

2014 Winter Steelhead Guide

Winter steelhead are one of Oregon's most prized game fish – and one of the most challenging to catch. But the promise of large hard-fighting fish, fresh from the ocean, lures many anglers to brave the cold, wet conditions in search of a trophy. This 2014 Guide offers the novice steelhead angler an overview of where and when to fish. For the more experienced angler, the Guide also includes updates on access, regulation changes and other changes that could affect fishing.

For updates on current conditions, such as water levels and fishing success, consult ODFW's weekly [Recreation Report](#).

Anglers also should consult the 2014 Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations for a complete list of relevant rules and regulations. Pick up a copy at most license dealers or view them [on-line](#).

NEW for 2014

Anglers fishing for steelhead, salmon and sturgeon in the Columbia River Basin – this includes all rivers in the Willamette, Central and NE zones and a few rivers in the NW Zone - will need to purchase a [Columbia River Basin endorsement](#).

[Northwest Zone Guide](#)

[Southwest Zone Guide](#)

[Willamette Zone Guide](#)

[Central and Northeast Zones Guide](#) – *great winter fishing for summer steelhead*

Sodium sulfites in cured eggs

If you fish with cured eggs, you should know that a popular cure ingredient – sodium sulfites – can be toxic to young fish. [Click here](#) to learn more, and to see a list of products that meet Oregon guidelines for sodium sulfites.

Related links:

[Oregon Steelhead Fishing](#) – *tips and techniques, and an annual run calendar for top steelhead rivers*

Winter vs. Summer Steelhead

There are two main runs of steelhead in Oregon, a “summer” run and a “winter” run. Some river systems have both types of runs while other streams may have one or the other. Both winter and summer run fish spawn in the spring, but they enter the river at different times and at different stages of reproductive maturity.

As their name suggests, summer steelhead begin migrating to their birth streams as early as May in some streams near the coast and as late as October/November in some rivers in eastern Oregon. They will remain in the river for several months before spawning. All steelhead returning to rivers east of the Cascade Mountains are considered summer run fish.

In many northeast Oregon rivers, fishing for these “summer” fish can last well into the winter.

Winter steelhead migrate into freshwater when they are closer to reproductive maturity and are generally larger than their summer run cousins. Winter steelhead begin their migration in early winter with some fish continuing to migrate well into spring. Unlike the other

salmonids, steelhead are not pre-determined to die after spawning and may live to spawn multiple times. After the eggs have been deposited in the spring, the fry emerge in summer and may spend the next one to three years in fresh water before migrating to the ocean.

Northwest Zone

The Northwest Zone offers excellent fishing with easy access from Portland, Salem, Eugene and Corvallis. Whether you prefer fishing from the bank or a boat, with a fly or a spinner, on a small intimate stream or a large tidal river, Willamette Valley anglers can be on the water in no time.

NORTH COAST

The 2012-13 winter steelhead season was below average on the north coast. Catch rates were lower than seen in several years, although the average size of fish was larger as the 3-salt component of the run was higher. Signs point to better survival of smolts for the 2-salt steelhead for this year's run. Given the lower return of 2-salt fish last year, it is likely that there will be fewer large fish this season; however the overall run size may be up. No matter the abundance, there will be plenty of opportunity for those who get out there and spend time on their favorite stretch of river.

Fishing conditions often depend on rain patterns and water levels. Water levels and turbidity can increase after heavy rains and some rivers will clear faster than others after rainstorms. Flooding waters can carry a lot of wood and debris, and anglers should always use caution when floating rivers as new hazards can appear throughout the season. Road access may also be blocked after severe storms so be sure to check road conditions before heading out.

All fishing techniques can be productive, especially if you're flexible and adjust your gear to the water conditions.

All techniques can be productive. Side drifting is very popular with boaters, but pulling plugs or anchoring and casting can also be effective. Bobber and jig, drift fishing, or casting spinners or spoons are proven methods that work well for bank anglers (and boaters too). Fly anglers generally have better catches when flows are lower or in smaller streams.

Typically you will want to fish brighter offerings with a slower presentation when the water is higher and/or off color, and more subtle baits fished more quickly as the water clears. Various shades of red, pink or orange are effective colors, but don't be afraid to experiment with white, chartreuse, black or other colors. Eggs and sand shrimp are always effective baits. Other baits that can be effective at times include prawn meat, crawdad tails and night crawlers.

Several local streams host early returning (late November through January) hatchery winter steelhead. The North Fork Nehalem River is generally one of the better early season streams, with hatchery steelhead also available in the Necanicum, Kilchis, Wilson and Nestucca rivers, and Big Creek, Gnat Creek, and the North Fork Klaskanine River in the Lower Columbia. Some stray hatchery steelhead also migrate up the Trask River, although none are planted there.

The Wilson and Nestucca rivers, which have wild broodstock programs in addition to early returning stocks, will have hatchery steelhead available throughout the winter and into early spring (generally through mid-April). Wild steelhead are available throughout the winter in all the streams open to fishing, with the run generally peaking in March.

Anglers should contact the local ODFW office in Tillamook at 503-842-2741 for more information on fishing techniques, locations and updated fishing conditions. Recorded fishing information for the North Fork Nehalem is available at 503-368-5670 and for Big Creek at 503-458-6503.

Tillamook County has a fee system at county-owned or operated boat launch sites. Daily fee envelopes are available at access sites. Contact Tillamook County Parks (503-322-3477) or visit their [website](#) for more information or to purchase an annual pass.

Lower Columbia

Several tributaries near the mouth of the lower Columbia offer winter fishing for both wild and hatchery steelhead.

Hatchery steelhead smolts are released in Gnat Creek (40,000), Big Creek (60,000) and the North Fork Klaskanine River (40,000). Fishing for steelhead is restricted to the lower portions of the streams below the hatcheries. Hatchery fish are primarily available during late November, December and January, with numbers of fish tapering off quickly after that. These streams are small and are primarily fished from the banks. Access is available at the hatcheries, at Big Creek County Park, and along roads following the streams.

Anglers may call 503-458-6529 for recorded Big Creek fishing information. Or, become a fan of the [Big Creek Hatchery on Facebook](#).

The Lewis and Clark River, Young's River, and the South Fork Klaskanine River also are open to steelhead fishing. While anglers will encounter some stray hatchery fish, these streams offer mostly catch-and-release fishing for wild steelhead.

Necanicum River

The Necanicum River offers excellent small-stream steelhead fishing throughout the winter. The river is stocked with 40,000 smolts at a several locations up to Black's Bridge. Hatchery steelhead are caught in the early winter months, with the peak of the run in late December/early January. Wild fish are more commonly caught later in the season. The Necanicum is open to steelhead fishing through March 31 downstream of the Hwy 53 Bridge at Necanicum Junction.

Bank access is available along Hwy 26, especially at Klootchie Creek Park and around Black's Bridge (about 1.5-2 miles above Klootchie Creek). Lower river access is available in the Peterson Point area. Boaters may launch at the park, and takeout at a site along Hwy 101 just south of Seaside.

The Necanicum River is usually one of the first North Coast streams to clear following heavy rains. Boaters should keep a wary eye out, especially after storms when wood can move around.

Nehalem River Basin

The Nehalem basin offers abundant steelhead fishing opportunities. Hatchery steelhead (90,000 smolts) are released in the North Fork Nehalem at or below Nehalem Hatchery on Hwy 53. The best fishing for hatchery steelhead is usually in December and January, with the first fish appearing by mid-November most years. Hatchery steelhead are recycled regularly from Nehalem Hatchery during the peak of the run. Call 503-368-5670 for recorded fishing information.

Fishing for wild steelhead in February and March can be productive and it's usually much less crowded.

ODFW will be conducting a radio telemetry study of steelhead migration patterns beginning in December 2013. Anglers may catch steelhead with a radio tag antenna protruding from the mouth. A temporary rule for this winter allows anglers to keep hatchery steelhead that have been radio tagged. Anglers are asked to return the radio tag to ODFW (drop off at Nehalem Hatchery or other ODFW office) so that it can be re-used. Do not remove radio tags from steelhead that are released. Anglers may also encounter steelhead with Floy tags

inserted near the dorsal fin. Please report these fish to ODFW, including any numbers on the tags (if present).

Bank access on the North Fork is available near the hatchery and on neighboring industrial forestlands. The Nehalem Hatchery Barrier Free Fishing Platform offers additional access to anglers with a disabled angler permit. Boaters may float the North Fork below the hatchery, but extreme caution is necessary. Several bedrock rapids make drifting this river hazardous, and it should be attempted by only experienced boaters. Rafts are highly recommended.

The main Nehalem River is a very productive catch-and-release fishery for wild steelhead. Best fishing is February to early April. Some very large steelhead (occasionally topping 20 pounds) are caught from this river. Access is along Nehalem River Road. The lower river can be boated from the Beaver Slide (below Nehalem Falls) to Roy Creek County Park.

The Salmonberry River, a tributary of the Nehalem about 7 miles above Nehalem Falls, can provide superb fishing for large winter steelhead. The Salmonberry closes March 31. Access to the Salmonberry remains limited. The Nehalem River Road bridge over the Salmonberry has been rebuilt and is now open; however, the railroad right of way remains closed to public access. Anglers are advised to check with the Port for current status of access restrictions.

Tillamook Bay Streams: Wilson, Kilchis and Trask rivers

The Wilson, Kilchis and Trask rivers offer excellent winter steelhead opportunities. Hatchery steelhead usually begin returning in late November, with good fishing through January. Approximately 40,000 early returning hatchery smolts are released in each of the Kilchis and Wilson Rivers. The Kilchis is stocked up to Kilchis Park. An additional 100,000 wild brood smolts are released in the Wilson River, primarily in the lower river up to Siskeyville, but a small proportion (25 percent) are released in the South Fork. Wild broodstock hatchery steelhead are available in the Wilson River throughout the winter and early spring (primarily January to mid-April). The Trask River is not stocked, but hatchery strays are present.

The Wilson, Kilchis and Trask rivers offer good access to some great wild winter steelhead fishing, which peaks in March.

Hwy 6 follows the Wilson River from the lower reaches to the fishing deadline at the South Fork. The Little North Fork Wilson River and first mile of the South Fork Wilson River are open Dec. 1- March 31 for steelhead fishing. These streams provide good opportunities when the main stem Wilson River is high.

The Kilchis River is accessible at the Mapes Creek launch, Kilchis Park, and along Kilchis Forest Road up to the deadline at the confluence of the North and South forks.

