January 2nd, 2014**

Willamette Valley/Metro – Effort for sturgeon downstream of Bonneville Dam is nearly non-existent. Sturgeon fishing opens up above the dam on Jan 1 for a small winter quota, likely to be filled fast.

The Willamette River at Oregon City is in great shape for catching a Christmas steelhead. Plunkers at Meldrum bar are getting an occasional fish, but they aren't setting the river on fire. Catch and release sturgeon fishing in the Portland harbor is lighting up however and more anglers should participate in this urban winter fishery.

McKenzie River levels were still rising on Tuesday this week from earlier precipitation but without rain in the forecast, it will be dropping all week. Prospects are fair for fly fishers targeting winter trout.

Winter steelhead counts are picking up at Willamette Falls which will soon create a catch-and-release fishery on the North Santiam for those who favor it. Some feel these wild fish should be left alone.

The Clackamas River is running a bit hot on the high side, but the color is very fishable. A few early steelhead are spread out in the upper stretch between Carver and McIver Parks, but better numbers aren't due until mid-January. Expect the river to drop into prime shape by the weekend.

Sandy River anglers are also experiencing higher than optimum, murky water mostly due to the ascending freezing level. A slow fall is predicted through the weekend. Steelhead have been dispersed throughout the system, but better numbers are on the way.

Northwest – Winter steelhead fishing on the north coast remains fair at best. The most reliable resources, the North Fork Nehalem hatchery and Big Creek hatchery hotlines, report slow action with just a few fish moving into hatchery traps following the last rain freshet and peak season timing. It's clear the early returns are not going to be large, hopefully, the later returning broodstock and wild run hasn't suffered the same fate.

Driftboaters working the Necanicum River over the weekend report poor success. Some fish were taken off the bank but success rates were low. A few fish were reported in the tail-outs but low, clear water kept fish skittish and off the bite.

Regardless of the sub-par returns, the Wilson and Nestucca systems as well as the North Fork Nehalem remain the best chance for the early season. This will be peak week for quality steelhead, just don't expect great results with the upcoming weather pattern and poor returns.

There is a good set of weekend tides to entice a last chance at a keeper sturgeon on coastal estuaries. Action is likely to be fair at best with juvenile crab likely to intercept offerings before sturgeon have a chance.

Razor clam diggers will see good tides over the weekend but the surf conditions will likely keep clams from coming close to the surface for diggers to harvest.

Crabbing has slowed in most coastal estuaries. Even the consistent lower Columbia River is a fair-at-best option this time of year, even poorer, considering the extreme tide series this weekend.

Southwest- Rough ocean conditions have prevented offshore boats from launching recently but when they can get out, good results for rockfish and lingcod can be expected.

Lingcod are moving into shallow water in anticipation of spawning in January and February, to the delight of rock and jetty anglers.

Crabbing is fair at Winchester Bay. Winter steelhead are being taken below Sawyers Rapids on the Umpqua mainstem but treat these wild fish with respect. Hatchery fish are on the way.

Boaters at Coos Bay and in tidewater on the Coquille are reporting fair but steady crabbing. A few winter steelhead have been caught but anglers are advised to hit the lower stretches of any coastal stream in low water conditions.

With the bay fishery done for the year at Gold Beach, anglers are hitting various stretches of the Rogue with mixed results. Brief rainfall early this week sparked a little winter steelhead action on the lower river but catches have stalled due to low, clear and cold water. Anglers on the middle Rogue are taking a few, mostly wild steelhead and inadvertently the occasional coho on a variety of lures but it has been spotty. Steelheaders on the upper river continue to take summers but these fish are well past their prime and winter steelheading won't be a viable option until February next year.

Commercial crabbers report slow fishing out of Brookings. Rainfall made little change in Chetco levels with the river continuing to drop with the flow predicted to be less than 400 cfs by the coming weekend. Catching a steelhead in these conditions will be extremely challenging.

Crabbing out of Port Orford is reported as good. A little rain fell on the area earlier this week but it had very little impact on the low, clear water on the Elk River.

Eastern – The cold waters of the Grande Ronde River are reported to be providing fair fishing for steelhead to anglers dressed for frigid weather. The Imnaha is another option but not as likely to produce as the Grand Ronde.

The John Day is largely frozen over with boat travel not possible. Action won't resume until warmer weather persists.

SW Washington- The Cowlitz River remains the best option for steelhead and even though fair catches are likely to persist for another week, it's likely past its prime.

