

The Guide's Forecast - volume 17 issue number 5

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

Forecasting for the fishing week of **January 30th – February 5th, 2015**

Oregon Fisheries Update:

Willamette Valley/Metro – Spring chinook are becoming more newsworthy as three springers have now been confirmed not far from the Portland/Metro area. With more low, clear water conditions happening, more opportunity will present itself in the coming week on the larger bodies of water here locally. No, there have not been any springers pass by Bonneville Dam...yet.

The cool waters of the lower Willamette are moderating in flow. Some winter steelhead are being caught by boat and bank anglers on the lower river. Catch-and-release sturgeon fishing remains good.

McKenzie River water levels are dropping but fishing here is slow.

North and South Santiam water levels have been dropping over the past week. It's too early in the year for these rivers to offer much in the way of fishing, however.

The Clackamas River is running low although steelhead have been caught as recently as Wednesday this week. Even Eagle Creek produced fish over the past weekend.

Sandy water levels are reported as very skinny. Steelheading is fair but will improve with more water. Smelt dipping will be allowed two days in March.

Northwest – Steelheaders are contending with low, clear water conditions on all north coast streams except the mainstem Nehalem. Catches have been sporadic but anglers have to be sneaky in order to score success on most of these smaller systems.

The Nehalem, Nestucca, Wilson and Trask will remain top options but you'll want to fish low in these systems and hope for tidal fish to be on the move. Broodstock fish should start to make a stronger showing, especially on the next rain freshet but spawned out, earlier returning steelhead will likely begin to make up the bulk of the catch.

The ocean has produced some great catches recently with a rare calm sea situation allowing saltwater anglers non-typical access to big blue. Be cautious of the 2015 regulations, they could catch you by surprise. You can likely find what you need from this ODF&W web page:

<http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/saltwater.asp>

Ocean conditions should allow for boats to launch over the coming weekend. Crabbing is slow offshore but bottom fishing is good.

Razor clamming is closed from the California border to Heceta Head near Florence because of elevated levels of naturally-occurring bacteria.

While this is not the time of year when it's usually productive, south coast beaches have turned on again for surf anglers who are taking decent numbers of redbait surf perch.

Steelheading is not living up to angler expectations on the Alsea. Many are trying but very few are catching anything.

The Umpqua mainstem is producing fair to good numbers of winter steelhead, most of which are wild. Similar results are reported from the North Umpqua. While the South Umpqua is a good bet for fin-clipped fish, it's still early to expect good results here.

Crabbing and fishing for rockfish has improved at Coos Bay. The Coos River system is running too low to fish well for winter steelhead.

Winter steelhead are being caught in fair to good number on the lower and middle Rogue River although prospects are expected to improve with rain. It's too early for the upper river to reliably produce winters.

Bottom fishing has been good for boats launching out of the Port of Brookings. Steelheading has slowed on the Chetco with water levels low.

The Elk and Sixes have fallen to levels too low to fish well.

Central & Eastern – Deschutes water levels are high, apparently from snowmelt due to warmer temperatures on the east side.

Winter trout fishing is very slow at Fall River.

A few trollers have been trying their luck for kokanee at Green Perter Reservoir with mixed success.

SW Washington- Like many Oregon streams, the early season component of the hatchery steelhead run is fading as the full-blown spawning season is underway. It will still be a few weeks away but broodstock returns should be favorable as we progress into late winter.

The Cowlitz River is beginning to slow for steelhead but the Lewis, Kalama and Cowlitz should all see late returns of steelhead well into March. Spring chinook won't start showing for several weeks either.

Smelt seasons were set on Wednesday and managers are taking a conservative approach to this year's run. Managers anticipate another good return, like the previous 2 years but when dealing with a listed species, precautionary approaches are important. Here are the Cowlitz options:

Washington Tributary Recreational Smelt Fisheries

Adopted a smelt season as follows:	Saturday February 7 and Saturday February 14, 2015
Season:	Open hours 6 AM to noon.
Area:	Cowlitz River (bank only).
Gear:	Dip net.
Limit:	10 pounds per person.