The Trask River is accessible at Trask Hatchery and Loren's Drift off Chance Road and along Trask River Road. The North and South Fork Trask (open Dec. 1 to March 31) are accessible by forest roads that follow each stream. The North Fork Trask deadline is at Bark Shanty Creek and the South Fork deadline is at Edwards Creek.

The Tillamook and Miami rivers are open to steelhead fishing though March. A few stray hatchery fish and smaller populations of wild fish are present in each stream. The Miami River offers access in the upper stretches along Miami Forest Road; however, public access is very limited on the Tillamook River.

Nestucca Basin: Nestucca, Little Nestucca and Three Rivers

Early-returning hatchery steelhead (40,000 smolts marked with an adipose and left maxillary fin clip) are available from late November through January, with a peak in late

December/early January. Wild broodstock hatchery steelhead (70,000 smolts; adipose only clipped) are available in the Nestucca through the spring. Past creel surveys show most fish are caught January to early April.

Since 2008, most of the early returning hatchery smolts have been released in Three Rivers, with a portion released at Farmer Creek boat launch. The wild brood hatchery smolts are released in Three Rivers; in the main stem Nestucca River at Farmer Creek boat launch and First Bridge boat launch; and in Bays Creek (a tributary just above the fifth bridge). This release strategy should optimize harvest opportunities and help spread the fishery out.

Wild steelhead are caught throughout the winter, with a peak in March.

The Nestucca River Road parallels the upper Nestucca River, beginning at Beaver and continuing upstream to the angling deadline at Elk Creek. Best bank access is above Blaine, with many pullouts along the river. The use of bait is prohibited in the Nestucca River above Moon Creek. Fishing in the upper Nestucca is best later in the season, as primarily wild fish return to the upper river. The Nestucca River upstream from Moon Creek closes March 31.

Boat access is available at boat ramps located at the first and fourth bridges above Beaver, at a boat slide above the fifth bridge (a new wooden boat slide was constructed in 2011, with concrete steps added last year to make access down the bank easier) and at the sixth bridge. The launch site at sixth bridge is located on private property, and anglers are asked to be courteous and pack out their trash in order to insure access in the future. Only experienced boaters should launch upstream of the fourth bridge due to some hazardous water.

The lower Nestucca River offers limited bank access, but some very good boat access. Launching/takeout is available at boat ramps located at First Bridge, the Rock Hole (end of Bixby Road), Farmer Creek wayside, the mouth of Three Rivers and Cloverdale. Bank access also is available at those sites. A separate fee (**not** the county pass) is required at Cloverdale to cover the cost to lease access from the Sanitary District. Day passes are available at the launch, or season passes are available from the sporting goods store in Hebo. Repairs to the lower end of the Cloverdale launch were completed recently. Use caution as there is a drop off at the end of the concrete, although this should not be an issue at normal winter flows.

Three Rivers, a tributary entering the Nestucca at Hebo, offers very good bank access in the lower river and excellent opportunity for anglers targeting early-returning hatchery steelhead, as well as later returning wild broodstock hatchery steelhead. Good numbers of steelhead ascend Three Rivers on their return to Cedar Creek Hatchery.

Bank access on Three Rivers is available at the hatchery, at the "heart attack" hole (on the south side of the stream), on the "S" curve just above Hebo, and by the sewage treatment plant in Hebo. The upper Three Rivers is accessible along Hwy 22, but fewer fish are present above the hatchery weir and bank access is limited. When available, fish are recycled downstream from Cedar Creek Hatchery.

The Little Nestucca River offers fair opportunity for steelhead. A few stray hatchery steelhead may be present throughout the winter season. Wild fish may be caught and released through the winter, with the run peaking in March. Limited public access is available along Little Nestucca River Road between Hwy 22 and Hwy101. The river closes March 31.

North Coast Lakes

Coffenbury Lake, Lost Lake, Vernonia Pond, Cape Meares Lake, Loren's Pond and Town Lake periodically receive excess adult hatchery steelhead. Check the weekly [Recreation Report](#) on the ODFW website for updated information on fish releases.

Other lakes may also receive fish when available. Steelhead caught in these lakes are considered trout, and do not have to be recorded on a harvest tag. Only one trout over 20 inches per day is allowed.

MID-COAST

The Mid-Coast winter steelhead returns are typically from December through March depending on the location, flow conditions and broodstock. Please note that only hatchery fin-clipped winter steelhead may be retained. If you do catch a wild steelhead, please handle carefully and try to keep the fish in the water while unhooking. For in-season updates of winter steelhead fishing along the mid coast check the weekly [Recreation Report](#) on the ODFW website or contact the ODFW Newport District Office at (541) 265-8306 ext. 236 or 224. Many of the large river basins along the coast have river gauges which can be [viewed online](#).

Salmon River (located north of Lincoln City along Hwy 18) offers fair-to-good catch-and-release fishing for wild winter steelhead, from late December through March. Bank access can be found in the lower river near the Salmon River Hatchery or along the Van Duzer corridor.

Siletz Basin

The Siletz River offers anglers the opportunity to fish for steelhead year-round. The Siletz has both summer and winter steelhead native runs as well as summer and winter steelhead hatchery programs. Anglers are reminded that only hatchery fish can be retained.

Winter steelhead begin arriving in late November with a peak in January-March. The winter steelhead hatchery program in the Siletz Basin utilizes a wild broodstock and can provide excellent fishing throughout the season. This program has a target release of 50,000 steelhead smolts each spring from the Palmer Creek acclimation facility located across from Moonshine Park.

During peak season drift boat fishing can be very productive but many sections of the river can be busy during favorable flow conditions. Popular techniques used from a drift boat include side drifting, pulling plugs or drifting a bobber and jig. Bank fishing can also be very good in the upper river around Moonshine Park. Effective bank fishing techniques are flow dependent but include swinging spinners and spoons across riffles, drifting a bobber and bait or jig, plunking, and bouncing a corky and bait along the bottom.

Fishing upstream of the park does require access through the Siletz Gorge Road -- a private logging road open to public vehicle traffic only on the weekends. Bank anglers also plunk with stationary gear in the lower river, especially when river conditions are high with poor visibility. A portion of hatchery fish returning to ODFW fish traps are also recycled to provide additional fishing opportunities. These fish are tagged with a small colored tag near the dorsal fin. Anglers are encouraged to report these tagged recycled fish so that the benefit of the recycling program can be assessed.

The Siletz River also has a native summer steelhead run, the only one in the Oregon Coast Range, giving anglers a chance to fish for steelhead year-round.

A hatchery summer steelhead program with a target smolt release of up to 80,000 fish each spring offers anglers an excellent opportunity to harvest fresh steelhead by early summer. Summer steelhead start arriving in May with a peak in mid-July. A second push of summers arrive with the first fall rains. Most summer steelhead fishing is from the bank starting around Moonshine Park on up to the deadline below Siletz Falls. During the summer flows, fly fishing the gorge area can be very productive by swinging flies across riffles in the early mornings. Other techniques such as casting lures or using a bobber and bait/jig can also produce good results.

Drift Creek-Siletz (located just south of Lincoln City) offers anglers good catch-and-release wild steelhead fishing with the occasional stray hatchery steelhead. A large portion of the fishable river is located within the Siuslaw National Forest with several good hike-in opportunities.

Yaquina Basin

The Yaquina Basin receives approximately 20,000 smolts of an early-returning Alsea hatchery stock. The return usually peaks in December and January, depending on location and flow conditions.

Good bank access is available along upper Big Elk Creek near the smolt release site (river-mile 21 below Grant Creek) and several miles downstream. There is no boat fishing on Big Elk Creek.

Alsea Basin

The Alsea Basin provides good fishing opportunities for hatchery winter steelhead from December into March. The target release of 120,000 smolts into the Alsea are split between the traditional Alsea hatchery broodstock and wild Alsea broodstock.

This winter, the Alsea Basin will be the focus of a steelhead “harvest vulnerability” study. This study will help determine potential hatchery production and release strategies that will maximize angler harvest and minimize excessive straying.

The data from this study will be used to test for a difference in catchability or “harvest vulnerability” of steelhead produced from wild parents that were harvested by anglers vs. steelhead produced from wild parents that returned to the hatchery. Harvest will be evaluated with a statistical creel survey, conducted by ODFW surveyors and straying will be assessed by monitoring adult collection sites in the basin. Anglers wishing to participate in the program by contributing wild-caught fish for broodstock to the Alsea hatchery are encouraged to coordinate with the hatchery (Matt Frank, 541-487-7240). Additional information is available by contacting staff at the Mid-Coast District office of ODFW (Derek Wilson, 541-265-8306, ext. 236).

The 2012 release of winter steelhead smolts was the second year of a new release point down river. Approximately 40,000 smolts of the traditional hatchery stocks were released near Blackberry Park. This release group will return this winter and should hold up in the lower river longer than in fish in previous years.

Fair to good bank access can be found throughout most of the basin at numerous public pull-offs and parks along the river. During high water, bank anglers should focus their efforts in the upper basin and around the Alsea Hatchery. A parking lot just below the hatchery provides anglers with off-road parking and access to the river. Most river access near the hatchery is on private property, which is clearly posted.

The Alsea contains a lot of bedrock shelves and deep slots that make side drifting difficult. Popular tactics include pulling plugs or divers with bait, drifting bobbers with bait or jigs, and swinging spoons across riffles.

Drift boats can be put in at launches from just downstream of the town of Alsea all the way to the head of tidewater, depending on the time of year and river conditions. Fishing from a floating device is prohibited above Mill Creek. Throughout the season a portion of hatchery steelhead captured at the Alsea hatchery traps are recycled downstream as far as the Blackberry Launch to provide additional fishing opportunity.

Drift Creek-Alesea offers fair to good catch-and-release wild steelhead fishing. A large portion of the river is within the Drift Creek Wilderness Area providing good hike-in opportunities in a remote, old-growth setting.

Yachats River (located in the town of Yachats) is a productive winter steelhead river with access to public properties from a county road bordering the stream. It offers good catch-and-release opportunities for wild steelhead from the forks down to tide water.

Cummings Creek (located approximately 4 miles south of Yachats on Hwy 101) is a smaller stream located in the Cummings Creek Wilderness area. Anglers can have fair to good wild winter steelhead fishing in a secluded old-growth setting.

Ten-Mile Creek (located approx 6 miles south of Yachats on Hwy 101) consistently produces good catches of wild winter steelhead when conditions are right. Much of the creek-side property is in private ownership. Occasional hatchery steelhead strays also can be caught.