The Lewis and Kalama systems as well as the Washougal will likely be fair for steelhead this week but anglers will have to work for success.

An 8-day razor clam dig is scheduled to begin on December 29th. Check the WDF&W web site for open beaches and best opportunities.

Columbia River Fishing Report – Nothing happening on the lower Columbia. Crabbing has slowed with the onset of the commercial season although the tide series last weekend was conducive to sport crabbing; it's just challenging to find limits with all the commercial effort in the lower river and adjacent areas in the ocean. It won't get any better either. We'll forgo a forecast for this week and likely the next several. Spend your time in pursuit of fish elsewhere.

Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reports, " Nada to report below Bonneville Dam. Sturgeon fishing opens up above the dam on Jan 1."

The Guide's Forecast – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) predicts, " Nobody is doing it, but the C&R sturgeon fishing below Bonneville Dam would likely produce if you find a wad of fish. The deep water around Cape Horn would be a great starting point, as would the old freshwater clam beds above Skamania Island. These spots have traditionally kicked out winter fish to fishermen of years past, when retention was allowed."

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reports, "The Willamette River at Oregon City is in great shape for catching a Christmas steelhead. Plunkers at Meldrum bar are getting an occasional fish, but they aren't setting the river on fire. Water conditions are also great for back trolling plugs which is the favorite method for boaters. Whether it be a 3.5 Maglip, a K-11X Kwikfish or a Wiggle Wart, all will get their share and occasionally outshine other techniques. Don't get too caught up in picking colors as all the standards will get fish. Blue pirate, green pirate, solid metallic red, blue or flame red all work equally well. Some boater still backtroll a sandshrimp or a prawn and when a few early springers show up, that is the go-to method that will take the first springer of the season. Catch and release sturgeon fishing in the Portland harbor is however lighting up and more anglers should participate in this urban winter fishery. The entire river from the Multnomah Channel on up to Willamette Falls has a solid population of sturgeon this time of year. But the better areas for getting into big numbers rather than the occasional fish are the Portland Harbor just above and below the St. Johns bridge, the Milwaukie area and up at Oregon City. Smelt, anchovy, squid, sand shrimp and herring are all favorite baits depending upon individual preferences (of the angler AND the fish)."

McKenzie water levels which were cresting on Tuesday this week, have started to drop as predicted at that time. Without precipitation in the forecast over the next week or so, expect to find steadily moderating flows here.

North Santiam flows dropped from 3,400 cfs to less than 2,400 cfs over the past two days. Conditions should be good as the river continues to drop over the coming week.

Mt. Hood Pond is open year-around but is restricted from April 1st through August 31st to youngsters 17 and under and anglers with a valid Oregon Disabilities Fishing Permit. It was stocked several times in the fall and has fish available for winter outings.

Huddleston Pond has been stocked with 300 "trophy-sized" trout measuring 16 inches or better.

Trout stocking in the New Year will be reported as the information becomes available. The stocking schedule usually isn't released until sometime in February or March.

The Guide's Forecast – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) predicts, "Expect fishing to continue as usual on Meldrum Bar with the random steelhead hitting the beach. With the water cleaning up, it should bring out a few more boats and plug pullers will score a few too. Catch and release sturgeon fishing will produce well for anglers who prefer action and numbers, over the hours spent trying for a "rare" hatchery steelhead."

Fly fishers on the McKenzie will find good water conditions and fair catch-and-release trout prospects. Nymphs will be most effective but keep an eye out for periodic sparse hatches.

Numbers of wild winter steelhead will continue to improve on the North Santiam as counts at Willamette Falls ramp up but with fewer than 200 counted thus far, there aren't enough fish in the river to target.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)

reports, "The Clackamas River is running just about optimum for steelhead fishers and will continue its slow drop through the weekend. A few early steelhead are spread out in the upper stretch between Carver and McIver parks, but better numbers aren't due till mid-January. Anglers intent on getting a Clack steelhead before the New Year would be well advised to cover lots of water and use methods that attract fish from a distance. Hardware like spoons and spinners are fabulous for stirring fish to move for your offering and backrolling a plug with a rattle would be a great choice for boaters.

