

The Guide's Forecast - volume 16 issue number 4

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 24<sup>th</sup> – January 30<sup>th</sup>, 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** – The Bonneville pool catch and keep sturgeon fishery is now closed. A summer season will likely be forthcoming.

The catch and release sturgeon fishery on the lower Willamette River remains the best bet in town if action is your goal. Double digit days can be expected if the fish are located and they are relatively easy to find. Looking for the concentration of boats in the Portland Harbor is a common practice, but having a decent depth finder and knowing how to use it makes the "locating" easy. Little pressure and even less action is happening at Meldrum Bar, though the season's first spring chinook could be taken here or at Sellwood any time now.

McKenzie River flows have stabilized with little change expected until the next weather front moves through. Winter fly fishing is fair.

North Santiam levels will be fishable through the coming weekend. While there still isn't a lot of winter steelhead in the system, numbers are improving with a few taken recently by boats drifting from North Santiam State Park to Stayton.

On the Clackamas River, ideal water conditions are inviting but the distribution of winter steelhead is still discouraging. Better times should be ahead as the Clackamas "winters" come later than those of other drainages. Late February through April is generally peak time.

The Sandy River saw some winter steelhead success over the weekend but there is still little to get excited about. Water conditions are again approaching low and clear with more challenging fishing to follow. Fresh fish will still enter the system, but one by one rather than a big push. Best opportunities are available from Lewis and Clark State Park up to Dodge Park.

**Northwest** – Back to low and clear water conditions, steelheaders on the north coast are left to deal with less-than-ideal scenarios in what is already past prime early season for returning adults. Following the last rain freshet, anglers were already coming across spawned out fish although bright ones still cut orange.

One of the better options, the North Fork Nehalem continues to report low pressure and low catch. Four steelhead were reported off of the handicap platform on Monday and it's likely steelhead will become more motivated to feed after they've dropped their eggs in the gravel. The problem is, they make for poor table fare.

Even larger streams such as the Wilson and Nestucca are unlikely to produce quantifiable catches of quality steelhead in the near future. Anglers typically have to wait until late February or March before the second wave of returns happen; a mix of wild and some broodstock fish to NW watersheds. To find consistent success anglers will have to downsize their offerings and approach pooled up fish in a stealthy manner. Single beads have become popular recently and low water is the perfect time to employ this technique.

Despite moderating weather, the ocean swell continues to keep anglers at bay. Aggressive lingcod will be available when seas allow but rockfish catches will likely remain subdued until ocean temperatures warm and fish begin to school in greater numbers.

The lower Columbia has slowed dramatically for Dungeness crab. It will be summer before catches improve again.

**Southwest-** Nearly everyone took rockfish limits over the past weekend when boats were able to get out on the ocean. Lingcod catches were also good. Rough offshore conditions are keeping boats at bay most days, however.

Crabbing has been slow at Coos Bay despite little fresh water influence from the last storm. Catches of rockfish have been good off the jetties.

Flows on the lower Rogue have dropped back to pre-freshet levels with catches of adult and half-pounder steelhead slowing as a consequence. While a handful of winters have been caught, fishing on the middle river has been poor to slow and is unlikely to show improvement with water levels predicted to continue dropping through the coming weekend. Upper Rogue steelheaders have continued to hook colorful or spawned out summer fish this week as the population of winters in this stretch remains low.

Following a crest at 4,500 cfs with the storm front earlier this month, the Chetco has been steadily dropping. Steelheaders trying it in the coming weekend will see a result of that trend in low, clear water, flowing at less than 1,000 cfs. These are challenging fishing conditions calling for light lines, long leaders and diminutive baits. Long range trends indicate relief will come in the last week of January when another front is forecast to roll through.

A few winters were taken over the past week at the Elk River but it is now at extremely low and clear conditions in the absence of precipitation.

Little change is reported at Diamond Lake where ice fishing is ongoing with little snow on the lake's surface. Fishing is slow to fair.

**Eastern** – Fly fishers on the lower Deschutes report fair results for native reddsides. Caddis, Midges and Blue-Winged-Olives will remain the patterns of interest through the season.

Most recently reported at 58 cfs, Crooked River flows are getting low even for regulars here. Trout fishing is fair on midge patterns.

**SW Washington-** District steelheaders are dealing with conditions consistent with NW Oregon; low, clear water conditions and a lull in returning adults after the early season steelhead. The Cowlitz will remain the best option but better returns are likely later in March when wild fish, along with some broodstock programs kick in for fair spring steelheading into early April.

Anglers are more likely to get on the water and try for an early spring chinook on the mainstem Columbia. Although the best fishing won't happen for several more weeks, January or February sport-caught chinook are not unheard of. Willamette fish are typically the first to return but that component of the run is forecast to be mediocre so early season catches will be more challenging.

