

Brace for winter and enjoy Washington Wildlife

Local News

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For Washingtonians, the start of the new year is prime time to fish for winter steelhead, dig razor clams and enjoy the annual spectacle of bald eagles, snow geese, elk and other wintering wildlife. Other possibilities include sturgeon fishing, which opens Jan. 1 from the mouth of the Columbia River to McNary Dam, and hunting for ducks and geese during seasons that run through Jan. 30 in most areas of the state. But winter weather is an important consideration wherever you go. Ice fishing can be a dicey proposition in most parts of the state and heavy rains can render a river

“unfishable” and even dangerous; virtually overnight. Preparation is essential for any outdoor activity, especially in winter,” said Mike Cenci, deputy enforcement chief for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

“Check the weather conditions, river conditions and road conditions and let people know where you’re going before you head out.” And, of course, wear warm, waterproof clothes. “We don’t get a lot of T-shirt weather in January,” Cenci said. [Page 1 : Brace for winter and enjoy Washington Wildlife](#)

[Page 2 : North Puget Sound](#)

[Page 3 : South Sound/Olympic Peninsula](#)

[Page 4 : Southwest Washington](#)

[Page 5 : Eastern Washington](#)

[Page 6 : Northcentral Washington](#)

[Page 7 : Southcentral Washington](#)

All good advice for the hardy souls planning to dig razor clams on ocean beaches over the New Year’s weekend. Digging will be allowed after noon on Dec. 31 and Jan. 1 at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks and Kalaloch. Twin Harbors will also be open for an extra night of digging Jan. 2. “Digging razor clams on New Year’s Eve is a Northwest tradition,” said Dan Ayres, WDFW coastal shellfish manager. “Last year, more than 22,000 people marked the season by digging razor clams.” Rather avoid the crowd? Bald eagles are now on display from the Skagit Valley to Lake Roosevelt, while snow geese and other migratory birds are gathering throughout the coastal lowlands. Wintering elk are also on view in a number of areas, including the feeding station at WDFW’s Oak Creek Wildlife Area northwest of Yakima off Highway 12. For information on the feeding schedule, see the southcentral regional report below. Meanwhile, WDFW is reminding big-game hunters and Puget Sound sport crabbers that deadlines for reporting their harvest in 2010 are drawing near. Hunters have until midnight Jan. 31 to report their success in hunting deer, elk, bear and turkey during the past year. Those who file their reports by Jan. 10 will be entered into a drawing for one of five deer permits or four elk permits. Sport crabbers have until Feb. 1 to report their catch during the winter season. For more information on reporting procedures and as well as fishing, hunting and wildlife-watching opportunities available around the state and see the regional reports below.

[pagebreak:North Puget Sound] **Fishing:** In January, weather conditions often dictate where an angler chooses to fish. “If the rivers are in shape, steelheading is a good bet,” said

Steve Thiesfeld, salmon manager for WDFW. "But if the rivers are blown out, blackmouth salmon fishing in the marine areas of Puget Sound is probably a better option." Areas currently open for salmon fishing include marine areas 7 (San Juan Islands), 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) and 10 (Seattle/Bremerton). Anglers fishing those marine areas have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook salmon. Thiesfeld said anglers should focus on the San Juan Islands, where fishing for blackmouth traditionally has been decent this time of year. Later in the month, anglers also might want to consider fishing Marine Area 9 (Admiralty Inlet), which opens for salmon Jan. 16. "It's been slow in other areas of central Puget Sound — marine areas 10 and 11 — during the last weeks of December," he said. "But hopefully the fish will be there mid-January and the fishery will start strong." Meanwhile, the **Puget Sound crab fishery** is winding down. The fishery closes at sunset on Jan. 2, and crabbers are reminded that they are required to report their winter catch to WDFW by Feb. 1. Reports are due for the season running Sept. 7 to Jan. 2, whether or not crabbers actually fished or caught crab. To submit catch reports, crabbers may send their catch record card to WDFW by mail or file their report on the department's licensing website. The mailing address is WDFW CRC Unit, 600 Capitol Way N., Olympia, WA 98501-1091. The online reporting system is available Jan. 3-Feb. 1 at https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/wdfw/puget_sound_crab_catch.html. Winter is prime time to jig for **squid** in Puget Sound. Good spots include the Elliott Bay Pier in Seattle and the Edmonds Pier. More information on squid fishing is available on the department's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/shellfish/squid/>. Information on fishing piers is available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/piers/>. In freshwater, several rivers are open for **hatchery steelhead** fishing, including the Skagit, Stillaguamish, Snohomish, Skykomish and Snoqualmie. "As long as the weather cooperates and the rivers stay fishable, anglers should have some good opportunities to hook a hatchery steelhead," said Bob Leland, WDFW's steelhead program manager. Freshwater anglers also might want to try fishing for **perch**, **cutthroat** and **smallmouth bass** at Lake Washington or Lake Sammamish. Anglers targeting perch should fish near deep ledges between 60 and 100 feet, said WDFW fisheries biologist Danny Garrett, who recommends using nightcrawlers. "Perch are generally caught within a couple feet of the bottom," he said. For cutthroat or smallmouth bass, try trolling the same depth with hard baits near the bottom or around schools of smelt. "Anglers will likely have to put in some time to hook a smallmouth this time of year, but the bass that are caught are often trophy-sized fish," Garrett said. Before heading out, anglers should check the rules and regulations for all fisheries on WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/>. **Hunting:** Most big-game hunts in the region will be closed by the start of January, although, waterfowl hunters still have time to bag **ducks** and **geese**. Waterfowl hunters, who have through Jan. 30 to hunt **ducks** and **geese** in the region, should check the *Waterfowl and Upland Game* pamphlet online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations/> for details. WDFW will make an announcement in early January — after aerial surveys — on whether the tentatively scheduled **brant hunt** in Skagit County will open. While more than 10,000 brant typically winter on Washington's waters each year, at least 6,000 brant must be counted in Skagit County before hunting is allowed there. Hunters should keep checking WDFW's website for an announcement on the season, which is tentatively scheduled for Jan. 15, 16, 19, 22, 23, 26, 29 and 30. Hunters who would like to participate in the **Snow Goose Quality Hunt** program on Fir Island and in the northern Port Susan Bay area should visit WDFW's website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/snow_goose/ for information on the rules and requirements. Another option is the new **Waterfowl Quality Hunt Program**, which provides duck and goose hunting opportunities at more than 40 sites in Whatcom, Skagit and north Snohomish counties. For more information on the program, visit WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/wqhp/>. Hunters who purchased tags for **black bear**, **deer**,