Columbia River Fishing Report – The season's first spring chinook was reported off of Prescott Beach close to Rainier. Plunkers working lower Columbia beaches certainly have a chance at salmon but the bulk of the effort is likely centered on steelhead. Regardless, small, scented spin-n-glos will likely most often get used. A bigger tide series over the weekend may produce some results on these lower Columbia beaches for both a rare salmon and steelhead. I guess it's officially underway!

The Guide's Forecast – If you need something to read, here is the 2015 forecasts for the spring run of chinook: http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/forecasts/columbia_river/2014-results_2015-expects.pdf

Willamette, McKenzie & Santiam Rivers Fishing Report – As Willamette Falls flows continue to moderate and the water temperature rises to the lower 40s, winter steelhead counts have topped the 1,000 mark. While there's no spring Chinook count set up (yet) at the Falls, there are surely a few in the lower river.

The McKenzie River has been gradually dropping over the past ten days and is expected to continue that trend into the coming week. It's open to catch and release trout fishing below Leaburg Dam but closed to all fishing above Leaburg Lake.

North Santiam flows are fairly high, measuring about 4,000 cfs at Mehama as of mid-day. The level and flow is predicted to drop rapidly over the next couple of days, then remain stable. The North Santiam River below Packsaddle Park is open year-round to adipose fin-clipped steelhead although trout fishing is on the entire Santiam system closed until May 23, 2015. In an interesting overnight change, the South Santiam went from 5,000 cfs at Waterloo on January 28th to less than 2,000 cfs today, January 29th. It is forecast to remain at that flow into February.

The ODFW will host a training course for those interested in becoming volunteer fishing instructors. The session will take place on Saturday, Jan. 17 from 10 AM to 4 PM at the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Office located at 61374 Parrell Road in Bend. Lunch will be provided but applicants must pre-register by January 14th, to do so, contact Darlene Sprecher at 503-947-6025 or by Email at Darlene.m.sprecher@state.or.us.

Walter Wirth Lake will be stocked with 100 7 to 10 pound brood trout this week for a little bonus fishing opportunity.

The trout pond at the E.E. Wilson Wildlife refuge opens Sunday, February 1st. There are those who just can't wait, however, and they're getting ticketed this week for trying their luck early. That's poaching, folks.

The Guide's Forecast – Bank anglers on the lower Willamette have had it pretty good this week. Winter steelhead catches have been fair but steady at Meldrum Bar and the Blacktop and the ODFW reports these steelheaders have taken a couple of springers as well. **Robert Campbell at Fisherman's Marine in Oregon City (503-557-5600)** remarked that one of his employees landed four winters at Meldrum on Wednesday this, "two hatchery and two wild." Campbell went on to say, "boats pulling plugs in the area are taking fish as well. This area should be productive for another two months. Add to that the wave of springers that usually come in during the first couple of weeks of February and it should be good. Catch-and-release sturgeon fishing remains phenomenal," he added. "Anchovies and smelt are still getting bit but herring has been real good. Just get the small red label herring and you're in business."

Winter trout fishing remains slow on the McKenzie.

While summer steelhead are getting hooked on rare occasion on the upper North Santiam, it's the catch-and-release fishery for winters that has a following here. With over 1,000 counted at Willamette Falls, chances are a few have found their way to the Santiams. Too few to target, though, at least for now.

Clackamas and Sandy River Fishing Reports – Water levels on the Clack have been dropping. "It's too low for jets," quipped **Robert Campbell at Fisherman's Marine in Oregon City (503-557-5600)**. "Drift boats will do OK now but powered boats can't make it in water this low."

The Sandy is also low – `way low. It has dropped to a point that it's making steelheading a challenge. Rain is on the way in just a few days, though.

The Guide's Forecast – "The Clackamas is fishing pretty good." according to **Robert Campbell at Fisherman's Marine in Oregon City (503-557-5600)** "There are more fish around this year and this week catches have been split about 50/50 broodstock and wild. There have been some good catches the last couple of days; it's just too low for power [boats, Ed.]" Campbell went on to say that Eagle Creek put out some fish over the past weekend although it's really skinny now. "You can still catch fish in pocket water but your skills have to be surgical." Campbell also talked about a photo of a chrome-bright, fin-clipped, Clackamas-caught spring Chinook sent to him by **Jim Wellner** (who manages a Fisherman's at a different location). This springer was supposed to have been taken by an angler swinging flies for steelhead. Unfortunately, Wellner could not be reached for verification or details.