**Columbia River Fishing Report** – Although there are spring salmon in the Columbia River, your chances of catching one are next to nil. Mild temperatures and moderating flows make it possible however but springers caught this early in the season are often bound for the Willamette. Unfortunately, if the prediction is accurate, the Willamette run will be far from impressive. Rumors are circulating however that the first springer of the season has been taken; I just haven't seen any factual evidence. Other than that unlikely option, reports from crabbers in the lower river, reports are dismal. Following a heavy fall harvest, one boat reported working over 20 pots for just 18 keepers. Once you get below a

keeper per pot average, success rates are low. Apparently, the pots were also packed with high quality bait.

**Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** reports, "The Bonneville pool catch and keep sturgeon fishery is now closed."

**The Guide's Forecast** – Those pursuing spring chinook on the mainstem either have cabin fever or are truly dedicated anglers. If you think a February spring salmon tastes good, you should try a January one. I can only imagine..... One thing is certain, herring are almost always responsible for early season catches. You would want to use green or red label herring.

No rumors of smelt yet, but if they are going to show in any numbers, it should be in the next 2 weeks. Not that this does us any good as sport and commercial harvest is illegal.

Crabbing on the lower Columbia would be a waste of time. However, it's still likely to be one of the better bets for sportsmen anxious from fresh crustaceans. It might be hard to find fresh bait but it will be highly necessary if you plan on reaping any harvest whatsoever.

**Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** reports, "The catch and release sturgeon fishery on the lower Willamette River remains the best bet in town if action is your forte. Double digit days can be expected when fish are located and they are relatively easy to find. Looking for the concentration of boats on anchor in the Portland Harbor is the most common practice in locating sturgeon, but having a decent depth finder and knowing how to use it makes the "locating" easy. "sometimes, you may find a wad of hungry fish stacked like chord-wood and have nobody else in sight. The fact is, these fish move around and one day they will be in a usual hang-out, only to vacate it the next day and move a mile or two up or down river to another hole. It could be that they are actually getting out of Dodge because they are getting stressed by anglers catching them and letting them go with nothing in their bellies to show for. It could also be that the food source keeping them in a particular spot has dried up and they are searching for another. After all, food is scarce in winter months until the smelt show up. Either way, sturgeon anglers have to be prepared to move around and locate fish. Little pressure and even less action is happening at Meldrum Bar, though the seasons first spring Chinook could be taken here or at Sellwood any time now. Usually sometime in February, bar fishermen will start to beef up their gear and add prawns and sandshrimp to their spin n glows. Soon enough, two or three boats a day will loiter under the Sellwood bridge looking for a slab of fatty springer that NW fish mongers have put on a \$40 a pound pedestal."

Stable mid-week, waters of the McKenzie have started dropping again with continued dry weather. Fly anglers should fond good conditions for winter fishing over the weekend to come.

Keeping an eye on counts at Willamette Falls is a method to "guestimate" fish populations in the Santiam as about 25% of those counted are destined for that system. That said, passage at the Falls was fair but steady for 10 days starting January 11th, after which numbers of winters dropped back to single digits with the YTD total somewhat short of the 700 mark. North Santiam flows are at decent levels for fishing and will be gradually dropping over the coming weekend.

**The Guide's Forecast – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** predicts, "Catch and release sturgeon fishing on the Willamette river will continue to entertain anglers through the winter and spring. This week's mild temperatures will make conditions even better for an outing and will likely make the fish a bit more active. Get out and get after em. Like many of you, we here at The Guides Forecast are chomping at the bit waiting for the first spring Chinook to be caught. it could be tomorrow, it could be March 1st. We'll keep our ears and eyes wide open and give you the play by play as it unfolds."

McKenzie fly fishers will continue to enjoy fair catch-and-release fishing for reddsides with the standard seasonal patterns: Caddis variations and midges and to a lesser degree until the next set of showers pass through, Blue-Winged Olives.

While water conditions will make the North Santiam appear appealing, there are too few winter steelhead to target with much optimism. The stretch below Homestead Rapids produced a nice fish recently on a pink and white jig after spoons and spinners drew no strikes. All winters in the North Santiam are wild and must be released.

**Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** reports, "On the Clackamas River, ideal water conditions are inviting but the distribution of winter steelhead is still discouraging. Better times should be ahead as the Clackamas "winters" come later than those of other drainages. Late February through April is generally peak time. Anymore, many Clack regulars won't even wet a line on the river until Feb and March, knowing the bulk of the run shows up that late. Once more fish do arrive, the best fishing tends to be in the stretch above Riverside Park, up to Rivermill Dam. That leaves four different drifts for drift boaters and plenty of navigable water for powerboats. The lower Clackamas also offers pretty good opportunity for bank bound anglers with a multitude of pull-outs along the river as well as no less than five parks that offer access to good fishing holes.