"Right now, Sandy River anglers are also experiencing optimum water conditions with a slow, steady fall through the weekend. Steelhead have been dispersed throughout the system, but better numbers should be on the way. A good solid rain is needed to bring the brunt of the fish in. The Dabney Park and Oxbow Park areas have been putting out some fish for both boaters and bank anglers alike. The Sandy River offers water types that cater well to all methods, be it conventional drift fishing, float fishing or hardware. It's also a favorite with fly anglers who like to swing a fly with a double hander or indicator fish the pocket water. It has great floats for boaters, either raft, drift boat and sled. Pick your attack strategy and head to the Sandy for the awesome scenery if nothing else."

The Guide's Forecast – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) predicts, "A few steelhead will be available on the Clackamas river over the next few weeks, but effort might be better directed to other rivers where the run timing comes earlier. By mid-January, more fish will arrive with Feb, March and April producing even better yet.

"Conditions will be ripe this week on the Sandy for New Year's steelhead fishing. Water conditions will be excellent and it couldn't coincide better with the arrival timing of the rivers hatchery steelhead."

North Coast Fishing Report – After such a gloomy start, the North Fork Nehalem hatchery reported some sporadic good action on the 24th and 25th with a few limits of steelhead coming for anglers working the river near the hatchery. There were some 3-salt fish reported as well, tipping the scales over 12 pounds. It's been a rare glimmer of hope for a slow early start. The one thing we have going for us is the fact that we are entering peak season right now. Traditionally for the early run, the most fish enter in a relatively small window; the last week of December through the first week of January. That time is now.

Although the North Fork receives the largest number of hatchery plants, it's a good sign that any system on the north coast is producing anything at all. It's also likely that if the North Fork is producing some fish, than other systems are likely to have a shot of returning fish as well. We'll give the breakdown in the forecast section.

One report from the Necanicum River came in as unsurprising. The driftboaters almost did more dragging than drifting and saw a few fish in the tail-outs of some holes but never hooked a fish. They did talk to a few anglers that had luck the day before. Many smaller north coast systems never got enough water to rise river levels to any large extent. Most systems, even the larger watersheds might have come up only about a ½ of a foot. This wasn't the rain freshet we needed to really jump start the peak season.

Throughout the north coast systems, it's clear that interest is low and like the case on the North Fork Nehalem, for those persistent anglers (or stubborn, however you see it), you may be rewarded with good action but only if you're out there fishing. It's likely the same on other systems; you have to be there to catch 'em. Anglers fishing the Wilson are still coming home largely disappointed but anglers now have the highest likelihood for success. Those remaining in the lower reaches, especially below Sollie Smith Bridge, have the best access to fresh fish as they slowly make their way upstream in the low flows. Side-drifting remains the best bet for this stretch but some fish are being taken on plugs as well.

A recent drop in water temperatures, around 5 degrees on the Wilson River in the last 2 days is a pretty dramatic drop in short order. That certainly won't help with success rates but maybe the water temperatures will start to climb again in the near future.

The Nestucca remains slow for early returning adults but these fish move into Three Rivers so quickly that anglers don't have a great chance at them until they reach this small but productive tributary. Bank anglers fishing at the mouth of Three Rivers are finding an occasional fish. Bank fishing access is fairly wide-spread on Three Rivers and fish are more likely to bite in the smaller river system if the water isn't too low and clear.

Big Creek and the other Astoria area streams are finally getting a few fish but like other systems, it's pretty clear that these systems aren't going to be over-run with returns this year. Big Creek reported collecting 32 steelhead this week, bringing their total up to 53 for the season; not impressive but definitely better numbers this week as one would expect. The Klaskanine and Gnat Creek are sure to mirror the Big Creek system.

It's a bit early for the Trask but oftentimes, especially after a big rain, can produce some early catches of wild fish. We're really still a few weeks away from high expectations on this system and they may never get all that high unless the late component of steelhead had higher ocean survival rates than the early component.

There still aren't many anglers excited about pursuing sturgeon on Tillamook Bay. Despite good tides, effort remained low and that's certainly a good indicator that there wasn't much there to pursue. It will likely be catch and release options only after the New Year.

Offshore opportunity wasn't all that great either. With rough seas for much of the week, anglers wouldn't have had that great of an experience out there but lingcod are quite willing this time of year as we near the spawning phase for them.

The Guide's Forecast – As we enter peak season for early returning steelhead, anglers should see some of the best opportunity for the next several weeks. The problem may be however, it may not really be all that good. It's pretty clear by the early, early returns of adults that this is not going to be a big run but it could still justify a trip since there's really nothing else to fish for. The below systems should all produce some, and I emphasize, some steelhead, even in the dropping and clearing conditions over the course of the next week.

