

[Weekender Report: Enjoy Valentine's Day together fishing for salmon, watching elk](#)

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

Posted on : January 28, 2011 at 8:40 am

Temperatures are warming, birds are singing and spring chinook salmon are starting to move into the lower Columbia River. Spring is still a ways off, but February offers plenty of opportunities to enjoy the outdoors with a friend or loved one - maybe even on Valentine's Day. "I suggest that couples looking for a uniquely Northwest experience head to the San Juan Islands for blackmouth salmon," said Steve Thiesfeld, Puget Sound salmon manager for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "Fishing, antique shops, nice restaurants - there's something for everyone." Not that couples can't find other great get-aways in other parts of the state. While the bulk of the spring chinook run usually doesn't arrive until March, opportunities abound to enjoy the outdoors right through the month of February. Options include:

Counting birds: The Great Backyard Bird Count runs Feb. 18-21 throughout North America, where birders of all levels are invited to record the birds they see in a 15-minute period. Participants can conduct their count anywhere they choose - including their own backyards - for the annual survey.

Catching steelhead: Starting Feb. 16, anglers can catch and keep one wild steelhead for the license year on eight rivers on the Olympic Peninsula - the only rivers in the state where retention of wild steelhead is allowed. Meanwhile, anglers continue to catch hatchery-reared steelhead on the Columbia River and its tributaries.

Digging razor clams: If marine-toxin results are favorable, Twin Harbors beach will open for razor-clam digging Feb. 17-19 and four other ocean beaches will open Feb. 18-19. Watch the WDFW website for confirmation that the dig has been approved.

Fishing Lake Roosevelt: Anglers are reeling in kokanee, walleye, burbot and rainbow trout from the big impoundment in northeast Washington.

Jigging for squid: Winter is prime time to fish for squid in Puget Sound. Good spots include the Elliott Bay Pier in Seattle and the Edmonds Pier.

Watching elk and bighorn sheep: WDFW's winter-feeding program is in full swing at the Oak Creek Wildlife Area 15 miles northwest of Yakima. Watch hundreds of hungry elk and bighorns gather to dine on alfalfa hay and pellets. For more information about these and other fishing and wildlife viewing opportunities, see the regional reports below: [Page 1 : Weekender Report: Enjoy Valentine's Day together fishing for salmon, watching elk](#)

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[pagebreak:North Puget Sound] Fishing: With fishing for steelhead and other game fish scheduled to close early on several rivers in the region, the focus is shifting on the marine areas where blackmouth salmon fisheries are under way. "The San Juan Islands are the best bet for salmon anglers as we head into February," said Steve Thiesfeld, a fish biologist for the Washington

Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "Fishing has been good for blackmouth in the San Juans, and hopefully that will continue throughout the month." Anglers fishing Marine Area 7 (San Juan Islands) - as well as marine areas 8-1 (Deception Pass, Hope Island and Skagit Bay), 8-2 (Port Susan and Port Gardner) and 9 (Admiralty Inlet) - have a two-salmon daily limit, but must release wild chinook salmon. Marine Area 10 (Seattle/Bremerton) is only open for salmon through Jan. 31. Thiesfeld said there also have been reports of some nice-size blackmouth caught in Marine Area 9, especially around Possession Bar off the southern tip of Whidbey Island. Another option is jigging for **squid**. Winter is prime time to fish 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/>.

