

The Guide's Forecast - volume 16 issue number 3

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 17th – January 23rd, 2014**

Get the 2014 fishing summary and guide from The Guide's Forecast, written by Pro Guide Bob Rees
<http://www.theguidesforecast.com/2014OregonFishingSeasonSummary.pdf>

Willamette Valley/Metro – Sturgeon fishing in the Bonneville Pool has been just so-so. Participating anglers are reporting fewer keeper size fish than hoped. Expect the fishery to continue through the scheduled closure on Jan 19th.

Catch and release sturgeon fishing has been excellent in the Portland Harbor for the few anglers putting in the effort. Double digit days are the norm and although anchovies have been the preferred bait, most of the fish are pretty indiscriminate about what you feed them.

Meldrum bar is seeing very light pressure with very few steelhead caught per angler. Don't be surprised if a lucky angler catches the season's first spring chinook within the next few weeks.

Water levels at the McKenzie River will be dropping through the coming weekend and beyond. Fly anglers throwing Caddis and Blue-Winged Olive patterns should expect fair results for winter trout.

Angling adventures on the North Santiam remain primarily academic. A few winter trout are available for catch-and-release but there are still too few native winter steelhead to target.

As of this writing, anglers are waiting for the Clackamas River to recede so that they may resume steelhead fishing. Fishable water conditions should be available by the weekend.

The Sandy River is high and dirty as of now, but better conditions will be available by Wednesday or Thursday. Expect winter steelhead to be spread throughout the system by then with bait taking the majority of fish until water conditions drop and clear.

Northwest – Last weekend's rain event was the one all steelheaders have been waiting for. With rivers finally primed after a long dry spell, all coastal systems should produce catches by the weekend. Smaller streams were in ideal shape as of Tuesday with today likely to produce fair catches as well. Although Thursday and Friday are likely to be best on larger systems such as the Wilson, Nestucca and Trask in that order, catchable numbers should still be available for weekend warriors.

The North Fork of the Nehalem produced surprisingly mediocre results for near perfect conditions on Monday; just another indication that the run is coming in sub-par this year. Some systems will already be seeing spawned out steelhead despite the fact we're still relatively early in the steelhead season. Conversely, some wild and broodstock fish should show in other coastal systems such as the Wilson and Nestucca. Following this freshet, anglers will be in a steelhead lull, between the early season returns and later returning wild and broodstock fish that have a strong 6-week window from mid-February through the end of March. It's likely that returns of these late fish will be down as well.

With strong winds and rough ocean conditions, boaters kept their vessels in-harbor for the last several days. Although we're entering a period of calm weather, ocean conditions are expected to remain rough, keeping bottomfishers and ocean crabbers from accessing willing seafood. Windows of opportunity are likely to be limited through March.

Softer tides may once again bring crabbers to the lower Columbia. Although success rates are likely to continue to fall, it may be the best bet for keepers on the north coast. Other estuaries are likely to be inundated with fresh water to produce measureable results.

Southwest- The storm watch is over on the coast with the accompanying precipitation welcome as most rivers were critically low at a time when steelheading should be excellent. Now that the storm has passed, water levels are moderating and fishing results are ramping up.

While high swells such as those which pummeled the Oregon coast over the past weekend will create conditions too rough for steelhead to cross, the ocean is laying sown as coastal rivers drop, creating ideal conditions for winters to enter and improved results for steelheaders.

Offshore bottom fishing will resume as the ocean calms sufficiently to allow launches. Rockfish and ling cod results are expected to be good.

There will be no depth restrictions through March although cabezon may not be retained until July. Forecasts indicate swells moderating Saturday this week but building again through the weekend. Check current reports for updated information.

Lower Umpqua steelheaders have been enjoying decent fishing for several weeks but with rainfall over the past weekend, upper stretches will share in the bounty. The first hatchery winters will be entering the South Umpqua as well although populations of winter steelhead sufficient to create a decent fishery here is still a few weeks away.