elk or **turkey** are reminded that reports on their hunting activities are due by Jan. 31 for each 2010 tag purchased. Hunters can file a report by calling (877) 945-3492, or by the Internet at <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov>. Those who miss the deadline must pay a \$10 penalty before they can purchase a 2011 hunting license. On the other hand, hunters who submit their reports by Jan. 10 will be entered into a drawing for five deer permits and four elk permits in various areas of the state.

New this year, WDFW is requiring hunters to file separate reports for general-season hunting activities and for special-permit hunts for deer, elk, black bear and turkey. That change will give game managers more information about hunters' success during both kinds of seasons. Whether reporting online or over the phone, hunters should follow the prompts until they receive a confirmation number for each report.

Wildlife viewing: The Audubon Society continues to compile bird sightings from the annual **Christmas Bird Count**, which comes to a close in early January. For more information on bird sightings in Washington, check the *Current Year Results* heading on Audubon's website at <http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count>. This compilation of sightings provides important information about bird populations, in Washington and throughout the Americas. But keeping a list of birds seen throughout each year is also a personal endeavor, a common practice among birders, veterans and novices alike. Some birders record their sightings in journals, others on computer software programs. Some keep track in their field guides where and when they saw each species. The Washington Ornithological Society (WOS) offers a wealth of information on birds and birding, including a checklist available at <http://www.wos.org/>. Birders along the Skagit River shouldn't have any trouble marking the **bald eagle** box on their checklist. January is a great time to see the raptors wintering in the area. Each winter, hundreds of the eagles spend December and January along the river, where the carcasses of spawned salmon provide a feast for the birds. After a few weeks of dining, the eagles head north to their summer homes in Alaska and British Columbia. Birders in the region may also want to check out the flocks of **snow geese** wintering in the Skagit Valley. Thousands of snow geese congregate in the Skagit Valley each winter, and can be found in the area from mid-October through early May. A great place to view the birds is at the Fir Island Farms Reserve Unit of WDFW's Skagit Wildlife Area. For more information on the Fir Island Farms Reserve Unit, visit WDFW's website at <http://bit.ly/9Hk0Vs>.

Fishing: Winter has arrived, but area anglers can still catch hatchery steelhead on several coastal streams, salmon in Puget Sound and razor clams on five ocean beaches. A **razor clam** dig has been approved at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Moco rocks and Kalaloch. Opening dates and evening low tides are: Dec. 31, Fri. – 3:40 p.m., (0 ft.), Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Moco rocks, Kalaloch Jan. 1, Sat. – 4:31 p.m., (-0.4 ft.), Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Moco rocks, Kalaloch Jan. 2, Sun. – 5:18 p.m., (-0.7 ft.), Twin Harbors Clam diggers are reminded that they should take lights or lanterns for the nighttime digs and to check weather and surf forecasts before heading out. No digging will be allowed before noon on any of the five razor-clam beaches. Harvesters are allowed to take no more than 15 razor clams and must keep the first 15 they dig, regardless of size or condition. Each digger's clams must be kept in a separate container. All diggers age 15 or older must have an applicable 2010-11 fishing license to harvest razor clams on any beach. Licenses, ranging from a three-day razor clam license to an annual combination fishing license, are available on WDFW's website at <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov> and from license vendors around the state. Meanwhile, **winter hatchery steelhead** fisheries are in full swing at a number of the region's streams. "If the weather cooperates, steelhead fishing should be good throughout January," said Kirt Hughes, regional fishery manager for WDFW. Anglers fishing the Quillayute and portions of the Bogachiel, Calawah, Hoh, and Sol Duc rivers have a daily limit of three hatchery steelhead. In the Grays Harbor area, anglers fishing the Chehalis, Humptulips, Satsop and Wynoochee have a daily limit of two hatchery steelhead. Hughes reminds anglers that they will not be allowed to catch and