Big Creek (located south of Yachats approx. 8 miles on Hwy 101) can provide good fishing as steelhead move into the river at high tide. A good road borders the stream and most areas are owned by the US Forest Service. Occasional hatchery steelhead strays also can be caught.

Siuslaw Basin

The Siuslaw winter steelhead broodstock incorporates wild winter steelhead and thus tends to return later than traditional coastal hatchery stocks.

Steelhead returns, and hence the fishery, typically peak from late January through February and last well into March. There also is an extended fishery in the Siuslaw River from Whittaker Creek downstream to 200 yards below the mouth of Wildcat Creek through April 15.

The Siuslaw River near the Whittaker Creek campground offers good boat and bank access and is where a target of 70,000 winter steelhead smolts are released each spring. A good portion of the returning hatchery fish collected at this site is released back into the fishery. This area can be heavily fished during the peak season by boat and bank anglers, particularly on weekends.

Lake Creek and its major tributaries can be a productive catch-and-release fishery for wild steelhead, and provide opportunities to catch hatchery steelhead near the town of Deadwood, where 15,000 hatchery winter steelhead smolts are released into Green Creek.

Popular techniques used from a drift boat include side drifting, pulling plugs or drifting a bobber and jig. Effective bank fishing techniques are flow dependent but include swinging spinners and spoons across riffles, drifting a bobber and bait or jig, plunking, and bouncing a corky and bait along the bottom. Some early season scouting during lower flows to learn which technique will work for an area can pay off.

Southwest Zone

SOUTH COAST

The Oregon South Coast offers the winter steelhead angler a diverse group of rivers to choose from. Anglers can fish tiny Brush Creek, battling steelhead and willows, or sit in the comfort of a jet boat running plugs on the mighty lower Rogue River. All rivers are providing good steelhead fishing by early January.

When anglers look to go steelhead fishing, flow and water clarity are two key factors in determining success. The best time to fish for steelhead is after a storm when river flows are dropping and waters begin to clear.

Coos/Millicoma, Coquille, and Tenmile Lakes Basins

ODFW is anticipating a slightly above average run of winter steelhead in the Coos, Coquille and Tenmile Lakes basins. The winter steelhead season in the Coos and Coquille basins typically begins around Thanksgiving, and in some years steelhead can be available into April. This year a few steelhead have already shown up in the Coos Basin in late October. The peak harvest occurs from late December to late February. Steelhead usually arrive a month later in Tenmile Creek, often not making the first appearance until late-December.

These three basins are popular with winter steelhead anglers. Strong hatchery programs usually mean there are plenty of marked fish available for anglers to take home if they wish. In all three basins, only adipose fin-marked fish may be retained.

In all three basins from Dec. 1, 2013 through April 30, 2014, steelhead anglers will be allowed to harvest 1 additional adipose fin-clipped steelhead for a total aggregate of 3 adult fish harvested daily. Unmarked steelhead are naturally produced, and must be released unharmed.

Most of the rivers open to steelhead fishing in the Coos-Coquille-Tenmile basins are open through April 30.

The hatchery programs in the Coos, Coquille and Tenmile use local stocks of fish for broodstock. Unmarked, wild steelhead are incorporated into the egg-take each year in an effort to keep the genetics, behavior and other characteristics of the hatchery stock as close as possible to those of the wild population. One possible benefit of using localized broodstock is a longer run, with fish returning from late November through spring.

Hatchery steelhead for the Coquille River Basin are reared at Bandon Hatchery. There are no facilities in the Coos and Tenmile basins to rear winter steelhead to smolts. Subsequently, steelhead smolts for these two basins are reared at Cole Rivers Hatchery in the upper Rogue, and transported back for acclimation and release. ODFW is evaluating and adjusting acclimation and release sites in order to increase survival and contribution to sport fisheries by returning adult steelhead.

Fishing Techniques

Novice anglers are encouraged to try drift-fishing roe and yarn or a corky on a leader about 20 to 24 inches under a three-way swivel. On the third eye of the swivel attach a short dropper (4-6 inches) of line, weighted to bounce slowly along the bottom. Adjust the amount of weight to allow the bait to drift at a natural rate, ticking the bottom periodically. Cast slightly upstream so that the bait is on the bottom by the time it is straight out from the angler. Bobber and jig combinations can also be a good method for the novice angler; if the bobber-to-bait length is adjusted accordingly it will keep the hook away from bottom snags. Long, straight runs with a uniform depth are good places to try this gear type. Sand shrimp are often added to the drift-fishing rig or on the jig to further tempt steelhead to bite.

Flyfishing for steelhead is becoming more popular in the Coos, Coquille, and Tenmile basins. Drifting an egg fly pattern under a strike indicator is a very effective and simple technique to catch steelhead in the area rivers. Fly anglers can also catch steelhead by swinging flies through short to medium runs that have prime steelhead holding water.

During steelhead season, don't discount periods when the rivers are low and clear. By scaling-down your bait or lure size, and toning-down the colors, steelhead can be enticed to

bite in clear water. For the bobber and jig anglers, a small black jig often works when a neon-colored or pink jig will spook fish.

Another tip is to try fishing in the late afternoon/evening hours. Many steelhead anglers are out early in the morning and quit by mid-day. After the fish have had a chance to settle-down, and with most anglers off the river, you can have sections of river almost to yourself.

Coos/Millicoma Basin

In the South Coos River, the best hatchery steelhead fishing is in the lowest five miles above the head of tidewater (located at Weyerhaeuser's Dellwood Log Camp). The Big Creek Acclimation Site, also known as the "Fivemile Hole," at milepost 5 is a good place to target adult steelhead returning to the area where they were released as smolts. Above milepost 6, most winter steelhead hooked will be unmarked and must be released but you can occasionally find a fin-clipped steelhead for harvest. Access to the South Coos River above the Dellwood Gate is by permit from Weyerhaeuser Company, and is subject to their rules. Anglers should call the Weyerhaeuser hotline number at 1-888-741-5403 for recorded information on access and permits. Fishing access permits can be obtained at Weyerhaeuser's Dellwood office.

Excellent steelhead bank fishing opportunities are available on both the East and West forks of the Millicoma River system.

On the East Fork Millicoma, bank access is available in Coos County's Nesika Park, with several excellent fishing holes and drifts from which to choose. On the West Fork, public access is available at ODFW's Millicoma Interpretive Center (MIC), about nine miles upriver from Allegany. Located on lands administered by the Oregon Department of Forestry, the banks at MIC and for several miles upstream provide excellent steelhead fishing opportunities. The ponds at MIC are used for acclimation of steelhead smolts, so adult fish are drawn back to this area.

Limited boat fishing for steelhead occurs on the East and West Fork Millicoma. There are no developed ramps on either fork, but primitive slides do exist here. Both forks have bedrock and boulder areas that make for difficult boating when flows are low.

There are river gauging stations on the South Fork Coos along with the East and West Fork Millicoma rivers that steelhead anglers can use to look at river levels before they leave home. River levels are updated approximately every 15 minutes onto the [Coos Watershed Association's website](#).

Coquille River Basin

Prime steelhead fishing is available in the major forks of the Coquille River—namely the South, North and East forks. Hatchery steelhead smolts are acclimated and released in areas where angler access and harvest success is good. The South Fork of the Coquille River upstream of the Forest Service boundary is closed to all fishing to protect spawning and rearing steelhead.

The South Fork is the largest of the three forks, and provides good access for boat and bank fishing.

Steelhead smolts are released from acclimation sites at the mouth of Beaver and Woodward creeks below Powers, so adult steelhead are attracted back to these spots. The South Fork between Myrtle Point and Powers is a great area to target these returning fish.

Drift boat launches are located at the mouth of Beaver Creek, at the confluence of the Middle and South forks, and several points in-between. Beaver Creek, Baker Creek, Myrtle Grove State Park and Powers Memorial State Park provide access to popular bank fishing holes.

On the North and East forks of the Coquille River, most fishing is from the bank, although limited drift boating occurs in a few places.

On the North Fork, the most popular steelhead holes are located in Laverne County Park. An acclimation site is located here, so hatchery returns to the area are plentiful. On the East Fork, acclimations occur near China Creek below Brewster Gorge, and excellent fishing is also available here. Land ownership along the East Fork is a “checkerboard” pattern, with alternating sections of private lands and BLM-administered public lands.

The Middle Fork Coquille River has no hatchery steelhead releases. This river, characterized by boulder and “pocket water”, is a spawning and rearing area for wild steelhead. While their presence is very low, adipose fin-clipped steelhead are legal to harvest in the Middle Fork. There are a few public sites along the Middle Fork because most land is privately owned.

River gage information for the South Fork Coquille River at Powers is available [here](#).

Tenmile Lakes Basin

Steelhead fishing access is available at the Forest Service’s Spinreel Park, just west of Hwy 101. Spinreel Park has a small boat ramp where anglers can launch a drift boat or small boat with a motor. This area is popular with bank anglers that plunk or drift eggs. The Forest Service charges a fee for day use in the park. Steelhead smolts are acclimated and released at the mouth of Saunders Creek in Spinreel Park, in Tenmile Creek near Hwy 101, and at the outlet to Eel Lake. Adult hatchery steelhead are drawn back to these areas and provide for excellent catch rates. Steelhead fishing is open in Eel Creek (below Eel Lake) from Jan. 1 through April 30.

Lower Tenmile Creek is an interesting water body to fish for winter steelhead. Consisting of mostly sand bottom, it has a different “feel” than rivers with a gravel bottom. It can be difficult to locate holding fish in this creek, as it does not exhibit the typical pool-riffle pattern like other rivers.

Fishing lower Tenmile Creek downstream of Spinreel Park begins with a hike through the dunes, and offers a unique steelhead fishing experience. With the big lakes acting as a settling basin, Tenmile Creek is often fishable when other area rivers are muddy following heavy rainstorms.

North and South Tenmile Lakes and Eel Lake are open from Nov. 1 through April 30 each year for harvest of adipose fin-clipped steelhead; however, steelhead are primarily in the lakes from January through April. Some anglers troll the upper ends of the lake arms for steelhead.

From May 1 to Oct. 31, rainbow trout over 20 inches are considered trout, and may be harvested one fish per day, in accordance with Southwest Zone regulations. They do not need to be fin-clipped to harvest during this “trout” fishing period, nor do they need to be recorded on a tag. This regulation allows harvest of some large “holdover” rainbow trout from the ODFW stocking program. During the period when wild steelhead are passing through the lakes on their way to spawning grounds, the regulations help protect these unmarked fish from harvest.

Umpqua River Basin Overview and Mainstem

The *50 Places to go Fishing within 60 minutes of Roseburg* publication features several steelhead fishing spots and is available [on line](#), at the Roseburg Visitor Center, and the Roseburg ODFW office.