"Low and clear at the Sandy," said **Robert Campbell at Fisherman's Marine in Oregon City (503-557-5600)** "but you can still catch steelhead. Paul [a pro guide who works at Fisherman's. Ed.] caught four yesterday. Stealth techniques are required until there's more water in the river."

Smelt on the Sandy

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife announced it will again conduct a very limited *recreational smelt fishery on the Sandy River*, from 6 a.m. until noon on Saturday, March 7 and again Sunday, March 15. This is the second time since 2011 that the state has allowed recreational smelt fishing since the fish were listed for protection under the Endangered Species Act. Bank only fishing is allowed, restricted to dip nets, and a bag limit of 10 pounds per person. Under Oregon fishing regulations anglers do not need a license to harvest smelt.

North Coast Fishing Report – Steelhead anglers have been challenged lately by low and clear flows. Most boat anglers are now targeting larger systems as fish are hunkered down in deeper, darker, broken surfaced pockets. Following the last rain freshet over a week ago now, catches were quite impressive on some of the smaller streams and now anglers are largely dependent on tidal flow fish to fill their creels.

The Wilson and Nestucca remain obvious targets as both have produced good early season catches of quality broodstock steelhead. **Nestucca Valley Sporting Goods (503-392-4269)** reports fishing in the lower river is fair, most effort remains focused downstream of Three Rivers. Although limits are highly uncommon, savvy anglers can pick off quality fresh fish if they hunt the right areas. Again, it would be wise to read the tide table as fish are likely to move in and out with these tidal exchanges. Effort on the Wilson remains subdued but those interested in pursuit, are focusing their efforts downstream of the Donaldson's put in. Driftboaters getting first water are seeing some success but those versed in the reach downstream of Sollie Smith, are the most likely to score. Plugs tend to become more effective during these periods of low water. If you are fishing sidedrifting gear, you have to drop down to very subdued outfits and very light lead. Be sure to focus your efforts in the broken surfaced areas which are few and far between under these water conditions.

The mainstem Nehalem has finally become a good option and will likely remain that way given the predicted weather pattern coming up. There are no hatchery fish, or few to speak of, on the mainstem Nehalem.

The Salmonberry was rumored to have some steelhead present but these fish are quite sneaky and can disappear in a hurry. It's a small gear fishery here with most anglers trying to spot the fish they are pursuing. It's a challenging river to target fish on but experienced anglers can score consistent results.

The often overlooked Trask River is getting little attention and boaters over there would prefer to keep it that way. Action however shouldn't be overlooked as good fishing exists here, especially for this early in the season. **Pro guide Chris Vertopoulos (503-349-1377)** produced great results during a short day trip on Monday. Chris tallied a 6 fish day for a 3 mile float from Loren's Drift to Johnson's Bridge. Chris

captured 4 wild steelhead, 1 broodstock fish and one chrome bright chinook. All fish came on plugs and he noted no other boats on the float.

Ocean anglers took advantage of calm seas at mid-week and there may be some other opportunities in the near future (check the forecast section). Lings, black seabass and crabs all topped the list for those that were prepared for such a bounty. It's a pretty rare situation to pursue these fish in January and a time when not much fresh fish is available to our community. It's important to watch the bar conditions too however, research your bar and tide together, they are largely related.

Bay crabbing continues to be less than impressive and not likely to change in the near future.

The Guide's Forecast – Conditions will continue to challenge anglers with low, clear flows likely to continue well into next week. Anglers need to be prepared to use light lines and small, subtle offerings. Under these conditions, bobbers and jigs or backtrolling plugs become more effective as fish congregate in more defined water. Larger systems and particularly the lower reaches, will produce the best results. Anglers will want to take advantage of the early morning hours and late mornings when temperatures begin to warm up. Here is our river-by-river breakdown that should give you an idea as to your best prospects.

Highway 30 streams (Klaskanine, Big Creek, Gnat Creek)- Runs are largely over with very few wild and no broodstock returns expected in the coming weeks. Fish should largely be spawning or be spawned out and become pretty easy prey for bait fishermen. They won't provide a high quality product this late in the season however.