Fishing for **steelhead and other game fish** is closing early in several river systems in Puget Sound and along the Strait of Juan de Fuca to protect wild steelhead. The early closures will affect the Nooksack, Snohomish, Stillaguamish and Skagit river systems, as well as several streams along the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Most rivers will close Feb. 1, although some waters near WDFW fish hatcheries will remain open through Feb. 15 to provide anglers an opportunity to catch and keep hatchery steelhead. "We're closing these rivers early because of conservation concerns," said Jim Scott, assistant director for WDFW's Fish Program. "With low numbers of wild steelhead expected back, we need to take this action to protect those wild fish that do return." Anglers are reminded that the lower Green River (King County) and the White, Carbon and upper Puyallup rivers closed to fishing for steelhead and other game fish Jan. 16. The upper Green River closes Feb. 1. For more information on all the closures, check the emergency rule changes on WDFW's website at <http://bit.ly/eWlYg3>. With several of the region's rivers scheduled to close, freshwater anglers might turn their attention to local lakes. Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish are good spots to fish for **perch, cutthroat** and **smallmouth bass**, said WDFW fisheries biologist Danny Garrett. "Lake Sammamish has been producing consistent angling action for cutthroat trout that range from 14-18 inches," he 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/>. The **Puget Sound crab** fishery is now closed, 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. **Hunting:** The **waterfowl** hunting season wraps up statewide at the end of January. Hunters, who have through Jan. 30 to hunt ducks and geese, 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. WDFW is accepting enrollment applications through Feb. 15 for its **Master Hunter program**. The department enlists master hunters to participate in controlled hunts to remove problem animals that damage property or threaten public safety. For information, see WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/masterhunter/> or call 360-902-8412. **Wildlife viewing:** Have 15 minutes to spare for bird science? That's virtually all it takes to contribute to the **Great Backyard Bird Count** (GBBC), an annual survey of birds sighted throughout the North American continent over a four-day period. This year's bird count is scheduled

Feb.18-21, when birders of all levels of experience are invited to count the number of birds they see in a 15-minute period and enter their tally, by species, on the GBBC website (<http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>). Participants can conduct their count in their own backyards, in a neighborhood park or anywhere they choose. Later in February, birders can take part in the **Port Susan Snow Goose and Birding Festival** in the Stanwood and Camano Island areas. The festival is scheduled for Feb. 26-27, and will feature tours and speakers for the experienced and beginning birder. For more information, visit www.snowgoosefest.org/.

[pagebreak:South Sound/Olympic Peninsula] Fishing: Several areas of Puget Sound open to blackmouth salmon fishing in February, more wild steelhead are moving into coastal rivers and another razor clam dig is tentatively scheduled for mid-month. If tests are favorable, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) will proceed with an evening **razor clam** dig at Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks and Kalaloch. Tentative opening dates and evening low tides are: Feb. 17, Thursday - 5:53 p.m. (-0.9 ft.); Twin Harbors Feb. 18, Friday - 6:33 p.m. (-0.9 ft.); Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks and Kalaloch Feb. 19, Saturday - 7:13 p.m. (-0.5 ft.); Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, Mocrocks and Kalaloch 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, anglers can find **hatchery steelhead** at some of the region's rivers. "Fishing for hatchery steelhead is winding down in the north coast streams, but anglers should continue to find fish in the Chehalis River Basin," said Kirt Hughes, regional fishery manager for WDFW, who recommends the Satsop, Skookumchuck and Wynoochee rivers. Beginning Feb. 16, **wild steelhead-retention rules** go into effect 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. Anglers will be allowed to retain one wild steelhead per license year on one of the eight rivers. For more information on steelhead fishing regulations, check the *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/>. Elsewhere, fishing for **steelhead and other game fish** will close early in several river systems in Puget Sound and along the Strait of Juan de Fuca to protect wild steelhead. The early closures will affect the Nooksack, Snohomish, Stillaguamish and Skagit river systems, as well as several streams along the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Most rivers will close Feb. 1, although some waters near WDFW fish hatcheries will remain open through Feb. 15 to provide anglers an opportunity to catch and keep hatchery steelhead. "We're closing these rivers early because of conservation concerns," said Jim Scott, assistant director for WDFW's Fish Program. "With low numbers of wild steelhead expected back, we need to take this action to protect those wild fish that do return." Anglers are reminded that the lower Green River (King County) and the White, Carbon and upper Puyallup rivers closed to fishing for steelhead and other game fish Jan. 16. The upper Green River closes Feb. 1. For more information on the closures, check the emergency rule changes on WDFW's website at <http://bit.ly/eWIYg3>. On the other hand, saltwater **salmon** fishing opportunities will expand Feb. 1, with the opening of marine areas 11 (Tacoma-Vashon) and 12 (Hood Canal). In addition, salmon fisheries also get under way in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, where marine areas 5 (Sekiu) and 6 (eastern Strait) open Feb. 16. Steve Thiesfeld, WDFW fish biologist, recommends trolling Coyote Bank, located about 13 miles north of the Washington shore between Port Angeles and Dungeness Spit. "Coyote was one of the more consistent producers last year, and hopefully that will continue this season," he said. "But make sure you keep your eye on