Gnat Creek, Big Creek and Klaskanine River – Look for these systems to produce mediocre results in the low flows but at least fish entering these systems won't be making fast time upstream although much of the lower reaches lie in private lands, inaccessible to the majority of sportanglers. Under these conditions however, fish may even be available in the tidewater stretches of these systems or extreme lower reaches where some access exists. You can also get to these tidewater steelhead using a boat using bobber and jigs or bait for best success.

Necanicum River – Likely to stay too low for productive fishing, anglers should explore the lower reaches below the RV Park downstream of the Cannon Beach Junction. There are a few pull-outs bank anglers can explore and the tidewater stretch can be productive under these conditions as well. Fortunately, the tide swings are gaining in intensity so there could be a batch of new fish coming in. This system will remain a top bet for bank anglers however; especially for anglers that can employ a stealthy approach.

North Fork Nehalem – This river will likely remain the most popular destination for bank anglers on the north coast with the best bank access close to the hatchery. Returning adults are coming into the trap in better numbers and with the low flows, fish won't move too quickly through this system. Regardless, the

best catches always seem to come from the hatchery area, where fish congregate in the highest numbers before entering the trap.

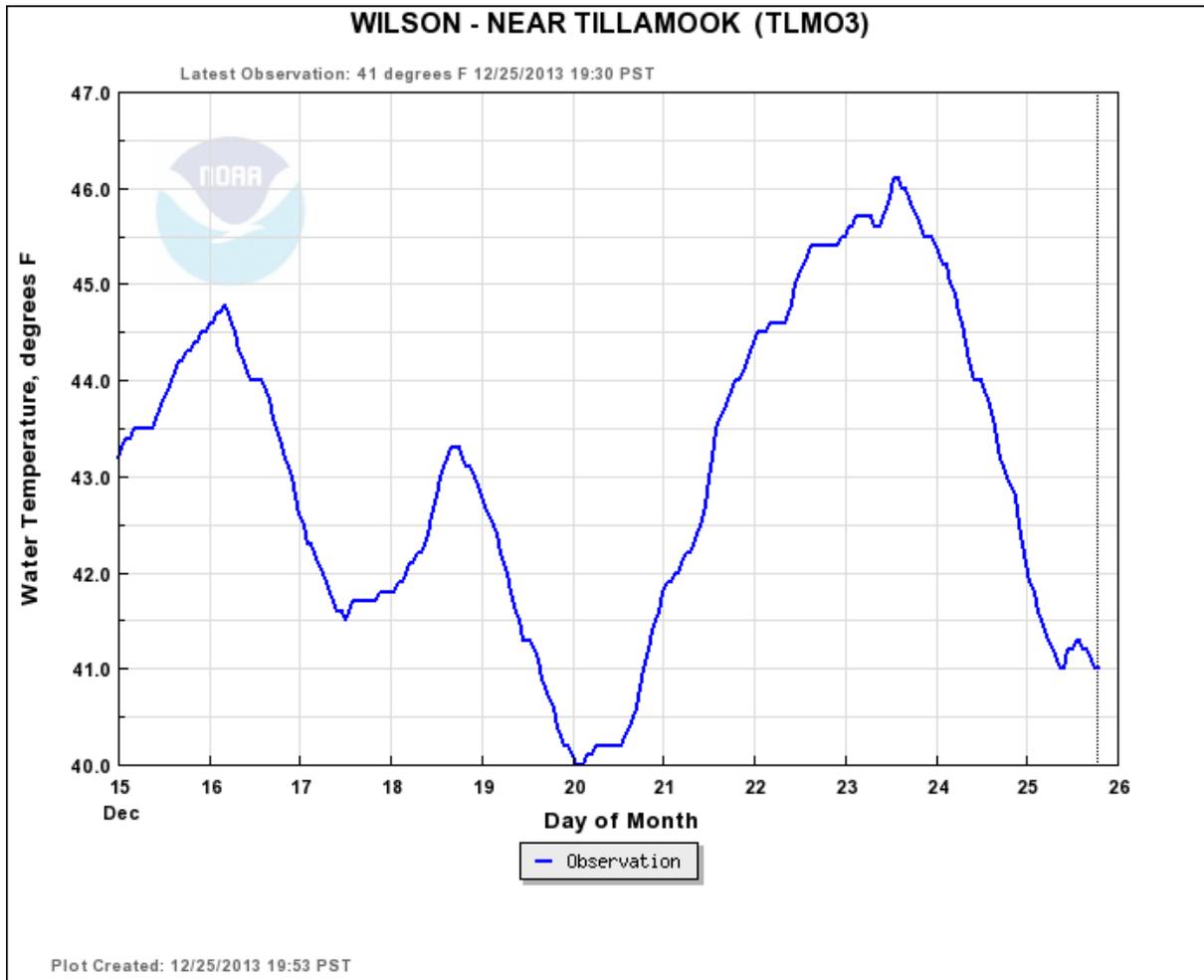
Kilchis River – Despite receiving as many hatchery plants as many of the other north coast systems, it doesn't seem to produce great numbers of biting fish. Boaters will have a difficult time getting a watercraft downstream but fish will concentrate in the deeper holes until we get more precipitation. There should be hatchery fish available but given the level of public access and the history of the stock here, don't expect a bunch to hit the bank this week.