The Umpqua is famous for its steelhead fishing. There is year-round harvest of adipose fin-clipped steelhead in the Mainstem and North Umpqua, while the South Umpqua and Smith River are open for adipose clipped winter steelhead from Dec. 1, 2013 through April 30, 2014. The wild run has been strong the last several years, so there are good catch-and-release opportunities throughout the basin. Anglers should remember that no wild steelhead can be harvested in the Umpqua Basin.

The Umpqua River Basin has an estimated population of 30,000 to 40,000 winter steelhead. An estimated 7 to 11 percent of the winter steelhead that swim through the Mainstem are fin clipped. Thus anglers should anticipate hooking more wild fish than hatchery fish, particularly in the Mainstem, Smith and North Umpqua. The hatchery program is based in the South Umpqua so anglers wanting to harvest a steelhead should concentrate their efforts in the South Umpqua from Canyonville downstream. During the last couple of years 75,000 to 109,000 winter steelhead smolts have been released in the South Umpqua. Thus 3,000 to 5,000 fin clipped steelhead should be returning.

From December through mid-February all of the steelhead bound for the North and South Umpqua are still making their way through the Main Umpqua. This makes for an incredible catch-and-release fishery as up to 90 percent of the steelhead hooked will be wild fish and must be released unharmed.

The best fishing opportunities in the Mainstem begin after Thanksgiving and continue through early March. Winter steelhead fishing begins just above tidal influence at Scottsburg. Bank fishing begins at Family Camp and continues upstream on the south side of the Umpqua River to Lutsinger Creek. Sawyer's Rapids and Scotts Creek are just upstream and are popular bank and drift boat spots. There also is good bank access at Bunch Bar wayside, which is owned by Douglas County and at Yellow Creek, Cleveland Rapids and River Forks Park.

Drift boaters can access the river at the Scotts Creek boat ramp and the Sawyer's Rapids RV Park. Boat fishing is also available at Elkton, Yellow Creek, Osprey, James Woods and Umpqua boat ramps. Boat fishing on the Mainstem tends to be best when water levels are between 8 and 10 feet. Low and cold water conditions can keep steelhead up. Anglers fishing under these conditions should be particularly mindful of practicing good ethical catch-and-release techniques and handle the wild fish as little as possible.

Fishing in the North and South Umpqua starts in late December, with peak catch rates in late February through March. Winchester Dam counts show that by Jan. 15 only about 11 percent of the run has crossed Winchester Dam. By Feb. 15 normally about 30 percent of the run has reached the dam while by the middle of March about 66 percent have crossed the dam. Assuming that the South Umpqua steelhead are traveling at the same speed, it means that the fishing in the South Umpqua will be most successful from late February on. Since the fish tend to move more with rising water temperatures, anglers should be aware that a cold snap can stop the migration and slow the bite. Steelhead fishing in April can be productive, but by then many anglers have shifted their interest to spring chinook.

The North Umpqua and Smith River are typically the first waters to come back into fishable shape after a storm. The Mainstem Umpqua and South Umpqua are best fished when water levels are rising or falling. Higher flows cause the migrating winter steelhead to travel closer to the banks making them easier for bank anglers to target. Many of the best plunking holes on the Mainstem can only be fished at higher flows.

Fishing Techniques

Bank anglers on the Mainstem are successful plunking with a Spin-N-Glo, with or without prawns or roe, on a 20-24-inch leader rigged with appropriate weight from a three-way swivel. Bank anglers on the North and South Umpqua Rivers prefer drift fishing with a corky, yarn or egg rig. Most will use pencil lead or a slinky about 24 inches above the bait,

with just enough weight to keep the bait near the bottom. Anglers in the North Umpqua fly waters should double check the angling regulations since gear use varies by time. Most boaters throughout the Umpqua basin prefer side drifting with eggs or pulling plugs.

Contact the District Office of ODFW at Roseburg, 541-440-3353, for more information on fishing techniques, and up-to-date fishing conditions. Or check out the ODFW weekly [Recreation Report](#) for the latest on fishing conditions.

North Umpqua River

Anglers should remember that the North Umpqua no longer has a wild fish harvest. Only adipose fin-clipped steelhead may be kept in this area. Only about 5 percent of the winter steelhead in the North Umpqua are hatchery fish. However, with the strong wild population there is still a lot of catch-and-release opportunity in the North Umpqua.

Boat access is readily available on the lower 30 river miles of the North Umpqua River. Hestness Landing provides access for anglers to the lower North Umpqua River, and Amacher Park boat ramp is located just below Winchester Dam. A drift from Amacher Park to Hestness Landing is often productive for winter steelhead anglers. Above Winchester Dam, boat access is available at Whistlers Bend Park, Gravel Pit boat ramp, Colliding Rivers boat ramp, and a drift boat slide on Lone Rock Road. A boat take-out-only is located on the south side of the river off Page Road. The best boat fishing occurs when the North is between 4 to 7 feet or 1,688 to 6,400 cfs. The North Umpqua can be difficult to float for inexperienced boaters and caution should be used when floating this river.

Bank fishing in the lower river can be found at River Forks Park, Amacher Park, Whistlers Bend Park, near Colliding Rivers, the Narrows and just below Rock Creek at Swiftwater. Winter steelhead fishing above Rock Creek to Soda Springs Dam is part of the fly water area and is limited to wading and bank fishing. Fishing in the fly water can be productive throughout the season depending on river conditions -- optimal flows are from 1,500 cfs to about 5,500 cfs. Successful fly anglers use 10 to 14-foot spey rods and sink tips to "swing" large weighted or unweighted flies in the winter.

Winchester Dam counts are also posted on the [ODFW website](#). The counts are not meant to be "real time" but can provide a look back at what the run timing has been in recent years.

The best way to use the Winchester Dam counts is to click on the time frame you're interested in from the previous year. Then you can view 10 years of data to see what percent of the run has normally reached Winchester Dam by that time. Run time is generally the same from year to year with some adjustments for flood events, or cold snaps that can slow the run down a little. By viewing 10 years of data by 2-week increments anglers can plan their trips accordingly.

South Umpqua River

The South Umpqua is the center of the Umpqua's winter steelhead hatchery program. The goal of the hatchery program is to acclimate and release 80,000 –120,000 winter steelhead smolts per year. To help maintain the best possible genetics for the hatchery program, about 50 percent of the fish used for the broodstock are wild fish. Some of these fish are provided to the program through guides who have permits from the ODFW and Oregon State Police, while the rest of the fish are captured at various traps in the South Umpqua basin.

The South Umpqua winter steelhead program also provides a lot of public outreach. Volunteers from ODFW's STEP program are an integral part of operating the acclimation sites and assisting with the broodstock collection. The ODFW has two acclimation sites on Canyon Creek, one operated by STEP volunteers and the other by the Cow Creek Band of the Umpqua Tribe of Indians. The ODFW also runs one acclimation site in cooperation with Eastwood Elementary School. This provides steelhead that tend to linger in the Canyonville

and Roseburg areas. The STEP program and volunteers provide a variety of tours and field events at the acclimation sites so visitors can learn about fish life-cycles, the needs of fish, and fish management techniques.

With the release of nearly 94,000 smolts in 2011, 109,000 in 2012, and about 75,000 in 2013 we are expecting a good hatchery return this year. Most of the fish that return come back in 2 years; therefore, fishing for hatchery fish is predicted to be good. Again, although these hatchery fish will be available in the Mainstem and North Umpqua, they will compose a small percentage of the steelhead in those basins.

The South Umpqua River provides the best opportunity to catch and keep adipose fin-clipped steelhead.

Boat ramps include Templin Beach in Roseburg, Douglas County Fair Grounds and Happy Valley. The new Harold and Sid Nichols boat ramp in Winston opened in October 2012. It is off Highway 42 near Douglas High School.

Several unimproved boat ramps are located at Boomer Hill, Gazley Bar, Stanton Park and Canyonville County Park. These boat ramps tend to be in the portion of the South with the highest concentration of hatchery fish. Above Canyonville there are unimproved ramps at Days Creek, Lavadoure Creek, Milo and Tiller. Catch-and-release fishing for wild steelhead is popular in this upper section of the South. The best boat angling is when the water levels are between 7 to 9 feet or about 3,000 to 6,500 cfs.

Bank fishing can be good at Templin Beach, Happy Valley Boat Ramp, the Myrtle Creek Bridge and Stanton County Park. There is also bank fishing available behind Seven Feathers Casino. Cow Creek is open to Middle Creek for steelhead fishing. Both Cow Creek and the South Umpqua River also provide above-average opportunities to catch and release large wild winter steelhead.

Smith River

Smith River provides anglers an opportunity to catch and release wild winter steelhead. The regulations do allow harvest of adipose-clipped steelhead, but there is no hatchery program in the Smith River basin and stray hatchery fish are rare. Bank access below Smith River Falls is limited due to private landownership. Boat access below the falls is available at the Wasson Creek Bridge, a drift boat slide near Dailey Creek, a wayside just above Doe Creek, and an unimproved boat slide just below the falls. Bank fishing access improves above Smith River Falls, as landownership becomes BLM and private industrial. Several unimproved boat slides exist above the falls, with good boat access at Vincent Creek. Several good drifts are available in the Smith River basin.

Rogue River Basin

Anglers will find some of the best fishing spots, including many favorite steelhead fishing areas, in *50 Places to go fishing within 60 minutes of Medford* publication. The publication is available [on-line](#) and at ODFW offices. An associated Google map with locations and directions also is available [on-line](#).

The Rogue River offers steelhead fishing opportunities nearly every month of the year. Winter steelhead migrate up the Rogue from December through May, followed by summer steelhead from May through November. A strong run of wild winter steelhead is supplemented by releases of hatchery fish in the Rogue and Applegate rivers. Winter steelhead provide a popular fishery on the Rogue River, but do not draw the huge crowds like spring chinook; therefore, anglers can enjoy a little more elbow room. Given the diversity of the rivers within the Rogue Basin, anglers can find water suitable for whatever fishing technique they enjoy.

Returns of winter steelhead to the Rogue River and its tributaries are expected to be near average this winter. With favorable river conditions, anglers should experience good fishing throughout the basin.

Several dams have been removed within the Rogue Basin over the last several years. Savage Rapids, Gold Hill and Gold Ray dams were taken out of the main stem Rogue River. This has greatly improved conditions for all of the Rogue's native species, including winter steelhead. For anglers, this means more fishable water. In the areas once impounded by the dams there are now new riffles and runs – prime fishing water for winter steelhead. The dam removals also have reduced migratory delay and stress on fish, and improved chances for successful spawning and the likelihood of solid runs in years to come.