Crabbing has been good for boaters on Coos Bay and fair to good for those crabbing from the docks. Recent rainfall is not expected to affect results. Clam diggers will have an opportunity this week with low tides occurring at late in the day on Thursday this week with best results expected around Charleston, Cape Arago Highway and at Clam Island.

Precipitation fell far short of predictions regarding impact on for Rogue levels. Flows on the lower Rogue increased slightly but fell back to nearly the same as those before rain started to fall. Rain pushed water up on the middle river early this week but anglers will find it at pre-storm levels in the coming weekend. As a result of these lackluster effects from the storm, fishing is slow on the middle Rogue and only a little better on the lower river where half-pounders are also available. Steelheaders on the upper stretch are still picking up the occasional elderly summer fish although a well over 100 winters have made it to the hatchery so there's reason for optimism in the not-to-distant future. Anglers fishing below the Hog Creek boat ramp are now allowed to keep one wild steelhead a day as long as it's 24 inches or better. Bait may be used anywhere on the Rogue now.

As seas calm, jigging for rockfish and ling cod just outside Brookings Harbor is expected to be good. Chetco levels crested over the past weekend and will continue dropping through the weekend to come and are forecast to get skinny once again. Steelheading was fair prior to this freshet and is expected to be good as fresh winters enter the system. The run this season is predicted to be better than average with the height of the season historically occurring during the month of January.

Low, clear water will once again be the condition on the Elk and Sixes rivers by the coming weekend.

Ice fishing is ongoing at Diamond Lake, producing fair catches to most although those who find concentrations of fish are doing quite well.

Eastern – Fly fishers on the lower Rogue are reporting slow to fair results with a few trout being hooked and very few steelhead biting.

Trollers fishing at 50 to 60-foot levels have seen some improvement in Bull Trout catches at Lake Billy Chinook.

Ice fishers auguring holes in the frozen surface at Lake of the Woods are catching yellow perch for their efforts. This fish make excellent table fare.

SW Washington- The Cowlitz was the bright spot over the weekend with fair success coming for steelheaders from both the bank and boat fisheries. It will likely remain the top bet until late season wild and broodstock fish return to the Kalama and Lewis systems as well.

The Washougal remains a poor option for steelheaders and it's not likely to improve.

Trout plants, including both broodstock fish to 10 pounds and smaller catchable keepers by the thousands were recently planted in Lake Sacajawea in Longview, Battle Ground lake, Klineline Pond and Kidney Lake near North Bonneville. These fish should be actively feeding in the warming weather pattern.

Columbia River Fishing Report – With few folks eyeing options on the lower Columbia, most are simply anticipating when the smelt run will show. Unfortunately, sport or commercial anglers don't have access to this run of smelt but it's a simple show of ecosystem health. After such a strong showing last year, anglers are hopeful that the smelt show, and thus a healthy sturgeon population literally on their tails.

One remarkable note, four spring chinook have already passed Bonneville Dam, as of January 16th. Also notable is the fact there are no recent records of springers passing Bonneville this early in the year, let alone, 4 salmon. Certainly the low and warmer than usual flows may have something to do with this.

Crabbing remains an option on the lower Columbia but based on the effort, catches are dramatically slowing down. The lower river remains busy with commercial pots but effort from the commercial fleet is also waning for obvious reasons.

Sturgeon fishing in the Bonneville Pool has been just so-so. Participating anglers are reporting fewer keeper size fish than hoped. Plan on sorting through a lot of sub-legals to find a keeper or two. Anchovies have been the favorite bait, but anglers are getting bites on all the usual offerings. Water temperature has bumped up a couple degrees which should improve the bite a smidge. The wind will become more of a problem through the rest of the opener. Expect the fishery to continue through the scheduled closure on Jan 19th.

The Guide's Forecast – Still nothing to fish for on the lower Columbia although there is a chance that there are some early spring chinook in these reaches. You won't find many people pursuing them but if the weather continues to cooperate, we could see the season's first spring chinook anytime now. Early February often produces spring chinook on the lower Willamette and they have to swim through the Columbia to get to the Willamette. Another week of nice weather won't hurt prospects for early springer seekers. Also, see our above note, that 4 spring chinook have passed Bonneville already.