"The Sandy River saw some winter steelhead success over the weekend but there is still little to get excited about. Water conditions are again approaching low and clear with more challenging fishing to follow. Fresh fish will still enter the system, but one by one rather than a big push. Best opportunities are available from Lewis and Clark State Park up to Dodge Park with good access for both boaters and shore anglers. Bobber and jig fishing will again take precedent with many fishermen and boaters in particular will also score well pulling plugs. The K-11X kwikfish is a great low water plug that dives deep and works well in the slower water. One attribute that stands out with the K-11 is that it does NOT have a rattle in it. In clear water, I believe the rattle can be a bit much and will likely scare off a potential opponent. Give me green/murky water and I'll use plugs with rattles to help the steelhead locate the approaching intruder. That is when the Maglip 3.5 and the clatter -tad version of the Tadpolly shine."

**The Guide's Forecast – Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** predicts, "Good water conditions will hold up on the Clackamas River through the week. As the weeks progress, more fish should enter the system giving more opportunity. Some rain is expected on Tuesday next week and it wouldn't be unwelcome.

"Although the Sandy river continues its slow drop, it is still plenty fishable and seasoned anglers will score using low water tactics. Its unsure how much precipitation is coming mid-week, but I'm betting on less rather than more. The Sandy could use a good shot of rain to add color and ramp up the flow, as well as bring in more steelhead."

**North Coast Fishing Report –** Depressed north coast steelheaders don't have much to look forward to the next several weeks. From mid-January through at least mid-February, steelheaders frequently experience a lull in success rates. This gap will be even more evident given the poor return of adults this year.

Reports coming in from every basin reflect the same results. Challenging fishing exists throughout the region. What few steelhead remaining in the systems are likely to be spawning or will have already spawned. Kelts will begin to make up the bulk of the catch. All the north coast staples will still have fish, you just won't find many fresh ones to make for a good quality take-home product. We'll cover the intimate details in the forecast section. I repeat, you don't have much to look forward to.

With steelhead a poor option, it's hard to believe there are even poorer options on the north coast. It's not as if this is any big surprise, but sturgeon remains catch and release in coastal estuaries and the ocean and bar has been too rough to access groundfish. This really leaves only Dungeness in our coastal estuaries and despite high salinity levels, catches are poor. Tides have been moderate through the weekend but will slightly increase this coming weekend. The weak tide exchanges can make for good bottomfishing along the jetty but be prepared to put up with lots of snagged gear.

**Late report** – This late report in from guides **Chris Vertopoulos** and **Grant Rilette**: Some decent fishing given the results from the last few weeks, Grant guided Chris and his dad Jerry down a north coast river on Wednesday, landing 4 fish for 5 hooked. Grant has become quite the bead fishing guide but Vertopoulos mentioned that jigs out fished beads on this day. The 15 pound broodstock fish that Chris took was not only thick and chrome but was caught with a jig under a bobber above Mills Bridge. Not much other traffic on the water and the weather was great!

**The Guide's Forecast** – Although somewhat of a futile exercise, here's the breakdown for this week's options. If you haven't picked up on the theme already, we don't have a lot to get excited about this weekend or the next several weeks in general. Starting with the best prospects, the Wilson River may see a rare fresh early returning fish but the bulk of the catch will be spawned out hatchery fish. Anglers may come across a rare wild or broodstock fish but the bulk of those adults will return in March. Given the depressed early returns, don't have high expectations for a banner late season surge either.

Looking to other systems, the Nestucca should get a nod as well. Although it's likely that returns to the Nestucca system are even poorer than the Wilson, the key is the larger systems will likely hold the heavier concentrations of fish. Not to overlook the simple fact fish may be less spooky on a larger body of water. Like the Wilson and all the other north coast streams, fresh fish will be few in number. Spawners will likely make up the bulk of the catch. Smaller systems such as the Necanicum, Highway 30 streams, Three Rivers and the North Fork of the Nehalem will all have a few biting spawned out fish available. All of these systems are again, in desperate need of a deluge.

Even if that rain comes in the next couple of weeks, action will only improve for spawned out fish until late February and March arrive. If you choose to pursue steelhead under these current conditions, it would behoove you to learn how to effectively fish single beads with long, light leaders.

Bank fishers working the smaller systems will need to be nearly invisible to find success. The North Fork Nehalem has recently reported a few fish coming off of the handicap platform. Again, fresh fish are becoming more unlikely by the day.

The offshore outlook for weather doesn't give saltwater sportsmen much to get excited about. There may be a day or two where wind waves are calm but the swell is still forecast to be around 8 foot high. When boaters can get out, good lingcod action should be anticipated and the rockfish bite should be improving soon as well.