Necanicum River- Like the Highway 30 streams, the run is largely over with mostly spent fish in the system now. There may be a few more fish on the way; they'd be holding in tidewater in these low flows, but they won't show in the upper reaches until the next the next rain freshet.

North Fork Nehalem – Slow fishing here and not likely to improve. Some wild fish have been reported in the system and another small batch of fresh steelhead could show on the next rain freshet, we're just not sure when that is going to be.

Mainstem Nehalem – Fish should be well distributed in this system, it is just a big system. You'll have to cover lots of water to produce good numbers but as far as water conditions go, you won't find one as primed as this system. You can still use larger baits and offerings here but it will get better as we progress into February. Only a rare hatchery stray here, from the North Fork Nehalem.

Kilchis River- Very low, unproductive until the next rain freshet. Wild fish for the remainder of the season and when the next rain hits, it should be pretty good.

Wilson River – If you're looking for fresh hatchery fish, you won't find an abundance of them here but they should be in good shape and in the lower reaches (below Sollie Smith) in fair numbers. Plugs may continue to be the best option here but drifted small baits may also produce good results.

Trask River – A sleeper by most definitions, mostly due to its management of wild fish only this time of year. There are a few hatchery strays here and those that float downstream of Loren's Drift aren't likely to have much competition. Action could be fair here this weekend.

Three Rivers/Nestucca system – Most of the early season returning fish are done here, destined for the Three Rivers hatchery. Broodstock fish are in the system and available down low, play the tides. Bobber and jigs as well as plugs should offer up the best chances to take fish in the deeper, darker water. The next rain freshet should produce good results.

The ocean could be a good place to recreate over the weekend. Rockfish and lingcod should be readily available. Here is the ocean forecast and look to our home page for bar conditions. Don't make plans to cross the bar on the outgoing tide.

FRI NE WIND 10 TO 15 KT...EASING TO 5 TO 10 KT IN THE AFTERNOON. WIND WAVES 3 FT. W SWELL 6 FT AT 15 SECONDS.

FRI NIGHT NE WIND 10 TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 3 FT. W SWELL 6 FT AT 13 SECONDS.

SAT NE WIND 5 TO 10 KT. GUSTS TO 15 KT IN THE MORNING. WIND WAVES 2 FT. W SWELL 5 FT AT 13 SECONDS.

SAT NIGHT E WIND 5 TO 10 KT...VEERING TO SE AFTER MIDNIGHT. WIND WAVES 1 FT. W SWELL 4 FT AT 12 SECONDS.

SUN S WIND 10 TO 15 KT. WIND WAVES 3 FT. W SWELL 6 FT.

MON SW WIND 15 TO 20 KT. WIND WAVES 3 FT. W SWELL 8 FT.

With bigger tide exchanges on the horizon this weekend, don't count on bay crabbing to be excellent despite the lack of fresh water in our estuaries. Regardless, if you're using high quality bait, you should find some decent crabbing in most north coast estuaries.

Central & South Coast Reports - Bottom fishing for rockfish and ling cod is excellent at this time of year. Ocean conditions aren't often cooperative in winter months so take advantage of the decent ocean conditions predicted off the central coast over the next several days.

Ocean crabbing remains slow but is best near the mouth of estuaries. It has often been better inside the bays than offshore.

Razor clamming is closed from the California border to Heceta Head near Florence because of elevated levels of naturally-occurring bacteria.

While this is not the time of year when it's usually productive, south coast beaches have turned on again for surf anglers who are taking decent numbers of redbtail surf perch.

It has been slow on the Alsea for steelheading this week. A few are being taken but far fewer than anglers expected as many took vacation days from work to fish at this particular time. Bank fishers have been doing better than drift boaters.