Even when winter freshets create high flows and turbid water, anglers can typically still find fishable water on the Rogue between Cole Rivers Hatchery and Big Butte Creek, where the clear outflow from Lost Creek Reservoir makes up most of the river's flow. Following a freshet, the Illinois River clears more quickly than the Rogue or Applegate Rivers.

Lower Rogue River

Winter steelhead fishing kicks off around Thanksgiving, but really picks up in mid-December. The steelhead run will usually peak sometime in late January, but steelhead fishing remains good thru March or early April. Regulations for the lower Rogue River change on Jan. 1 each year and anglers should review the regulations before heading out.

Anglers fishing either off the bank or from a jet boat can do equally as well, depending on the flow. Bank anglers will do the best when flows are around 10,000 cfs and dropping, while boat anglers do best when flows get down around 7000-8000 cfs and dropping at Agness. ([Rogue River flows](#))

Plunking a Spin-N-Glo is the technique of choice for bank anglers. Steelhead in the lower river all migrate on the inside bends of the river in about one to three feet of water. Anglers new to the fishery can easily get all the information they need to be successful from watching and talking to other anglers on the gravel bar.

Public access is very good from the top of tide all the way to Quosatana Campground, approximately 15 miles.

Running plugs is the number one technique among boat anglers. Boat anglers can launch at any of the gravel bars in the lower river, or boat ramps at the Port of Gold Beach, Lobster Creek Campground or Quosatana Campground.

The tough part for boat anglers new to the fishery is appreciating how close to the bank steelhead migrate. Usually, you want to anchor the boat about one boat width from the shore, unless the water is really clear.

Middle Rogue River

Winter steelhead normally start to arrive in the area around Grants Pass in late December, with peak fishing in February and March. There is plenty of good bank access along the middle Rogue. Between the city, county and state parks and the federal recreational areas, there are over 20 developed access sites. In addition, much of the land along the river below Hellgate Canyon is owned by the Bureau of Land Management. Some of the most productive sites include Valley of the Rogue State Park, Matson Park, Griffin Park and Robertson Bridge. Bank anglers can enjoy success by drifting bait, casting lures, plunking, and fly fishing.

This section of the river also offers good opportunities for fishing from both drift and motorized boats. With boat ramps distributed every three to five miles along the river, there are a lot of options. Techniques favored by boat anglers include drifting bait, casting

lures and flies, back bouncing bait and lures, and back-trolling plugs. Side-drifting bait is becoming increasingly popular in the long, slow runs below Grants Pass.

The removal of Savage Rapids and Gold Ray Dams has opened up new floats for boat anglers; however, boaters should be aware that there are several difficult rapids between the Fishers Ferry and Gold Hill boat ramps. The [Rogue River Water Trail brochure](#) provides an excellent description of this reach as part of its map of the middle and upper Rogue between Grave Creek and William Jess Dam.

Above the Hog Creek Boat Landing (below Merlin), anglers may keep non-adipose fin-clipped (wild) steelhead at least 24 inches in length, one per day and five per year, from Feb. 1 to April 30. Adipose fin-clipped (hatchery) steelhead may be kept the entire year.

Upper Rogue River

Winter steelhead are normally caught in the upper river above the former Gold Ray Dam (near Gold Hill) from February through mid-May, with peak fishing activity in March and early April. Because hatchery steelhead returning to Cole River Hatchery supplement a healthy population of wild steelhead, there are a lot of winter steelhead in this section of the river.

Access for bank fishing is plentiful in this stretch. Bank anglers can enjoy good success between the hatchery and the Hwy 62 Bridge, and at public access points such as Casey State Park, Rogue Elk Park, Takelma Park, Denman Wildlife Management Area and Tou Velle State Park.

Numerous boat ramps allow boat anglers to choose from a variety of popular drifts. The river gets smaller in this upper section, with more defined holes. The area from Cole Rivers Hatchery downstream to Big Butte Creek usually remains fishable when the rest of the river is out of shape due to storm events.

Drifting bait, casting lures, and back-trolling plugs are all popular techniques. Later in the season, fly fishing can be very productive. Fly anglers can find good water for swinging flies with two-handed rods, as well as places to dead-drift nymph patterns.

Anglers may keep non-adipose fin-clipped (wild) steelhead at least 24 inches in length, one per day and five per year, from Feb. 1- April 30. Adipose fin-clipped (hatchery) steelhead may be kept the entire year.

Illinois River

The Illinois River provides an excellent opportunity to fish for wild winter steelhead in a remote and rugged setting. Winter steelhead are available from December through March, with activity usually peaking in January and February.

With its clear water, outstanding scenery, and big fish, the Illinois River is a good destination for anglers seeking a quality fishing experience.

The Illinois River flows out of California into the Illinois Valley, before entering a long canyon leading to the Rogue River at Agness. In the Illinois Valley, private land limits access to the river. In the canyon, most of the land is publicly-owned. Except for the lower three miles, between Oak Flat and the mouth, a lack of developed access points and technical whitewater limit fishing opportunities from a boat. In addition, topography in the canyon makes access to the river difficult in most places, but this also keeps the fishing pressure down.

Anglers willing to make the effort can usually have a beautiful section of river to themselves. The river is full of boulders and ledges that make drift fishing difficult in many places, so casting flies and lures are popular fishing methods. Due to the local geology, the

flow in the Illinois can increase rapidly during a storm; however, the river drops and clears quickly afterward.

Fishing in the Illinois River is restricted to artificial flies and lures. Above Klondike Creek anglers may harvest non-adipose fin-clipped (wild) steelhead at least 24 inches in length, one per day and five per year, as part of the steelhead/salmon catch limit. Below Klondike Creek anglers may only keep adipose fin-clipped (hatchery) steelhead, which occasionally stray into the Illinois River from the Rogue. The river above Pomeroy Dam (near Cave Junction) and all tributaries are closed to fishing to protect spawning salmon and steelhead.

Applegate River

The Applegate River is smaller than neighboring rivers, and offers good opportunities for wading anglers. Well-defined holes and runs, and a gravel bottom make it easier to fish. The first winter steelhead are typically caught the lower river starting in mid-January, with the fishery peaking from mid-February through the end of the season on March 31. Fishing in March can be excellent.

Drifting bait works well, and casting spoons is popular.

The river also offers one of the best opportunities in the area to catch winter steelhead on a fly. Swinging traditional steelhead flies and dead-drifting nymph patterns both work well. Fly anglers will find the best conditions when flows are below 800 cfs, but the river can be fishable at higher flows as well. Flow information can be obtained online at the [USGS Wilderville Gauge](#).

No fishing is allowed from a floating device, but anglers can use small rafts or pontoon boats to access more water. Much of the river is in private ownership, so anglers must use caution and always avoid trespassing. The National Forest lands on the upper river, Cantrall Buckley Park and Fish Hatchery Park are prime fishing sites. The main stem Applegate upstream to Applegate Dam is open to fishing for adipose fin-clipped (hatchery) steelhead from Jan. 1 through March 31. All non-adipose fin-clipped (wild) rainbow trout and steelhead, and all cutthroat trout must be released unharmed.

Winchuck River

The Winchuck has an excellent run of winter steelhead. It's also slow to muddy and clears quickly after rains. The upper river flows primarily through Forest Service land with good access for bank anglers. Anglers can float the river, but only experienced oarsman should attempt to. Fishing from a boat is prohibited.

Chetco River

The Chetco is slow to muddy and clears quickly after a rain event. It is the only non-Rogue River stream on the south coast with a hatchery program. ODFW has maintained a wild broodstock collection program on the Chetco River for more than 25 years, releasing up to 50,000 steelhead smolts annually. Releases occur at Social Security Bar, approximately 3 miles upriver from Hwy 101. In 2011 and 2012, the ODFW Restoration and Enhancement Program funded a two year steelhead creel on the Chetco River with an average catch of 3,800 steelhead for those years. It is a great fishery, but can be crowded at times.

The majority of the returning hatchery steelhead stay within the lower 8 miles of the river, providing a very good fishery from early December to March. The heaviest concentrations are around the mouth of the North Fork Chetco River up to Loeb State Park.

The Chetco River also has a tremendous wild steelhead population. Both runs return at the same time, and most fish are spawned out by mid-March. The wild fish generally move through the lower river during rain events, providing excellent fishing. The majority of wild fish spawn in the upper river and tributaries. Flows are a key factor in determining when to fish and what method to use. Anglers can keep an eye on the [Chetco River flows online](#).

Bank anglers usually start plunking Spin-N-Glos around 9,000 cfs and drift boat anglers do best at 4,000 cfs and dropping.

Anglers are reminded that to maintain a wild steelhead broodstock program, ODFW staff are regularly netting wild steelhead on the Chetco River. At times, these broodstock collection efforts may interfere with an anglers fishing. In addition to broodstock collection, ODFW will be conducting a steelhead angler creel from December to March. Please be courteous to all ODFW personnel and volunteers.

Pistol River

The Pistol has a very good run of steelhead but muddies quickly during rain events and is slow to clear. Most anglers use roe, cast spinners or fly fish. Access is limited by private property and anglers are reminded to ask first before entering private property. Only the lower 4-5 miles is floatable. The best access for bank anglers is around the mouth of Deep Creek and the South Fork.

Hunter Creek

Hunter Creek muddies quickly and is slow to clear. Bank access is very good, with most landowners allowing access if asked. Anglers can float the river during moderate flows. Boat anglers might try running plugs, while bank anglers prefer bobber and jigs, spinners, flies or drifting eggs. Hunter Creek is closed to steelhead fishing until Jan. 1 each year in order to protect spawning fall chinook.

Euchre Creek

Euchre Creek muddies slowly, and clears quickly. Like all south coast streams, Euchre Creek has a good wild steelhead run. Bank access to Euchre Creek is all through private property, but bank anglers who ask are generally allowed access to fish. This creek is too small and brushy for boats. Most anglers use roe, cast spinners or fly fish.

Brush Creek

Brush Creek is a small creek that muddies slowly and clears quickly. The lower river is all within Humbug State Park, providing ample bank access. Anglers will have to search for pools free of willows to fish, but are usually rewarded with a steelhead. Unlike most of the south coast rivers and creeks, Brush Creek is closed to the harvest of wild steelhead.