keep **wild steelhead** on eight Olympic Peninsula rivers until mid-February. In early 2010, the annual opening date for wild steelhead retention was changed from Dec. 1 to Feb. 16 on the Bogachiel, Calawah, Clearwater, Dickey, Hoh, Quillayute, Quinault and Sol Duc rivers. Those eight rivers are the only waters in Washington where wild steelhead retention is allowed. The change, adopted by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission last February, was made to protect the early portion of the run, said Hughes. He noted, however, that anglers will still have an opportunity to catch and keep a wild fish during the peak of the return. Freshwater anglers looking to hook salmon also have opportunities in January. Anglers can find **late-run coho** salmon in some of the region's rivers, including the Humptulips, Naselle, Satsop and Willapa, said Hughes. "The Skookumchuck also is a good bet for anglers fishing for late-run coho, as well as steelhead," he said. For **winter chum** salmon, anglers should try fishing the Nisqually. On Puget Sound, Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound) remains open for **salmon**. However, regulations for Marine Area 13 change Jan. 1, when anglers will have a daily limit of one salmon. Anglers should be aware that salmon fisheries in marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon Island) and 12 (Hood Canal) close Jan. 1. Before heading out on the Sound, anglers should check the regulations on WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/>. The **Puget Sound crab fishery** closes at sunset on Jan. 2, and crabbers are reminded that they are required to report their winter catch to WDFW by Feb. 1. Reports are due for the season running Sept. 7 to Jan. 2, whether or not crabbers actually fished or caught Dungeness crab. To submit catch reports, crabbers may send their catch record card to WDFW by mail or file their report on the department's licensing website. The mailing address is WDFW CRC Unit, 600 Capitol Way N., Olympia, WA 98501-1091. The online reporting system is available Jan. 3-Feb. 1 at https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/wdfw/puget_sound_crab_catch.html. Opportunities to dig **clams** at Hood Canal increase Jan. 1, when Belfair State Park in Mason County opens for littleneck, butter, manila and other clams. Recent surveys indicate that the clam population will support a fishery at the park. For more information on clam-digging opportunities in Hood Canal and elsewhere, visit WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/shellfish/beaches/>. **Hunting:** Most big-game hunts in the region will be closed by the start of January, although, waterfowl hunters still have time to bag **ducks** and **geese**. Hunters have through Jan. 30 to hunt for **ducks in the region**. **Goose hunts in Goose Management Area 3 also are open seven days a week through Jan. 30.** However, hunts in Goose Management Area 2B (Pacific County) are limited to Jan. 2, and Saturdays and Wednesdays only from Jan. 5-15. The brant hunting season in Pacific County is open Jan. 15, 16, 18, 20, 22, 23, 25, 27, 29 and 30. Waterfowl hunters should check the *Waterfowl and Upland Game* pamphlet online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations/> for details. Hunters who purchased tags for **black bear, deer, elk or turkey** are reminded that reports on their hunting activities are due by Jan. 31 for each 2010 tag purchased. Hunters can file a report by calling (877) 945-3492, or by the Internet at <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov>. Those who miss the deadline must pay a \$10 penalty before they can purchase a 2011 hunting license. On the other hand, hunters who submit their reports by Jan. 10 will be entered into a drawing for five deer permits and four elk permits in various areas of the state. New this year, WDFW is requiring hunters to file separate reports for general-season hunting activities and for special-permit hunts for deer, elk, black bear and turkey. That change will give game managers more information about hunters' success during both kinds of seasons. Whether reporting online or over the phone, hunters should follow the prompts until they receive a confirmation number for each report. **Wildlife viewing:** The Audubon Society continues to compile bird sightings from the annual **Christmas Bird Count**, which comes to a close in early January. For more information on bird sightings in Washington, check the *Current Year Results* heading on Audubon's website at <http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count>. This compilation of sightings provides important information about bird populations, in Washington and throughout the Americas. But keeping a list

of birds seen throughout each year is also a personal endeavor, a common practice among birders, veterans and novices alike. Some birders record their sightings in journals, others on computer software programs. Some keep track in their field guides where and when they saw each species. The Washington Ornithological Society (WOS) offers a wealth of information on birds and birding, including a checklist available at <http://www.wos.org/>. [pagebreak:Southwest Washington]