Steelheading has been good on the mainstem Umpqua River over the past week and should remain so into the coming weekend. Most of the winter steelhead hooked on the mainstem are wild but several hatchery fish have been taken this week. The majority of steelhead in the South Umpqua are hatchery keepers with February and March considered the peak of the winter season. Be aware that, while a little early for optimism to be high, the mainstem and North Umpqua open to spring Chinook fishing on Sunday, February 1st. The limit is two wild spring chinook per day and up to 10 for the season in combination with wild chinook harvested in the mainstem Umpqua River. This means you can keep four wild springers on the mainstem Umpqua and six wild springers on the North Umpqua. Additional hatchery springers can be retained. Umpqua system anglers should also take note that the following areas, previously a two trout per day harvest, are now catch-and-release only: North Umpqua tributaries from mouth to Soda Springs Dam, South Umpqua mouth to Jackson Creek, South Umpqua tributaries below Jackson Creek, Cow Creek to Middle Creek and Cow Creek tributaries and mainstem Cow Creek above

Middle Creek. And, as the ODFW says, "Anglers should always check the 2015 Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations for date and gear restrictions and the map for areas in red closed to all angling year-round."

Crabbing is once again worthwhile in Coos Bay with the better catches coming from along the jetties where anglers are also catching good numbers of rockfish. Water levels in the Coos system are running low but had been fishing well before they dropped. On the Coos as well as Coquille river system steelheaders are allowed to take three hatchery steelhead per day.

Boats launching out of Gold Beach have been taking limits of bottom fish, most of which have been black rockfish. Lower Rogue steelheaders have been taking steady numbers of fish over the past week. Plug-pullers have been doing well with bank anglers taking winters on drifted roe, often fished with yarn or puff balls. Side drifters are also seeing steady action. From Grants Pass to Grave Creek, the middle Rogue has been producing good catches of winter steelhead with the stretch below the mouth of the Applegate River most productive. Winter steelhead numbers are still fairly low on the upper Rogue so there has been little effort but fishing will continue to improve in weeks to come. At last report, fewer than 50 winters had enter Cole Rivers Hatchery.

While reports are a bit mixed regarding bottom fishing out of Brookings, it's good enough that those who didn't limit out on rockfish and ling cod were probably fishing in the wrong place. Chetco River side-drifters have been doing well and bank anglers were taking fish early this week on drifted roe. While fresh steelhead are distributed throughout the Chetco River system, water levels are getting too low to fish well. Fortunately, the next round of precipitation should hit the area on this coming Sunday, February 1st. 'Til then, try down near the head of tidewater for the best chance at a hookup.

One steelheaders took nine winters on the Elk River last Saturday, then tried the Sixes on Sunday where he blanked. Water levels are now too low and water temperatures cold to expect much from these rivers until the next round of rainfall which is due in the coming week.

There is still no joy for Diamond Lake ice fishers as warmer temperatures this week opened holes in the thin covering of ice that had formed earlier this year. One brave soul ventured out on ice at the west end of the lake. Drilling four inches of ice over eight feet of water, he tried in vain for an hour or so. Stay tuned.

Central & Eastern - Water levels have been high on the Deschutes this week with warm weather triggering snowmelt. This situation has stalled fishing efforts until conditions improve.

A few fly anglers have ventured to the Fall River, a decent winter trout destination only a few years ago. Something has happened, however, for just as last year and the year before, the fish seem to have disappeared.

Fishing has slowed in the near-absence of hatches at Crooked River. Few trout are being taken although the abundant whitefish are more receptive to offerings,

Trolling at Lake Billy Chinook produced a couple of kokanee limits for anglers this week. Several bull trout have been taken as well.

Some boats took only one or two smallish lake trout at Crescent Lake this week while others landed several to 15 pounds. A few kokanee are being taken by those targeting them.

A few boats have been out trolling at Green Peter over the winter months. Kokanee are small but plentiful and populations are expected to be good this year as the winter season has been mild.

Write to the TGF staff:

Bob Rees: brees@pacifier.com

Michael Teague: TGFMichael@gmail.com

Doug Rees: doug@TheGuidesForecast.com

Random Links

Swinging flies for Winter Steelhead (on January 27, 2015):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mMkv-PgSpCY#t=65>

Steelhead Fly Fishing:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYTEizJXmI8&x-yt-ts=1422503916&x-yt-cl=85027636>

The Oregon Coast - A Winter Odyssey:

<http://vimeo.com/117670644>

For those interested, the 2015 Trout Stocking Schedules:

http://www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/trout_stocking_schedules/

Pacific NW Sportsman Show runs Feb. 4-8:

<http://www.thesportshows.com/shows/pacific-northwest/>

GOOD LUCK!