Elk River

Elk River is slow to muddy during rain events, and clears quickly. It has an excellent steelhead run that is best fished from a boat. Elk River does not have a steelhead hatchery program, but anglers can expect to catch some stray adipose fin-clipped steelhead. Elk River fishes best at 5.0 feet and dropping. Anglers can call (541)332-0405 for daily gauge heights and water clarity. Limited bank fishing is available because the majority of land along the river is private property. Most drift boaters put in at Elk River Hatchery and float approximately nine miles to Ironhead boat ramp; both are ODFW properties. Boat anglers side drift eggs, fly fish or run plugs. Chinook are in the system thru February, so anglers may want to run a little heavier line.

Recent improvements at the Ironhead boat ramp offer better boat launching and retrieval, and better bank fishing opportunities. Please park only in the parking lot, pack out all garbage and respect adjacent property owners.

Sixes River

Sixes River muddies quickly, clears slowly, and boasts an excellent steelhead run. Bank fishing and boat access are at Cape Blanco State Park, Hwy 101 bridge, and at ODFW and BLM properties. Boat anglers can find easy floats that range from two to 12 miles. Most anglers fish roe, spinners, run plugs or fly fish.

Floras Creek

Floras Creek muddies quickly, clears slowly, and has an excellent steelhead run. Bank is very limited. Boat access is very limited and mostly on private lands.

Willamette Zone

Portland area anglers should have plenty of opportunities to land a winter steelhead in 2014 as ocean survival continues to be good and management changes geared at expanding opportunities appear to be taking hold. Winter steelhead begin moving through the Willamette system during winter months, with the lower river fishery beginning in late November and early December. The native late-run winter steelhead start migrating upstream during the latter part of February and continue into early May.

Wild winter steelhead returns over Willamette Falls for the last five years averaged over 5,000 fish in Oregon City with 7,616 returning last year. Hatchery returns to the Clackamas and Sandy rivers have been increasing in recent years with Clackamas Hatchery collecting an above average number (1,244) of returning adult in 2012 after shifting to wild broodstock.

All indications are that opportunities should be plentiful in the Willamette Zone for the dedicated angler.

For more information on steelhead fishing in the Lower Willamette, Clackamas, Sandy, or Molalla rivers, contact the North Willamette Watershed District office at (971) 673-6011. For information on Upper Willamette tributaries, call the ODFW South Willamette Watershed District office at (541) 757-4186 x 249 or the ODFW Springfield Field office at (541) 726-3515.

Lower Willamette

The fishery for winter steelhead in the lower Willamette River (below Willamette Falls in Oregon City) usually begins in early December, although passage counts at Willamette Falls commence Nov. 1. A dry spell followed by a high flow event in late November/early December typically brings the first flush of winter steelhead into the Willamette. With the change to a native broodstock in the Clackamas River, winter steelhead should be available in the lower Willamette from November through the early part of the spring chinook season. Steelhead caught in the lower Willamette River are headed for the Clackamas River and tributaries above the falls including the Molalla, Tualatin, Santiam and McKenzie rivers.

The most popular and accessible bank-angling site in the lower Willamette is located at Meldrum Bar in Gladstone. Many long-time Meldrum Bar anglers are successful in high, muddy water when fishing close to the bank (within 15 feet) using brightly colored gear such as Spin-N-Glos or spinners.

The Meldrum Bar fishery can be a little different than most bank fishing so a good tip is to spend some time on the bank watching other anglers to see how it's done.

Winter steelhead are known to hold in shallow margins of the Willamette below the mouth of the Clackamas River, waiting for higher flows and warmer water temperature. Steelhead in the Willamette can be very lethargic and less prone to taking the bait during low, cold winter flows.

Look for river flows ranging from 12,500 – 20,000 cfs and water temperatures from 45-55 degrees for the best opportunities. Willamette River flows, temperatures, and Willamette Falls fish counts can be found [online](#). Keep in mind while viewing the fish counts that all steelhead passing the falls after May 31 are considered summer steelhead.

Clackamas River

The Clackamas River provides a highly-prized fishery near the Portland metropolitan area and produces the largest recreational catch of winter steelhead of all the Columbia River tributaries.

The hatchery winter steelhead program on the Clackamas is comprised of two stocks of fish -- Eagle Creek stock and local Clackamas stock that incorporates wild returning fish. Winter steelhead fishing usually begins slowly in December, but noticeable numbers of fish do not enter the system until high water events in January. Eagle Creek stock usually returns from late December through March, with a peak from mid-January to mid-February. The first Clackamas River stock show up as early as Jan. 1 and continue through May. This run usually peaks in March and April. Counts of fish passing North Fork Dam on the Clackamas River can be found [here](#).

Hatchery fish are acclimated and released from the Clackamas Fish Hatchery at McIver State Park, the mouth of Foster Creek, and the Eagle Creek National Fish Hatchery on Eagle Creek. When these fish return as adults many of them will hold at or below these release points.

The Clackamas River typically fishes best at flows with a gage reading of 10-13 feet, although anglers have been known to catch fish at levels up to 14.5 feet (measured at [Rivermill Dam](#)). When the river is high and off color, anglers should concentrate their efforts at the mouths of tributary streams such as Clear Creek, Eagle Creek or Dog Creek (at the hatchery outlet).

The best fishing is two to three days after a high water event, when the river has dropped and fish start to hold in pools or pool tail-outs.

Bank anglers can find access to the Clackamas River in the High Rocks/Cross Park area in Gladstone, Riverside Park in Clackamas, along Clackamas River Drive (there are several pull-off areas), in Carver near the mouth of Clear Creek, Barton Park, McIver Park near Dog Creek, and near River Mill Dam. Easy access to Eagle Creek can be found at Bonnie Lure State Park and Eagle Fern Park. Anglers can also walk down Eagle Creek to its confluence with the main stem Clackamas to find good bank fishing on the Clackamas River.

Boat anglers can find ramps at McIver Park (note: upper ramp should only be used by experienced boaters due to hazardous whitewater), Feldheimer's Road, Barton Park, Carver Park, Riverside Park or Clackamette Park.

The Clackamas River above North Fork Reservoir is managed as a wild fish sanctuary and is closed to fishing for steelhead and salmon.

Eagle Creek

Eagle Creek, a tributary of the lower Clackamas River, offers a popular winter steelhead fishery with easy access for the bank angler. The first steelhead of the season will typically start showing up in the creek right after Thanksgiving, but it is usually late December before anglers will find significant numbers of fish in the creek. Quality winter steelhead fishing can be expected in Eagle Creek from January on into March. Many of the steelhead caught at Meldrum Bar and in the lower Clackamas are actually destined for Eagle Creek National Fish Hatchery.

Fishing conditions on Eagle Creek are dependent on precipitation and its flows can change dramatically after a good rainfall. Often it will blow out quickly and be unfishable in a matter of hours. On the flip side, it also clears very quickly. It doesn't take long for the water color to improve, even though the flows may be somewhat high. If there is a long period of cold, dry weather it can get very low and clear, making steelhead fishing a bit more of a challenge. In the past few years, the number of smolts released in Eagle Creek has been

reduced from 150,000 to 100,00 – anglers will start seeing this reflected in the number of returning adults.

Many different types of lures can be successful on the creek, with color often dictated by water clarity. Try brighter colors during the murky water conditions and darker, and less flamboyant colors during times when the creek is crystal clear.

Types of gear that have consistently proven successful include bobber and jig, sand shrimp, corkies and yarn, and small egg clusters with yarn. The skilled fly angler can do very well using steelhead flies.

There are several public access points along Eagle Creek:

- Starting from the mouth of the creek, the first place to try would be Bonnie Lure Park, which is off of Dowty Road. Take a right from Hwy 224 in the community of Eagle Creek to find the park area. From Bonnie Lure Park you can also access nearly a half-mile of the Clackamas River for bank fishing.
- Eagle Creek passes under Hwy 224 just past Eagle Creek Store and there is also some bank access there.
- Very close to the Hwy 224 crossing is Wildcat Mountain Road. Go left towards the hatchery and follow the hatchery signs on Eagle Fern Road. You will soon see several pull-offs on the right that provide great access to the creek.
- Eagle Fern Park that has many good holes. This access area runs for about a half mile on up to Snuffin Road Bridge.
- From Snuffin Road you can continue up Eagle Fern Road (also called George Road), and after about three miles, turn right down Rainbow Road to Eagle Creek National Fish Hatchery. Fishing can be very good below the hatchery if you are willing to make the hike.

Much of Eagle Creek flows through private property. Longview Fiber and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are the largest landowners along the creek and they are not usually concerned about anglers for most of the year. However, it is advisable to get permission before accessing Eagle Creek on individual private landowner's property.

Sandy River

Among Columbia River tributaries, the Sandy River is second only to the Clackamas River in producing winter steelhead. This makes it a very popular destination for Portland area anglers. The hatchery program has been comprised of a native broodstock, meaning that the hatchery fish are derived from a portion of wild fish returning to the river. Winter steelhead begin returning to the river in December, but larger numbers do not start showing up in the catch until early February. The fishery usually runs from January through April. It is important to note that summer steelhead are also released into the Sandy River, and return from March through September.

All Sandy River winter steelhead are released from the Sandy Fish Hatchery on Cedar Creek, so anglers should focus their efforts from Cedar Creek downstream. There also are good opportunities for catch-and-release fishing for wild steelhead above Cedar Creek in the gorge above and below the former Marmot Dam site.

The Sandy River is a glacier-fed system that typically runs very muddy when warm winter rains melt the glaciers on Mt. Hood. The river will clear up within 3-4 days after high water if the snow level drops below 4,000 feet and the rain stops or slows to showers. The Sandy fishes best at gage readings of 8-11 feet (measured [below the Bull Run](#)).

Of special note is the recent removal of Marmot Dam at RM 30. The river became free-flowing again in mid-October 2007, providing fish unimpeded passage to the upper basin. With removal of the dam, river flows and patterns will likely continue to change. It may take several years for the sediment to leave the system, possibly altering your favorite fishing hole in the meantime. In addition, the angling deadline, which was located at Marmot Dam, was relocated to the mouth of the Salmon River beginning Jan. 1, 2008. The former dam site is now managed by BLM and is open for foot traffic only.

Anglers can access the Sandy River from many parks including Lewis and Clark, Dabney, Oxbow and Dodge. Access is also available at the mouth of Cedar Creek near the Sandy Fish Hatchery.

Boat anglers access the river at Dodge Park (recommended only for expert boat operators due to hazardous rapids), Oxbow Park, Dabney Park and Lewis and Clark Park near Troutdale. Jet boats are allowed downstream from Dabney Park. Also, fishing from a floating device is only allowed starting from a point that is 200 feet downstream of the Oxbow Park boat ramp.