Fishing: Winter **steelhead** are still the name of the game in the Columbia River Basin, although several other fisheries are beginning to compete for anglers' attention. **Sturgeon** fishing reopens Jan. 1 from the mouth of the Columbia to McNary Dam, and state hatchery workers have begun planting dozens of regional lakes with thousands of **rainbow trout**. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has also scheduled an evening **razor-clam** dig to run over New Year's weekend. Digging will be allowed after noon on Dec. 31 and Jan. 1 at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks and Kalaloch. On Jan. 2, digging will be allowed at Twin Harbors only. Meanwhile, anglers continue to reel in adult hatchery-reared **winter steelhead** — along with some late-run **coho salmon** — from a number of Columbia River tributaries. The Cowlitz River is still the best bet for steelhead, although the Lewis, Kalama, Grays, Washougal, Elochoman and White Salmon rivers, and Salmon Creek in Clark County are also producing fish, said Joe Hymer, a WDFW fish biologist. "As usual, river conditions basically determine success at this time of year," Hymer said. "Most anglers do best when water levels are rising or dropping. It's a lot harder to catch steelhead in the peaks and troughs." As with all steelhead fisheries in southwest Washington, only hatchery fish with a clipped adipose fin and healed scar may be retained. All wild steelhead must be released. The daily limit on all area rivers is two hatchery steelhead. Starting Jan. 1, anglers may also retain up to two adult hatchery **chinook salmon** per day on the mainstem Columbia from the I-5 Bridge downstream and in the Cowlitz and Deep rivers. The daily limit is one chinook per day in the Lewis and Kalama rivers. While the bulk of the spring chinook run isn't expected to arrive until March, Hymer said some lucky anglers will likely start catching early-arriving fish by late January or early February. "It's a good idea to keep the chinook regulations in mind, even if you're fishing for steelhead," he said. "Somebody has to catch the first springer of the year, and it could be you." WDFW recently released preliminary forecasts of Columbia River salmon and steelhead returns for 2011, predicting an upriver run of 198,400 adult spring chinook compared to an actual return of 315,300 last spring. However, the upper Columbia summer chinook run is expected to be significantly higher than in 2010. The preliminary forecasts, along with currently anticipated fishing seasons, are posted on WDFW's website at http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/reports_plants.html. Current fishing rules are described in 2010-11 *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/>) and the Northwest River Forecast is available at <http://www.nwrfc.noaa.gov/>. Ready to catch some **sturgeon**? All fishing areas will open to anglers Jan. 1 from the mouth of the Columbia River to McNary Dam, except for a small area in Sand Island slough upstream from Beacon Rock as outlined in the current regulation pamphlet. Fishery managers from Washington and Oregon are scheduled to meet Feb. 8 to consider changes to current catch quotas, but Hymer said that won't affect the fishery until later in the season. "The main concern right now is the cold weather," Hymer said. "A warming trend would likely improve the bite when the season gets under way." But there will be no fishing of any kind for **eulachon smelt** this year, he said. Once abundant in the Columbia River Basin, eulachon were listed for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act last May. Since then, Washington and Oregon have closed all sport and commercial dipping in the Columbia River system. In addition, Washington has closed all marine and freshwater areas statewide for eulachon smelt. Anglers can, however, still use any frozen smelt they have in their freezer as bait, said Capt. Murray Schlenker, WDFW enforcement chief for southwest Washington. "There's no law about possession," he said. "You just

can't fish for them.' As an alternative, anglers might consider spending a winter's day fishing for **trout** on a local lake. Throughout January, WDFW plans to stock more than two-dozen lakes in southwest Washington with thousands of rainbow trout ranging from 8-12 inch 'catchables' to 5-8 pound broodstock. 'There's a lot of interest in trout fishing in winter,' said John Weinheimer, another WDFW fish biologist. 'During breaks in the weather, people come out to fish for them like crazy.' The timing of the fish plants will vary according to the weather and the availability of tanker trucks, but Weinheimer said last year's stocking plan is a good indication of which lakes will fish. That stocking plan is posted at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/plants/region5/> on WDFW's website. 'All of these lakes are ice-free in winter,' he said. 'Given weather conditions, we don't encourage anyone to fish through the ice in southwest Washington. It just isn't safe.'