Wilson River – The Wilson will remain one of the better bets but not because it gets any more plants than another system but because it's a bigger system, where fish aren't as likely to be skittish or see the angler before you see the fish (not that this is going to happen either...). As you can tell by the theme in this section, you're still going to see challenging conditions to catch fish in. For those versed in the water below Sollie Smith Bridge, you may have the best chance at new fish, likely coming in on the tide. Side-drifting bait or bobber and jigs often produce the best results in these lower reaches, on the Wilson anyway. As you can see however, there isn't much good news on the horizon either, more dropping flows on the Wilson River:



Temperatures are expected to stay close to freezing during the night so water temperatures will not likely climb all that much after the dramatic drop this week. A rise in river temperatures would be nice but even

a stabilization would be welcome and likely produce better catches over the weekend and beyond. Here is the temperature graph from the previous week:



Nestucca River – Steelhead will be speeding through the lower reaches here in hopes of getting to their liberation point, most likely Three Rivers hatchery. That makes the mouth of Three Rivers most attractive where plunkers and drift-fishers have good access to them. There are some early returning hatchery fish available in the mainstem but the bulk of run is scheduled for mid-February through March, when the traditional return of the wild stock is too. Put bluntly, if you going to fish the mainstem, concentrate most of your effort below the mouth of Three Rivers near Hebo.

Three Rivers – Anglers should see a definitive peak here this week. Like the North Fork Nehalem, fish will “beat feet” to the hatchery, where anglers will have the best access to them but those working the roadside holes along the highway should also stand a fair chance at success this week. Hopefully, hatchery workers will get the chance to recycle fish this week. You should still pursue steelhead using small offerings, maybe even single beads in these low flows.

There will be another good tide series by the weekend, which could spur another round of fresh steelhead but sturgeon anglers may want to take advantage of the last chance at consumptive opportunity on Tillamook Bay. Standard areas to target sturgeon this time of year include the West Channel, Middle Channel and at Bay City using sand shrimp for bait. Target the middle to last 4 hours of outgoing tide but the first part of incoming tide can be equally effective.

Ocean forecasts don't look too promising for offshore opportunity. The best thing going is lingcod fishing and the action should be good. Sea bass will be a bit more challenging to catch and although limits may be challenging, you should get enough fish to make a fine meal. Crabbers will largely be disappointed however with the intense commercial effort underway. Here is the ocean forecast as of Thursday afternoon but realize it's always changing:

FRI

SE WIND 10 KT...BECOMING SW 10 TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 3 FT.
W SWELL 9 FT AT 16 SECONDS. RAIN LIKELY IN THE AFTERNOON.

FRI NIGHT

W WIND 10 TO 15 KT...TURNING NW OVERNIGHT. WIND
WAVES 3 FT. W SWELL 9 FT AT 17 SECONDS.

SAT

N WIND 10 TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 10 FT AT
16 SECONDS.

SUN

NE WIND 10 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 8 FT.

MON

SW WIND 10 KT. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 9 FT.

The winds don't look too bad but the ocean swell will not only keep most recreational boats off of the ocean but will compromise razor clam diggers in their quest for New Year's appetizers. A pounding surf will likely keep the clams from coming up to feed. Don't expect easy limits if you limit at all.