Sauvie Island

There are several miles of open beach suitable for steelhead fishing on the Columbia River at the Sauvie Island Wildlife Refuge just north of Portland. The best public access to the Columbia River from Sauvie Island is on NW Reeder Road, which runs from south to north along the western side of the Island. Getting to Sauvie Island is easy. Just take Hwy 30 out of Portland and head north toward Scappoose. Look for the bridge crossing onto the island about two miles north of Linnton. After crossing the bridge, drive north on Sauvie Island Road to Reeder Road. Take Reeder Road west across the island about 6 miles to NW Reeder Road where it runs north along the Columbia for several miles. There are several points to find parking in easy walking distance of the river.

NOTE: Once on the island, you will need a parking permit. Daily permits are \$7 and can be purchased at Sam's Cracker Barrel, Reeder Beach RV Park, Island Cove Café and the Sauvie Island Wildlife Area headquarters (during regular business hours). Permits also can be purchased in advance of your visit on the [ODFW website](#).

The best time of the year to fish for winter steelhead at Sauvie Island is from December to March as steelhead bound for tributaries upstream move past the Island. Many of the fish hug the shoreline in six to 15 feet of water.

The most popular method is to plunk using a weight or sinker heavy enough so it doesn't move with the current. The preferred lure is a Spin-N-Glo. Some anglers also attach salmon eggs or sand shrimp to the back of the lure for added attraction. Use 15 pound test line or heavier to adequately hold your gear in place and to fight fish in the strong current. Watch other experienced anglers and ask questions about best rigging methods. Be courteous to other anglers and give lots of space so you don't crowd in on other's space. This area is also intertidal, and depth will change 3-5 feet with the tide.

Molalla River

The Molalla River in the upper Willamette is no longer stocked with hatchery winter steelhead but is a popular destination for catch-and-release fishing for wild winter steelhead. The Molalla has good numbers of wild winter steelhead and offers the adventurous angler an opportunity to catch this majestic fish in relative solitude. Limited numbers of naturally produced and stray summer steelhead may be present in the system in many of the same areas where winter steelhead are typically found.

The river is open to fishing year-round for adipose fin clipped chinook and steelhead up to the Turner Creek Bridge. The use of bait is allowed only from May 15 to July 15 in order to

provide opportunities for spring chinook harvest while minimizing impacts to native winter steelhead and juvenile salmonids.

Keep an eye on Willamette Falls fish counts as approximately one-third of the total number of steelhead passing the Falls are destined for the Molalla River. Head for the Mo' when daily counts pick up to over 50 fish per day or total count exceeds 1,000 fish.

If you would like more information about steelhead fishing opportunities or about native fish conservation efforts in the Molalla, contact the Native Fish Society/Molalla River Alliance office at (503) 829-6211.

North and South Santiam

Although known primarily for their summer steelhead fishing, these rivers also offer a fair catch-and-release fishery for winter steelhead.

Approximately one-quarter to one-third of all winter steelhead that pass over Willamette Falls enter the Santiam system.

The best time for catching winter steelhead is from early March through mid-May, and almost all fishing methods work well including bobber and jig, spinners, bait, swinging wet flies and drifting egg patterns.

Anglers should look for dropping water levels with good visibility and water temperatures above 45 degrees. Water conditions in the North and South Santiam Rivers vary. Typically, flows are relatively high in November and early December as the Corps of Engineers draws the reservoirs down to accommodate flood waters. After that, flows are driven by precipitation until reservoir refilling begins in February. A good site for up-to-date flow information is the [USGS website](#).

Fish that have their adipose fin clipped are considered summer steelhead and may be kept. Summer steelhead may be present in the river beginning in April. Salmon and steelhead fishing is closed above Foster Reservoir on the South Santiam and above Detroit on the North Santiam, as well as most tributaries with the exception of the Little North Fork Santiam.

Central and Northeast Zones

Winter fishing for summer steelhead.

Steelhead returning to rivers east of the Cascades are considered summer steelhead, based on when they first enter fresh water. (The exception is the Hood River, which gets Oregon's easternmost run of "true" winter steelhead.) However, fishing for these fish continues well into the winter – qualifying them for inclusion into our Winter Steelhead Guide.

Central Zone

Angling Techniques

Anglers use a wide variety of techniques. Successful anglers cast sinking flies, spinners, spoons, or plugs, or drift fish with bait, artificial lures and jigs.

Hood River

Unlike most winter steelhead streams, the Hood River provides steelhead fishing opportunities for summer and winter run steelhead during the winter months. Angler opportunity peaks, however, when the winter run steelhead begin returning in late winter.

As one of the easternmost populations of winter steelhead in the Columbia Basin, the Hood River run is later than most winter run populations.

Winter run steelhead typically start returning to the Hood River in late December and continue through May, with the peak of the run not occurring until April. The hatchery population is partially comprised from wild broodstock, so hatchery and wild fish return at nearly the same time. Fishing should be good in the Hood River, as approximately 50,000 winter steelhead smolts are released annually.

Anglers on the Hood River have a unique opportunity to catch both winter and summer run steelhead on the same trip. Summer run steelhead have a very protracted run in the Hood River, and are present in the river throughout the year. While the winter run may be late in the Hood, anglers should not discount the opportunity to fish early in the season for early returning winter run fish, while also fishing for holdover summer run fish, or late into the winter run season, for the early returning summer run fish.

Unlike more traditional winter steelhead streams, the Hood is typically higher gradient, which tends to reduce the number of pools. Anglers should not overlook riffles with boulders, or pocket type water, where steelhead may be holding.

The Powerdale Dam, which was operated by PacifiCorps, was removed in the summer of 2010. This dam removal has changed the dynamic of Hood River fishing, and allowed ODFW to open up much more of the river to fishing. Regulations allow fishing from the mouth of the river upstream to the confluence with the East Fork, and in the West Fork upstream to the angling deadline at Punchbowl Falls. Anglers should consult the current Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations for more information on the Hood River.

While access is somewhat limited in the Hood River due to private property, all of the former PacifiCorps lands-- generally the lower 4 miles of the river -- are now owned and managed by the Columbia Land Trust and remain open to the public. Anglers can best access much of the lower Hood, at the former powerhouse access off of Hwy 35. Anglers should note, however, that the access road to the former Powerdale Dam site on the west side of the river has been closed by a private landowner. Other upstream public access points include the Tucker Park, and the lands surrounding Punchbowl Falls. Anglers need to obtain permission from landowners prior to crossing private lands to get the river.

Floating the Hood River is not recommended due to the extremely dangerous boating conditions.

The Hood River is known for its erratic flow regime, and anglers should pay attention to the [USGS flow information available online](#) for optimum fishing conditions. In general, anglers will find best fishing on dropping flows following high water events.

Successful anglers on the Hood River traditionally drift fish with bait or artificials; however, anglers casting spinners or even flies will also catch fish.

Deschutes River

While the Deschutes River is famous for its summer run steelhead, good fishing opportunities exist well into the winter for summer run hatchery fish remaining in the river.

Deschutes steelhead typically don't begin spawning until early spring and slowly migrating or holding fish provide anglers excellent opportunity throughout most of the winter.

While not as popular as the summer fishery, winter time steelhead anglers can be quite successful. Anglers will find greater solitude than in the busy summer months, and the arid Deschutes River canyon can provide a welcome break from the typically wet winter steelhead fishing conditions found west of the Cascades.

The ODFW releases approximately 180,000 hatchery steelhead annually into the Deschutes from Round Butte Fish Hatchery. Hatchery fish are released into the Deschutes, downstream from the base of PGE's Pelton Dam at RM 100. Somewhat unique to the Deschutes is the large number of fish from other hatcheries that often stay into the Deschutes for extended periods.

Good numbers of steelhead can be found throughout the river during the winter, but areas upstream from Sherars Falls generally offer some of the best late-season fishing. Preliminary ODFW data suggests that this year's returns may be slightly stronger than last year's, providing good numbers of fish for ample winter-time opportunity.

Anglers will find fish in different locations in the Deschutes in winter than they may in the summer, due to cooler temperatures. Anglers should focus their efforts on softer water areas where fish will be holding, such as behind boulders or other obstructions, as fish will be less likely to move great distances to strike.

Large tracts of public land provide bank access, along with boat access throughout much of the river. Popular winter bank fishing areas on the Deschutes include the multiple sites along the east bank access road upstream from Maupin, Trout Creek campground area, and the Mecca Flat campground area. Successful anglers typically cast spinners or plugs, or fish sinking flies for late season action.

ODFW conducts yearly summer steelhead population estimates for the Deschutes from the Sherars Falls Fish Trap. All fish captured at the Sherars Falls Trap are tagged to help estimate the run size. Anglers are encouraged to contact the local ODFW district by phone at 541-296-4628, or through the ODFW web page if they catch any tagged steelhead in the Deschutes. Tag recoveries from anglers are used in developing the yearly population estimates. Current catch data from the Sherars Falls Trap is available on [ODFW's web site](#).

Northeast Zone

Grande Ronde, Wallowa and Imnaha Rivers

Returns of hatchery and wild steelhead will be on par with the norm this year. While counts remain lower than normal at Lower Granite Dam on the Snake River, PIT tag detections indicate Northeast Oregon stocks are returning in relatively normal numbers. Wild and hatchery summer steelhead enter these eastern Oregon streams in late summer through spring and fishing for them can continue into the winter months whenever the weather and water conditions permit. Harvest is limited to three adipose fin-clipped hatchery fish per day.

The best fall and early winter fishing opportunities are in the lower reaches of the Grande Ronde and Imnaha rivers. Public bank fishing access to both streams is generally good. The Troy area, on the lower Grande Ronde, contains substantial Bureau of Land Management and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife lands. The Imnaha River below Fence Creek boasts several points in US Forest Service ownership.

Mid to late-winter offers fishing opportunities into the Wallowa River and middle reaches of the Imnaha River as fish push upstream. Public access is plentiful along the lower 20 miles of the Wallowa River. The reaches of the Imnaha River between the town of Imnaha and Fence Cr. are mostly private; however, Big Sheep Creek from the town of Imnaha to the confluence of Little Sheep Creek has fair access through Nature Conservancy lands and can provide some great late season action.

Anglers may also access the lower Wallowa and Grande Ronde Rivers by boat. Boat launch sites on the lower Grande Ronde River include Wildcat Creek Bridge (8 miles upstream of Troy), Mud Creek (6 miles upstream of Troy), Troy Bridge, and Redmond Bridge (2 miles

downstream of Troy). A site on BLM property 1 mile upstream of the Oregon/Washington state line is often used as a launch by anglers licensed to fish in both states or as a take-out for those launching upstream. The lower Grande Ronde is passable for rafts and drift boats at all but the lowest winter flows.