Expect more of the same on the Bonneville pool for catch and harvest sturgeon fishing. Sorting through a lot of sub-legals to get a keeper or two is the program. the Plan on going early as the wind builds through the day and at times becomes unbearable.

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – **Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** reports, Catch and release sturgeon fishing has been excellent in the Portland Harbor for the few anglers putting in the effort. Double digit days are the norm and although anchovies have been the preferred bait, most of the fish are pretty indiscriminate about what you feed them. Don't get to caught up in preparing the super top secret bait that is hand dipped from river-X, cured in a four part brine with

ingredient available only on line and shipped next day air from the other side of the globe, only to be blessed by Jim Conway's great grandfather. These fish are hungry and actively feeding and they just as soon eat McDonald's as they would McCormick and Schick's. Meldrum bar is seeing very light pressure with very few steelhead caught per angler. The better part of the run has already passed by this fishery and with the shrunken hatchery steelhead plants to the Willamette tributaries, this fishery is hardly a shadow to the not so distant past. Don't be surprised if a lucky angler catches the seasons first spring Chinook within the next few weeks. Last season the first confirmed Willamette springer came on January 26th from Sellwood, to lucky angler Bob Ross who was fishing with none other than John Shmilenko, aka "The Sultan of Sellwood".

McKenzie flows which increased to 5,800 cfs at Vida on January 12th, have been moderating since that date and are now approaching pre-freshet levels. As of mid-day Thursday, January 16th it measured just 3,750 cfs.

North Santiam levels rose from 3.5 feet to the six-foot level at Mehama on Monday this week as a result of the passing rain storm.

The Guide's Forecast – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) predicts, "The catch and release sturgeon fishery on the Willamette river is the best game in town. Expect the fishing to hold up through the spring and it often fishes well even in high, murky water.

Also worth a shot is the Middle Fork Willamette which is open for trout fishing below Hills Creek Dam. Water flowing below any of the dams will be slightly warmer and will hold trout.

Catch-and-release trout fishing is expected to be fair in the McKenzie below Leaburg Lake, It's closed to all fishing above the lake until the general trout opener on April 26th.

North Santiam levels have been dropping sine Tuesday this week and are predicted to continue with dry weather. As of mid-day January 16th, it was 4.3 feet at Mehama with flows at 3,000 cfs. This would be a decent level to fish if there were enough in the river to target. This, unfortunately, is not the case. Fewer than 250 winter steelhead have been counted at Willamette Falls.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) reports, As of this writing, the Clackamas River is in prime shape but the fishing is far less than prime. Although the peak of the run is still a few weeks off, many locals are surprised there aren't more steelhead available. What fish there are should be spread throughout the river with best fishing above Riverside Park. All the standard tricks and methods will work, but boaters do best free drifting small baits/yarn or pulling plugs, while bank angler have warmed up to bobber fishing bait, yarn or jigs more than anything else. The river should stay in good, fishable shape for the better part of a week or until we get the next blow-out.

The Sandy River is also in prime shape, but the fish have yet to show up in respectable numbers. Even Team Hook-Up, the legendary local Troutdale guide service was spotted on the Clackamas looking for greener pastures. Good water conditions will prevail through the weekend, but without rain in the forecast it will soon get low and clear. Catching steelhead when they are scarce means hunting for them and covering lots of water and putting your gear in front of every fish. Side drifting is a great technique for covering lots of water if you have a boat. bank anglers are encouraged to not stay in one place for long and if nothing bites after a few casts, move to a new spot and keep moving till you find fish.

The Guide's Forecast – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377) predicts, Anglers will find

lots of room on the Clack, at least until the big herd shows up. The bulk of the run shows up here sometime in February and runs through April, so it's a bit early to either get excited, or write this one off.

Expect good water conditions to prevail through the weekend on the Sandy River. Since there is no rain in the immediate forecast, the green color will quickly dissipate after that and low clear water will again be what have to deal with. Fish are scarce and what few there are, are spread throughout the system. remember to cover lots of water to score dividends.