Hunting: Most big-game hunts in the region will be closed by the end of December, but waterfowl hunters still have time to bag **ducks** and **geese** throughout the region. Hunters have through Jan. 30 to hunt for **ducks and geese**, although goose hunting is now closed at the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge, where the season's sub-quota for dusky Canada geese has been reached. Except for New Year's Day, the remainder of **Management Area 2A is open to hunting for ducks and geese Saturdays, Sundays and Wednesdays through Jan. 30. For more information, see the *Waterfowl and Upland Game* pamphlet, available online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations/>. Hunters who purchased tags for **black bear, deer, elk** or **turkey** are reminded that reports on their hunting activities are due by Jan. 31 for each 2010 tag purchased. Hunters can file a report by calling (877) 945-3492, or by the Internet at <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov>. Those who miss the deadline must pay a \$10 penalty before they can purchase a 2011 hunting license. On the other hand, hunters who submit their reports by Jan. 10 will be entered into a drawing for five deer permits and four elk permits in various areas of the state. New this year, WDFW is requiring hunters to file separate reports for general-season hunting activities and for special-permit hunts for deer, elk, black bear and turkey. That change will give game managers more information about hunters' success during both kinds of seasons. Whether reporting online or over the phone, hunters should follow the prompts until they receive a confirmation number for each report.**

Wildlife viewing: Winter weather in the Columbia River Gorge can be downright inhospitable, but migrating **tundra swans** don't seem to mind. Several hundred birds, each weighing up to 18 pounds, have settled in the area, where they have been dining on slugs, snails, insects, crayfish and plants. They especially like the native wapato, a tuber that grows at the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge, Franz Lake near Washougal, and in Mirror Pond across the Columbia River. The swans typically remain in the area through March, when they make the 3,725-mile trip back to their nesting grounds in the Arctic tundra. The number of tundra swans visiting the area appears to have declined since the early part of the decade, when 2,000 birds were observed on some of the larger lakes. Even so, human visitors can still see hundreds of swans feeding at Ridgefield, Franz Lake and other parts of the gorge. Some of those swans will no doubt be tallied during the 111th annual **Christmas Bird Count**, which runs through Jan. 5 in southwest Washington and throughout the Americas. Sponsored by Audubon, the annual event enlists birdwatchers — veterans and novices alike — to contribute their sightings over a 24-hour period to the world's longest-running bird database. Check out this year's tally under the *Current Year Results* heading on Audubon's website (<http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count>).

[pagebreak:Eastern Washington] **Fishing:** Lake Roosevelt is the region's hot spot for January fishing, says WDFW eastern regional fish program manager John Whalen. The huge Columbia River reservoir off Grand Coulee Dam provides winter fishing opportunities for big net-pen-reared **rainbow trout**. Boat and shore anglers can take up to five trout a day, although only two over 20 inches can be retained. Roosevelt also has **kokanee, walleye, smallmouth bass, burbot, lake whitefish** and **yellow perch**, but the rainbows

star at this time of year. Four winter-only rainbow trout lakes — Stevens County's Williams and Hatch and Spokane County's Fourth-of-July and Hog Canyon — have been producing well since opening Dec. 1. Access and style of fishing, through the ice or open water by boat or from shore, vary with winter conditions. No agency or organization is responsible for measuring ice thickness on area lakes, so there are no guarantees that fishing through the ice is safe, said WDFW central district fish biologist Chris Donley. According to U.S. Coast Guard guidelines, no one should venture onto lake ice unless it is at least four inches thick, clear and solid. As much as nine inches may be needed to safely support snowmobiles or other vehicles. Drilling a hole in the ice from a safe, near-shore location can give anglers an idea of ice depth. However, drilling only provides an estimate of the ice depth because shallow water near shore freezes quicker than deeper water in the middle of a lake where springs may slow the freezing process. Ice depths vary throughout a waterway due to underwater structures, springs, geothermal activity and water movement. Donley suggests following these winter fishing tips: Don't fish alone. Let others know where you and your fishing partners are going and when you plan to return. Keep fishing holes small and few. When drilling fishing holes with an ice auger, keep the diameter under eight inches. Bigger holes are not necessary to land fish and can create a safety hazard for others. Watch your step. Avoid ice fishing near feeder streams or known springs; brush, logs, plants or docks; multiple ice cracks or ice that is popping or otherwise audible. Also, avoid dark-colored ice; it may be weak. Spread out. Too many people congregated in one area may be too much for the ice to support. Disperse weight and fishing holes. Be prepared for weather conditions. Dress in layers and wear thermal underwear, fleece or wool, and wind and waterproof outerwear, especially for feet, hands and head. Take extra clothes, food, water, sand for on-ice traction, and a sled for easy on-ice transport of all equipment. Be prepared for emergencies. Carry equipment such as ice picks or awls, rope, and personal flotation devices. Also pack a first-aid kit and matches for starting a fire. Donley says there's also good trout fishing opportunity through the winter at several large year-round waters, including Rock in Whitman County, Sprague Lake on the Lincoln-Adams county line, and Waitts Lake in Stevens County. In Lincoln County, WDFW Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area manager Juli Anderson reports shoreside openings in Z Lake, thanks to an aeration system. "I don't know how many folks are trekking in to Z Lake to fish those rainbow trout, but they're available," she said. The Snake River **steelhead** catch season continues, but according to WDFW fish biologist Joe Bumgarner, it's been one of the slowest in the past decade. He guessed that those who brave the elements on the river will likely average no better than 25 hours of fishing per steelhead caught. "Lately angler effort has been so low, and checked fish so few and far between, that it's really hard to say what an average catch rate is," Bumgarner said. **Hunting:** The last weeks of **waterfowl** and **upland game bird** hunting can be some of the most productive, depending on snow and ice conditions and hunters' willingness to tough them out. WDFW regional wildlife program manager Kevin Robinette explains that when smaller waters are iced up, ducks and geese concentrate on bigger, open waterways, such as the Pend Oreille and Snake rivers. For a successful hunt, waterfowl hunters need to be prepared to access those areas in winter conditions bring trained retrieving dogs, he said. Hunting seasons for ducks and geese continue through Jan. 30 in most parts of the region. Goose hunting in Spokane and Lincoln counties is open Saturdays, Sundays and Wednesdays only through Jan. 23, plus on Monday, Jan. 17 for the Martin Luther King holiday, then every day Jan. 24-30. WDFW's Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area manager Juli Anderson notes that Hungarian (gray) partridge are hanging out closer to plowed roads at this time. Upland game bird hunting continues through Jan. 17. Bird hunters should check bag limits and other rule details in the *Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game Seasons* pamphlet, available online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations/>. Hunters licensed to hunt for **deer, elk, black bear** and **turkey** have a chance to win one of nine 2011 special hunting permits if