Central & South Coast Reports – The cabezon season was slated to close at the end of September this year but with little more than half the quota having been taken at that time, it was extended and will continue through December 31st. One cabbie of at least 15 inches in length may be included as part of the seven-per-day rockfish bag limit.

While it's been a challenge to fill a rockfish limit recently, not so with ling cod which have been large and plentiful. In addition to a rockfish limit, ocean anglers may keep two ling cod The lingcod 22-inches or better.

Rock and jetty fishing can be rewarding over the winter months but safety is paramount. Some rock fishers wear a PFD and it's a pretty good idea to do so at this time of year. Night fishing is productive but adds another element of danger. Greenling and rockfish are plentiful while ling cod will often run larger at this time of year as they start to move into shallower water in anticipation of spawning. Use bait for greenling, curly-tail jigs for rockfish and lings. And caution; use lots of caution. Consider returning large female lings laden with eggs to perpetuate the species; target the males.

Siletz winter steelheading has been slow although there are a few being taken and, as with all coastal streams, a freshet would improve catches.

Yaquina Bay crabbing has been producing numbers far short of limits for crabbers with many undersized and a few still soft. Most traps and rings are taking numbers of red rock crab.

Crabbing has been poor to fair in Alsea Bay. Steelheading is predictably very slow on the Alsea River and will remain that way until the area receives relief from some measurable rainfall. According to the long-range weather forecasts, it will be a while.

According to recent reports, while winter steelhead are being taken occasionally, the Siuslaw has been very slow. The hatchery trap doesn't start operation until sometime in January.

Winchester Bay has yet to reliably produce limits of Dungeness but those who work their gear are getting plenty to eat. On the Umpqua mainstem, winter steelhead have finally started moving above Sawyer Rapids and catches upstream have improved. Well, catch-and-release, anyway, as the vast majority of winters in the mainstem will be wild. The Umpqua at Elkton picked up about six inches of depth with flows bumping up to around 3,200 cfs mid-week with water forecast to be dropping through the weekend. South Umpqua steelheading will pick up in January and should be in full swing late in the month and into February. Except for aging summers, there's not much of interest to anglers on the North Umpqua.

Crabbing has been worthwhile in Coos Bay with boats doing well and even dock crabbers taking some legals. While water conditions aren't optimum as little rain has fallen, a few winter steelhead are being taken daily. The top of tidewater has been most productive.

The lower Coquille is producing a few winters with best results coming to bait fishers between Myrtle Point and the town of Coquille. Winter steelheading historically peaks in January here.

Catches of enter steelhead have been slow in the lower Rogue where low, cold water is challenging anglers. The middle river has giving up a few steelhead and the occasional dark coho but it is spotty at best. Without fresh water in the river, steelhead have little incentive to enter or move upstream. The months of January through March are historically considered the peak of the winter steelhead season. Upper Rogue steelheaders are braving cold weather and low water to take summers which are past their prime. Pressure is as light as the water is low.

Very few winter steelhead are being taken on the Chetco as skinny water conditions have stalled catches here.

No rain at Port Orford means low and gin-clear conditions on the Elk and Dixes rivers which equates to lousy fishing conditions. Most years, early winter steelhead and late fall Chinook are being nailed at this time of year. It has been one of the driest seasons on record in the southwest corner of the state but it's not too late for a decent weather front to rejuvenate this fishery.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Fly anglers on the lower Deschutes are taking a few nice redsides along with large whitefish. The occasional Blue-Winged-Olive is taking wing amidst a few Caddis but nymphs are the best bet here.

Metolius fly fishers using nymphs have been taking a few very large (and notoriously finicky) trout. There are sporadic caddis hatches occurring but the trout seem disinterested.

Crooked River is flowing at just under 70 cfs and is producing trout to its cadre of devotees.

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Random Links

Gray whales are migrating now - here's where to see them:

http://www.oregonstateparks.org/index.cfm?do=thingstodo.dsp_whaleWatching

A guide's view of the McKenzie lawsuit:

<http://www.registerguard.com/rg/news/local/30867974-75/salmon-hatchery-mckenzie-wild-river.html.csp>

Map provides lake and reservoir water levels in Willamette Valley:

<http://www.nwd-wc.usace.army.mil/nwp/teacup/willamette/>

Outside Bend Productions' Top Videos for 2013:

<http://outsidebendproductions.com/>

We've run this previously but it's such a darned good resource, here it is again - Atlas of Oregon Lakes:

<http://www.aol.research.pdx.edu/>

GOOD LUCK!