North Coast Fishing Report – With few exceptions, anglers are still disappointed by the lack of showing our winter steelhead have made this year. For rivers throughout the north coast, results are dismal but there are some fish available for the dedicated angler. Starting with the smaller streams, conditions were prime by Tuesday, we targeted the Necanicum River that day.

The Necanicum couldn't have been in a better state on Tuesday and we had the advantage of accessing a private boat ramp, not far downstream of Black Bridge. This Black Bridge reach is un-floatable right now (and has been for some time) due to a large log-jam that has existed for quite some time. We put in about 2 miles upstream of Klootchie Creek, fishing some quality water, only yielding 2 steelhead and 1 coho. One of the 2 hatchery steelhead was a spawned out hen that was still very bright with the flesh cutting as orange as the fresh buck we landed first thing that morning. The buck was taken on a rag with peeled prawn tail in the taylor of the put-in that we used. The large hen (likely about 10 or 11 pounds) was taken on a small metallic pink corky with a small dab of eggs and peeled prawn tail and the dark coho (released of course) was also taken on a rag and eggs. We saw several bank anglers but no other boaters, all of which said they had no luck whatsoever.

Reports from the North Fork Nehalem weren't much better. Bank anglers working the hatchery were not faring well despite good water conditions. A few fish were taken off of the handicap ramp on the morning of the 16th but overall, the area has produced poorly. The hatchery had a recent injection of about 500 steelhead, totaling nearly 800 for the year. With the heaviest hatchery plants (90,000 smolts) on the north coast, 800 isn't a surprising number of returning adults but frankly, given the poor performance of steelhead kept this season, it did surprise me a bit. Some are certainly being recycled but this will be the last strong push of hatchery fish for this system and all the north coast systems until the wild and broodstock returns happen late in February and March.

The Big Creek hatchery is also finally seeing it's push of fish, long overdue. The hatchery got just over 100 steelhead on the 13th, which brings their total to just over 200 fish for the year. Fishing was fair at best near the hatchery but a large percentage of the river is in private ownership, making it hard to access for the general angler.

The Wilson has also recently produced poorly given the ideal conditions anglers were finding on Wednesday and Thursday. Steelheaders were very disappointed that high effort yielded little return. Some anglers were talking about catching more winter chinook than steelhead but the vast majority of anglers came away empty handed the last few days, under what would typically be ideal conditions on the bigger streams.

The facts are in; it's a less than average early winter steelhead return on the north coast.

Weather hasn't been conducive for any offshore opportunity and little effort took place for anglers in the estuaries over the weekend either. Crabbing has dropped off dramatically and given the poor commercial catch this year, likely won't improve anytime soon.

The Guide's Forecast – With the peak of the early winter steelhead season behind us, fishing will only taper from here. Hard to believe, huh? Anglers will still have opportunity for a few fresh fish but we'll find

that most of the willing biters for the next several weeks will be spawned out early run hatchery fish. Some of these fish may still be bright and cut orange; they certainly are more willing to bite after they've deposited their eggs.

Here's our river by river breakdown on what to expect:

Highway 30 streams – A few more fair days of fishing before you'll find more spent fish on these systems and the best fishing will be near the hatcheries themselves. Big Creek will likely remain the top bet with Gnat Creek and the Klaskanine River both a distant second.

Necanicum River- Like the Highway 30 streams, we've seen the best of the season already. I know it's not one for the record books but it will be until mid-February before any sign of measurable numbers of wild steelhead show. Until then, a few bright fish, both pre and post-spawn but mostly spent fish after the weekend.

North Fork Nehalem- Same story here; spent fish will begin to make up the bulk of the catch with few new fresh ones coming in. Also like other systems, fish near the area of liberation, also known as the hatchery. Drop down your bait size, even try the hot new single bead technique but no matter what you use, don't count on big numbers.

Wilson River- It's lull time on this system; the time between the early returning fish and the later returning hatchery broodstock and wild fish. The fishing will taper and won't improve again until mid-February at the earliest. It's likely that the later returning fish will mimic the early returns; less than impressive. We know the winter steelhead fishery is a bust when results were so poor over the last few days under ideal water conditions.