Anglers with more time on their hands and prepared for winter camping conditions, may want to boat from the Minam launch on the lower Wallowa River to the lower Grande Ronde take out sites. The trip will require several days through a reach with no road access and they will need to pay close attention to flow and weather conditions. Flow, measured at the Troy gage, of around 1,000 cfs is required for rafts and 1,500 cfs is needed for drift boats. If the weather turns cold, icing conditions can become a serious hazard for boaters. Anglers considering this float should be experienced boaters, be prepared for cold weather, and should pay close attention to weather and flow forecasts.

Water conditions often limit angler success during the winter months. Icing and high, turbid flows can affect fishing for much of the winter some years. Generally, flows below 2000 cfs on the Grande Ronde River and 500 cfs on the Imnaha River provide the best fishing.

Anglers generally have their best success while flows are declining following a high flow event. During fall, look for rain in the forecast to bring flows up which prompts fish to move up the system. Warm periods during winter and early spring will also increase flows and improve fishing.

Expect catch rates near or below 10 hours per fish caught when the fishing is good. These catch rates can be hard to beat across the rest of the state. Catch rates generally drop-off with colder water conditions in late fall and early winter, then pick-up again in February and March, depending on weather conditions.

Successful anglers use a variety of techniques. Casting flies, spinners and spoons, and drift fishing with bait are all effective during moderate temperature conditions. Many anglers use bobbers and bait or jigs as well. These techniques can be especially effective during cold weather to target fish holding in deeper, slower water. Popular baits include eggs, shrimp, and worms (night crawlers or scented rubber imitations). Darker colors such as black, purple and green are popular for flies, lures and jigs.

For further information contact the ODFW Enterprise District Office at (541) 426-3279.

John Day River

There are no hatchery fish released into the John Day River and approximately 90 to 95 percent of the winter steelhead caught in this basin are wild and must be released unharmed. There are 340 miles of river open to winter fishing but the best places to fish will vary as the fish move upstream during the season.

In October and November steelhead are only found in the lower 100 miles of the river. They are bright, fat and full of energy and can be caught on lures, plugs, bait and flies. The proportion of adipose fin-clipped hatchery fish is much higher in this section of the river – approximately 25 percent of the fish are stray hatchery fish that will later turn around and go back to the Columbia River. Access is limited to only three drive-to sites, Cottonwood Bridge (RM 40), Starvation Lane (RM 30) and Rock Creek (RM 20).

Any hatchery steelhead in the John Day River are strays from other streams and are found mostly in the lower portions of the river below Cottonwood Bridge.

ODFW urges anglers to keep any hatchery fish they catch – thus removing them from the system before they spawn. These fish are small (4-6 pounds) and have been out of the ocean for over 6 months. They do not migrate like a typical summer steelhead but tend to

hold in deep slow pools for weeks at a time. Once these preferred holes are located an angler can return to them day after day.

Steelhead numbers this year are expected to be around 7,000 to 8,000. This is lower than last year when 10,000 fish returned.

By December and January the fish have migrated up to Service Creek (RM 155) but cold water and ice limits their willingness to take lures, making bait a popular offering. Access is much more available along this stretch of river with numerous public land access points and boat launches from Bridge Creek at RM 135 to Service Creek at RM 185.

Once February arrives steelhead have migrated as far as Kimberly (RM 184) where good access is available along Hwy 19. From here, the fish head up the three major forks of the river and assume a more normal migration pattern. Water temperatures are still cold and high, muddy water frequently disrupts the fishery but between water events the fishing can be very productive. Once the ice breaks up in February, the fishery begins in earnest in the Middle and North Fork John Day Rivers. All along the river steelhead enter the tributaries in preparation to spawn. These tributaries are closed to protect spawners and fishermen are limited to fishing the main river and forks.

The steelhead fishery is open year-round below Kimberly but most fish are spawned out by April 15. Above Kimberly, the North and Middle forks are open up to Hwy 395 and the mainstem John Day River is open up to Indian Creek above the town of John Day.

The season above Kimberly closes April 15. The best access for the February to April fishery is between Kimberly and Service Creek off of Hwy 19 onto scattered BLM and private lands. Always ask permission before fishing on private property. Primitive public boat ramps are found at Kimberly, Pine Tree, Shady Grove, Spray, Muleshoe Campground and Service Creek.

Anglers in the lower reaches have good success using typical steelhead fishing tactics; among the most popular are flies, small spinners, and drifting a small bait (prawns, nightcrawlers, or cluster eggs) with a small buoyant float and yarn. The most popular method for the upper river fishery is to use bait (night crawlers, cluster eggs, or prawns) and drift gear. Floats and marabou jigs are becoming more popular, particularly during low water conditions. Angler success is highly dependent upon river conditions.

For further information contact the ODFW John Day District Office (541) 575-1167.

Umatilla River

Wild and hatchery summer steelhead enter the Umatilla River from late August through April. Fishing should be good again this year with an expected return of approximately 3,300 steelhead. The total adult return will be comprised of 70 percent wild fish and 30 percent adipose fin-clipped hatchery fish that are available for harvest. The current steelhead return is off to a great start with early season return numbers and catch rates well ahead of normal. Current Threemile Dam fish return information can be found [here](#).

Water conditions generally determine angler success. Bank fishing is generally best when river flow ranges from 300-600 cfs. Drift boaters usually prefer about 800 cfs to traverse shallow areas. Fishing success declines rapidly at flows greater than 1,000 cfs. Visit [this website](#) for up-to-date flow information.

Access to much of the Umatilla River is via private land and anglers are reminded to always ask permission first. Several popular public access points are located in the Hermiston area. Riverfront Park provides a starting point to over two miles of Umatilla River frontage and anglers may access the entire three miles of river downstream from Three mile Dam. Fall returning fish tend to spend the fall and early winter months in the Hermiston

area awaiting fall rain prior to migrating upstream to the Pendleton area. A successful fall fishery has developed at the mouth of the Umatilla River in September and October, with anglers using bobbers, jigs or bait.

Upriver fishing is concentrated from Pendleton downstream to the Barnhart area. Publicly-owned access is limited, but the City of Pendleton Parkway provides access to some good fishing holes and several landowners downstream of Pendleton have allowed anglers bank access at several points in past years. Always ask landowner's for permission. The best fishing in this area typically occurs from January until the mid-April closure. Successful anglers cast flies, spinners and spoons, and drift fish with bait. During low flows many anglers utilize bobbers and bait or jigs.

For further information contact the ODFW Pendleton District Office (541) 276-2344.

Walla Walla River

The Walla Walla River supports a small but healthy run of summer steelhead. Fish begin entering the Oregon portion of the Walla Walla River beginning in February, with peak returns in March and April. While most of the steelhead returning to Oregon waters are wild, a small number (less than 10 percent) of hatchery strays also enter the river. Wild fish must be released but anglers can keep adipose fin-clipped hatchery fish. This year is expected to offer fair to good fishing. However, public access is very limited, with the best access within the City of Milton-Freewater. Successful fishing techniques include, fly fishing, casting spinners, bobber and jigs and drift fishing with bait.

For further information contact the ODFW Pendleton District Office at (541) 276-2344.

Snake River Zone

Large numbers of hatchery steelhead are released in Snake River tributaries and at the base of Hells Canyon Dam. As a result, good numbers of adipose-clipped summer steelhead are generally available for harvest from October through March. This year, returns of hatchery and wild steelhead will be on par with the norm.

Anglers without jet boats are limited to a few access points on the Oregon side, a couple at Hells Canyon Dam and the other at Dug Bar. Dug Bar is accessed by traveling to Imnaha, then north down the Imnaha River. The road is not suitable for passenger cars. Hearty hikers can access the Snake at Eureka Bar via 4 mile walk down the Imnaha river through an impressive canyon on a well-used trail.

Fishing conditions in the Snake River just below Hells Canyon Reservoir are usually stable through mid-December due to flow management at upstream dams, but heavy rains can temporarily disrupt water quality and catch rates in other parts of the River. A heavy snow pack and warm weather can also cause fluctuations in flow management during late winter and early spring in preparation for spring runoff. Flow information can be found [online](#).

The river is large and usually difficult to wade. Updated creel surveys are not available, but fishing is generally good from late October through early February just below the dam. Good bank fishing is available directly below the dam and about a mile down at Stud Creek. Most anglers use either bobbers or drift fishing techniques. There is also a lot of fishing out of jet boats using lures, plugs and drift-fishing techniques. Ethical fishing is very important when boat and bank fishermen are in close quarters with each other. Please be respectful and when boat fishing, do not cast into holes being fished by bank anglers. Also remember, barbless hooks are required on the Snake.

To provide additional fishing opportunities, 1,000 returning adult steelhead trapped below Hell's Canyon Dam are re-released into Hells Canyon Reservoir. These fish are then considered trout over 20 inches and a Combined Angling Tag is not needed, but only one may be kept per day.

For further information contact the La Grande District Office at (541) 963-2138 and ask for Tim Bailey or Nadine Craft.

Columbia River Zone

Columbia River (John Day Dam to OR/WA State Line)

Large numbers of steelhead migrate up the Columbia River destined for spawning tributaries throughout the mid and upper Columbia and Snake River basins. Steelhead pass John Day Dam throughout the year, but the primary run is from June through October, with the peak usually in late September. Popular angling locations include the John Day Arm, and the forebay and tailraces at John Day and McNary Dams, at the Umatilla River mouth, and at the Irrigon Fish Hatchery.

While most fishing is from boats, bank anglers are successful at both dams and locations near the Oregon and Washington border. Bank anglers generally float bait with bobbers and a few plunk Spin-n-Glo, plugs, or spinners. Boat anglers pull plugs or float bait with bobbers. In most locations, the best fishing typically occurs from mid-October to late November, but can also be quite good at times in December and January.

At Irrigon Hatchery, early season steelhead fishing typically runs from mid-August to mid-October. Steelhead fishing near the hatchery is poor when spawning salmon are present from mid-October thru November. Fishing picks up again in December and continues through March.

A popular and unique fishery is the night fishery above McNary Dam, where steelhead angling is allowed 24 hours a day from Jan.1 –March 31 and June 16-Dec.31, anglers troll lighted plugs after sundown for best results.
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For further information contact the ODFW Pendleton District Office at (541) 276-2344 or the John Day District Office at (541) 575-1167.