**Central & South Coast Reports** – Boats were unable to launch out of central Oregon ports mid-week as offshore conditions were less than friendly. East winds are predicted to continue through the weekend with ocean swells moderating.

Southwest rivers would benefit from rain without exception although a few are producing modest numbers of winter steelhead. Meteorological prognosticators (weather-guessers) forecast a little rain on Monday and Tuesday next week but it will not be in the quantity necessary to sufficiently improve conditions and get the season underway.

Crabbing has been fair in Yaquina Bay with boats taking enough to eat but returning with catches that are varying degrees short of limits.

Winter steelhead counts just topped the 200 mark at the hatchery facility on the Alsea River. Anglers have been reporting slow fishing here in skinny water. The next round of winter rainfall should encourage a decent push of steelhead into the system.

Steelheading has been slow in the low water of the Siuslaw River with anglers only able to dredge up the occasional hatchery fish. Jigs have worked as well as anything else in these tough conditions.

Ling Cod catches have been good for boats launching offshore out of Reedsport although ocean crabbing has been disappointing. Winchester Bay has been poor to slow for crabbing recently. The best chance of a winter steelhead hookup is most likely the Umpqua mainstem where native fish are abundant. These fish must be released but offer a decent shot at some action while most other coastal rivers and streams are running too low to fish well. The Hatchery steelhead season on the South Umpqua is on the horizon and will likely heat up following the next decent round of rainfall. A few of those fresh native winters are finding their way in to the North Umpqua but results will be better down lower.

Crabbing is slow to fair in Coos Bay where boaters are putting in extra time to get only moderate numbers of Dungeness. Rockfish and ling cod are being caught from the jetties. River levels have dropped, sending winter steelhead hopefuls low on the Coos River. Anglers on the South Coos have picked up a few winters this week. Precipitation would reignite fishery.

Deeper slots and pools on the South Coquille are holding some steelhead and a few were taking earlier this week from tidewater on the lower Coquille. Conditions are challenging, however, with water levels very low.

Results have slowed for steelheaders on the lower Rogue as water levels have dropped. Side-drifters are taking a few adult and half-pounder steelhead drifting from Foster Bar to Agness. Fly anglers are hooking up occasionally in the skinny water are spinner flingers using smaller-sized hardware. While a few winters have made it up into the middle Rogue, results have been poor to slow in this stretch. Results for fly, spinner and bait fishers have been about equally dismal. Few are trying on the upper Rogue where numbers of winter steelhead are too low to hold much hope of a hookup and summers in this stretch are either spawned out or well past their pull date.

Water levels at the Chetco have been steadily receding since the freshet created by a winter storm in the second week of January. Effect of that earlier downpour was less than expected as moisture-starved ground absorbed much of it. Currently, the Chetco is once again low, clear and cold although some of the winter steelhead which entered are still available, albeit hunkered down in deeper holes. Steelheaders employing long, light leaders and small boats are catching a few daily.

A 68-foot commercial crabbing vessel went down at the jetty near the mouth of the Chetco River on Wednesday this week. All hands were rescued but it is reported to be leaking fuel with odor of fuel oil permeating the area. See **Random Links**, below, for details.

Elk and Sixes rivers won't be a consideration until the southwest coast gets more rain.

**Central and Eastern Oregon** – Trollers have been picking up bull trout at Lake Billy Chinook. Kokanee have been responding to jigs as well as trolled lures over the past week.

A few diehards have been hitting the water at Green Peter for off-season fishing. The reservoir level is down but the Thistle boat ramp is still useable. Fishing has been predictably slow bit a few decent

kokanee and fewer rainbows have been landed. Reports indicate that being out on the water is far superior to sitting indoors on dry, sunny winter days.

Trollers using downrigger landed good-sized lake trout at Crescent Lake over the past weekend in sunny, calm conditions. While the water is nearly 40 degrees at the surface, ice is forming around the edges of the lake.

Grande Ronde River steelheaders have been braving the cold to catch fair numbers of steelhead about half of which have been hatchery keepers.

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### **Random Links**

Beautiful Skeena River Steelhead Footage:

<http://vimeo.com/66457561>

The World's Deadliest Delicacies:

<http://xfinity.comcast.net/slideshow/news-deadlydelicacies/1/>

Movie Night January 30 at McMenamins Mission Theater - "Hatchery and Wild - The future of Pacific Northwest salmon & steelhead":

<http://www.hatcheryandwild.com/>

Crab Boat Sinks at mouth of Chetco:

<http://www.triplicate.com/News/Breaking-News/Crescent-City-fishing-boat-sinks-in-Brookings-Harbor>

**GOOD LUCK!**