Trask River- Primarily a wild steelhead show, there have been a few caught and released at the hatchery already. Maybe the wild component won't suffer the same disgrace that the early returning hatchery fish have witnessed. The Dam Hole is always a strong option in high water but we're going to be in a dropping pattern for a while now.

Three Rivers- Another early season system, what few anglers remain targeting steelhead here, will continue to go home largely disappointed. More spent fish after the weekend with few fresh fish still yet to come; emphasis on few.

There really isn't much else to brag about on the north coast. The offshore forecast looks good for wind however the swell is forecasted to be large which doesn't play well for recreational boaters, assuming the bar conditions allow for passage in the first place.

The soft tides this weekend may be conducive to crabbing but don't count on much for your time; I've been surprised before however.

Central & South Coast Reports – The winter storm which dropped an inch or more of rain in places over the past weekend was a welcomed respite from extremely low water resultant of one of the driest seasons in southwest Oregon history. Water are dropping and clearing now with larger rivers generally in best condition today (Thursday) and Friday this week. Many of those rivers and particularly those which are smaller will be returning to low flow situations by the weekend with little respite in the forecast over the next 10 days or so.

Friday this week may allow a window of opportunity for offshore boaters seeking (what should be) excellent bottom fishing prospects for ling cod and rockfish as well as ocean crab although results for the latter has been less than inspiring. Bay crabbing in many instances has actually been more productive.

Crabbing has been slow at Yaquina Bay with most boats only taking one or two legals for a days' effort. Alsea Bay out of Waldport has been somewhat better.

Crabs have been seen by the hundreds dead on the beach north of the Siuslaw River mouth. Hypoxia (lack of oxygen) is theorized as the cause as this situation occurred in June of 2013. It is hoped that a solution is found as Dungeness deaths due to hypoxic conditions offshore have been increasing and have been negatively effecting recreational crabbing.

Despite heavy angler assault following the freshet early this week, Alsea River action has been slow to spotty with only a few winters being landed per day this week.

Steelheaders on the Umpqua mainstem are hooking up with good numbers of winters. The vast majority of these will be wild fish at this time of year but action with them has kept rods bent. The most effective technique by far has been backtrolling plugs upstream of Sawyers Rapids. North Umpqua steelheaders have been playing catch-and-release with a few native steelhead. A number of hatchery steelhead have entered the South Umpqua with improved flows with results for these fish improving later in the month and good catches in February.

Catches have been good for boat as well as for dock crabbers in Coos Bay. Those who didn't take advantage of improved conditions for winter steelheading on the Coos or the North Fork and South Fork Coquille rivers following rain last weekend may be too late. Levels are expected to have dropped and the water to be running clear by the weekend. Side drifters fishing from Foster Bar to Agness are having marginal results. After a disappointing impact of rain earlier this week, Rogue levels are dropping to back to less than optimum levels. Plunkers did well over the past weekend when water levels rose slightly but the relief as a result of a dry season was short-lived. A few steelhead were taken on the lower river Tuesday and Wednesday before flows started to get skinny again. Steelheading on the middle river is slow. There is little pressure on the upper Rogue with only aging summers and a very few winters available to target although numbers of the latter will be improving in the coming weeks.

Steelheading was good earlier this week as Chetco levels improved but catches have slowed and expected to continue slowing as water levels drop.

Ice fishing at Diamond Lake has been slow to fair for many with a few getting into decent numbers in the 15 to 20 foot levels. Call Diamond Lake Resort at 541-793-3333 for a fishing report and the latest ice conditions.

Central and Eastern Oregon – Keep offerings small for trout on the low waters of the Crooked River at this time of year. Midges and Orange Scuds are traditional offerings. Dress for cold weather and avoid wading on anchor ice.

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Michael Teague: TGFMichael@gmail.com

Chris Vertopoulos: chrisv@pacifier.com

Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com

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GOOD LUCK!