they report this year's hunting activities by Jan. 10. All hunters of those species, whether successful or not, are required to submit hunting reports for by Jan. 31. Failure to meet the deadline can result in a \$10 fine, payable before a hunter can purchase a 2011 license. Hunters can report by phone (877 945-3492) or the Internet <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov>. New this year, WDFW is requiring hunters to file separate reports for general-season hunting activities and for special-permit hunts for deer, elk, black bear and turkey. That change will give game managers more information about hunters' success during both kinds of seasons. Whether reporting online or over the phone, hunters should follow the prompts until they receive a confirmation number for each report. More information on mandatory hunt reporting is available on page 13 of the *Big Game Hunting pamphlet*, available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations/>. **Wildlife viewing:** January's typical snowy, cold conditions throughout the region often bring foraging wildlife closer to people. That can make for unique viewing opportunities, but it can also create problems. **Moose** wandering around town can be fun to watch, but should be given a wide berth, said WDFW central district wildlife biologist Howard Ferguson of Spokane. "Dogs especially need to be controlled to avoid problems with moose," Ferguson said. "This will not only to keep them from chasing moose at this stressful time of year for all wildlife, but also protect dogs, themselves. Moose see dogs as predatory wolves and some will go out of their way to attack dogs. People should keep some distance between themselves and moose, too." "Use binoculars, a scope or a telephoto camera lens to enjoy them, rather than approaching too closely. And even if a moose is munching your shrubbery, it's best at this time of year to just leave them alone. Most will wander off in a short time." WDFW habitat biologist Sandy Dotts of Colville reports **deer, turkeys** and **quail** are highly visible during warming, thawing periods when they take advantage of open south-facing slopes to forage. WDFW Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area manager Juli Anderson relays reports from volunteer Kim Thorburn of **snow buntings** among the usual **horned larks**, and even one "unhappy-looking" **western meadowlark** that evidently didn't migrate south. Spokane Audubon welcomes birdwatchers of all levels to join a "Banana Belt" field trip to southeast Washington and Idaho on Jan. 22. Trip leader Cindy McCormack says birders will convoy to the Lewiston/Clarkston area "looking for warmer weather as well as the thousands of waterfowl that winter in that milder climate." Target species include **loons, grebes, scoters**, and other wintering **waterfowl**, and **night heron, barn owl, lesser goldfinch**, and other wintering passerines. Contact Cindy McCormack (nwbirder@gmail.com or 939-4448) for further details. [pagebreak:Northcentral Washington]

Fishing: WDFW district fish biologist Bob Jateff of Twisp says **steelhead** fishing in the upper Columbia River is usually slow at this time of the year, but there are exceptions. "There have been reports of fish being caught within the mainstem Columbia, as well as the Okanogan and Methow rivers," Jateff said. Anglers should keep a close eye on air temperatures, because anything over 32 degrees keeps the rivers fishable and free of ice." Jateff reminds anglers of the mandatory retention of adipose-clipped hatchery steelhead from Priest Rapids Dam upstream including the Wenatchee, Entiat, Methow, Okanogan, and Similkameen rivers. As a change of pace from steelheading, Jateff suggests that anglers try fishing the Methow River for its sizeable population of **mountain whitefish**. "These fish can be caught readily on flies," he said. The daily limit is 15 whitefish, no minimum size, with selective gear rules in effect for whitefish in all areas that are currently open for steelhead. Winter **rainbow trout** lakes in the Okanogan are usually in good shape for ice fishing in January. Jateff recommends Davis Lake in the Winthrop area, Big and Little Green lakes in the Omak area, and Rat Lake near Brewster. For anglers seeking **yellow perch**, Patterson Lake near Winthrop has a good population of six to 10-inch perch, as well as a few **kokanee** and rainbow trout. Other popular ice fishing lakes in Okanogan County are Sidley, located east of Oroville, and Bonaparte, located east of Tonasket. Sidley has rainbow trout and Bonaparte has **eastern brook trout** and kokanee. Jateff warns

anglers to be aware that ice conditions can change at any time and become unsafe. According to U.S. Coast Guard guidelines, no one should venture onto lake ice unless it is at least four inches thick, clear and solid. As much as nine inches may be needed to safely support snowmobiles or other vehicles. The ice can reach these standards after at least a week of below-freezing temperatures, both day and night. Ice depths vary throughout a waterway due to underwater structures, springs, geothermal activity and water movement. Rivers and streams rarely have safe ice because of constant currents. Thawing and re-freezing can create air pockets that leave ice "honeycombed" or porous and significantly weakened. Drilling a hole in the ice from a safe, near-shore location can give anglers an idea of ice depth. However, this approach provides only an estimate of the ice depth, because shallow water near shore freezes quicker than deeper water in the middle of a lake where springs may slow the freezing process. WDFW does not measure ice on fishing lakes and cannot guarantee ice-fishing safety. But here are a few tips to help keep an outing safe: Don't fish alone. Let others know where you and your fishing partners are going and when you plan to return. Keep fishing holes small and few. When drilling fishing holes with an ice auger, keep the diameter under eight inches. Bigger holes are not necessary to land fish and can create a safety hazard for others. Watch your step. Avoid ice fishing near feeder streams or known springs; brush, logs, plants or docks; multiple ice cracks or ice that is popping or otherwise audible. Also, avoid dark-colored ice; it may be weak. Spread out. Too many people congregated in one area may be too much for the ice to support. Disperse weight and fishing holes. Be prepared for weather conditions. Dress in layers and wear thermal underwear, fleece or wool, and wind and waterproof outerwear, especially for feet, hands and head. Take extra clothes, food, water, sand for on-ice traction, and a sled for easy on-ice transport of all equipment. Be prepared for emergencies. Carry equipment such as ice picks or awls, rope, and personal flotation devices. Also pack a first-aid kit and matches for starting a fire. **Hunting:** The Columbia Basin, in January, can provide some of the best **waterfowl** hunting opportunities in the state, depending on winter weather conditions. Both resident and migrant ducks and geese from the north concentrate on the Basin's big open water, including Banks Lake, Rufus Woods Lake, Wanapum pool and other Columbia River reservoirs; the Stratford Wildlife Area's Billy Clapp Lake; Moses Lake; and Potholes Reservoir. Duck hunting continues through Jan. 30. Goose hunting is open Saturdays, Sundays and Wednesdays only through Jan. 23, plus Martin Luther King holiday on Monday, Jan. 17, and every day from Jan. 24-30. **Pheasant, quail and partridge** hunting continues through Jan. 17. If snow cover stays in the usual haunts for these birds, January can be very productive for upland game bird hunters who are willing to brave the elements and have dogs. Bird hunters should check bag limits and other regulations in the *Migratory Waterfowl and Upland Game Seasons* pamphlet, available online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations/>. Hunters licensed to hunt **deer, elk, black bear, or turkey** have a chance to win one of nine 2011 special hunting permits if they report this year's hunting activities by Jan. 10. All hunters of those species, whether successful or not, are required to submit hunting reports for by Jan. 31. Failure to meet the deadline can result in a \$10 fine, payable before a hunter can purchase a 2011 license. Hunters can report by phone (877 945-3492) or the Internet <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov>. New this year, WDFW is requiring hunters to file separate reports for general-season hunting activities and for special-permit hunts for deer, elk, black bear and turkey. That change will give game managers more information about hunters' success during both kinds of seasons. Whether reporting online or over the phone, hunters should follow the prompts until they receive a confirmation number for each report. More information on mandatory hunt reporting is available on page 13 of the *Big Game Hunting pamphlet*, available online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations/>. **Wildlife viewing:** January can be a terrific month for wildlife viewing in northcentral Washington. For example, thousands of waterfowl can now be seen on the Columbia River between the mouth of the Okanogan River at Brewster, near Entiat and

along the Wanapum pool where Interstate 90 crosses, reports WDFW habitat biologist Ken Bevis of Winthrop. "Vast mixed flocks of **coot, widgeon, greater and lesser scaup, redheads, ring-necked duck, Canada geese, canvasbacks, bufflehead** and many other species, spread out on the big water," Bevis said. "These birds come from places far north, and winter in the relatively warm waters of the Columbia." Spending time in at one spot can yield memorable observations. "Spectacular **bald eagle** attacks on flocks can result in the formation of "coot balls", similar to herring being attacked by predatory fish," Bevis said. "The eagles will haze these dense accumulations of ducks, trying to scare a slow bird out, or pick off a straggler when the flock panics and flies to escape. The flocks shift up and down the river in unpredictable patterns, but reliable concentrations are seen at Brewster and Entiat. Study the flocks with a spotting scope and see how many species of waterfowl you can identify." [pagebreak:Southcentral Washington] **Fishing:** Anglers continue to reel in hatchery **steelhead** from portions of the Columbia and Snake Rivers, although the lure of bigger fish will undoubtedly prompt some to switch gears. Starting Jan. 1, Lake Umatilla — also known as the John Day Pool — will reopen for retention of **white sturgeon** that measure 43 to 54 inches from their snout to the fork in their tail. Anglers planning on taking part in the fishery should be aware that the annual sturgeon quota for Lake Umatilla is 165 fish, said Paul Hoffarth, a regional fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "In recent years, the quota has been reached in a couple of months, so I'd advise anglers to get out early if they want to take a sturgeon home for dinner," he said. Another option is Lake Wallula (McNary Pool), including the Snake River below Ice Harbor Dam, which will reopen for sturgeon retention Feb. 1. Meanwhile, **steelhead** fishing has been up and down, typical of the winter fishery, said Hoffarth, who noted that some of the best catches on the Columbia River have been reported in the Ringold area. In the Tri-Cities area, the fishery is open for retention of hatchery steelhead from John Day Dam upstream to the wooden power line towers at the old Hanford town site through March 31, 2011. Another section of the Hanford Reach is open to fishing for hatchery steelhead from the Highway 24 bridge (Vernita Bridge) upstream to Priest Rapids Dam. Fishing in that area, which opened Dec. 8, is one of a number of angling opportunities funded by the Columbia River Salmon and Steelhead Endorsement Fee. The lower Snake River is also open for the retention of hatchery steelhead through March 31. The daily limit in the Snake River is three hatchery steelhead and barbless hooks are required. **Walleye** fishing can get slow in winter, but there's always a chance of catching a lunker. Hoffarth said some of the largest walleye of the year are boated during the winter months near the Tri-Cities — including the 19.3-pound state record taken in Lake Wallula in 2007. **Hunting:** Most big-game hunts in the region will be closed by the end of December, including the general-season cougar hunt in the Kittitas-Yakima zone. But waterfowl hunters can continue to bag **ducks and geese** through Jan. 30. Hunting rules are outlined in the *Waterfowl and Upland Game* pamphlet, available online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/regulations/> for details. Hunters who purchased tags for **black bear, deer, elk or turkey** are reminded that reports on their hunting activities are due by Jan. 31 for each 2010 tag purchased. Hunters can file a report by calling (877) 945-3492, or by the Internet at <https://fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov>. Those who miss the deadline must pay a \$10 penalty before they can purchase a 2011 hunting license. On the other hand, hunters who submit their reports by Jan. 10 will be entered into a drawing for five deer permits and four elk permits in various areas of the state. New this year, WDFW is requiring hunters to file separate reports for general-season hunting activities and for special-permit hunts for deer, elk, black bear and turkey. That change will give game managers more information about hunters' success during both kinds of seasons. Whether reporting online or over the phone, hunters should follow the prompts until they receive a confirmation number for each report. **Wildlife viewing:** WDFW's winter feeding program is now under way at the Oak Creek Wildlife Area, where hundreds of hungry **elk and big-horn sheep**

are expected to descend from the high country to dine on alfalfa hay and pellets. Now that the snow is flying, managers at the wildlife area are expecting a strong turnout at feeding stations 15 miles northwest of Yakima. Bald eagles can also be observed feeding on spawned-out coho salmon at Oak Creek and along the Yakima River. Oak Creek visitors can check the recorded message on the headquarters phone (509) 653-2390 for updates on feeding and elk-viewing tours. Tour reservations must be made at least 48 hours in advance by calling (509) 698-5106. For driving instructions and more information on the wildlife area see <http://bit.ly/hW6VAu> on WDFW's website. Meanwhile, birders will be counting birds for the 111th annual **Christmas Bird Count**, which runs through Jan. 5 in the Columbia River Basin and throughout the Americas. Sponsored by the Audubon Society, the annual event enlists birdwatchers — veterans and novices alike — to contribute their sightings over a 24-hour period to the world's longest-running bird database. Check out this year's tally under the *Current Year Results* heading on Audubon's website (<http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count>).