the weather if you're heading out that way." Salmon fishing is already under way in Marine Area 13 (South Puget Sound), where anglers have had some success hooking resident coho. Best bets include the Tacoma Narrows, the Squaxin Island area and in Eld Inlet off Evergreen Beach, said Larry Phillips, regional fish biologist for WDFW. Anglers should check the regulations for salmon fisheries on WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/>. Looking for some competition? Anglers can take part in the **Olympic Peninsula Salmon Derby** over Presidents' Day Weekend near Sequim. Prizes include \$10,000 for the largest fish, \$5,000 for second place and \$1,500 for third place. Details are available at <http://gardinersalmonderby.org/>. **Puget Sound 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. **Hunting:** The **waterfowl** hunting season wraps up statewide at the end of January. Hunters, who have through Jan. 30 to hunt ducks and geese, 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. WDFW is accepting enrollment applications through Feb. 15 for its **Master Hunter program**. The department enlists master hunters to participate in controlled hunts to remove problem animals that damage property or threaten public safety. For information, see WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/masterhunter/> or call 360-902-8412. **Wildlife viewing:** Have 15 minutes to spare for bird science? That's virtually all it takes to contribute to the **Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC)**, an annual survey of birds sighted throughout the North American continent over a four-day period. This year's bird count is scheduled Feb. 18-21, when birders of all levels of experience are invited to count the number of birds they see in a 15-minute period and enter their tally, by species, on the GBBC website (<http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>). Participants can conduct their count in their own backyards, in a neighborhood park or anywhere they choose. **[pagebreak:Southwest Washington] Fishing:** Ocean bright **spring chinook salmon** will be moving into the Columbia River in increasing numbers in the weeks ahead, setting the stage for one of the state's most popular fisheries. Anglers typically start landing early-returning "springers" in early February, but the fishery usually doesn't catch fire until March. "This is a good time to dust off your gear, prepare your boat and maybe do a little prospecting," said Joe Hymer, a fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). "You want to be ready to go when the bulk of the run arrives." According to the pre-season forecast, a total of 198,400 upriver spring chinook will return to the Columbia River Basin this year - well below last year's run of 315,345, but close to the 10-year average. Then again, 40,000 of this year's fish are expected to be five-year-olds, compared to 7,855 last year. In addition, 62,400 of the 104,000 fish headed back to the Willamette River are projected to be five-year-olds. "We're definitely expecting more big fish this year," Hymer said. "Five-year-olds can run from 18 to 30 pounds apiece." Fishery managers from Washington and Oregon are scheduled to meet Feb. 8 to work out fishing seasons and regulations for both the spring chinook fishery and white sturgeon fishery below Bonneville Dam. In the meantime, seasons and regulations listed in the 2010-11 *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/>) will remain in effect. As in previous years, only hatchery-reared fish marked with a clipped adipose fin and a healed scar may be retained. All wild

spring chinook, identifiable by an intact adipose fin, must be released unharmed. Fishing for spring chinook is currently open on the Columbia River below the Interstate 5 Bridge, where the limit is two adult fish per day. Anglers may also retain two adult springers per day on the Cowlitz and Deep rivers, but are limited to one adult fish a day on the Lewis and Kalama rivers. "The Cowlitz River and waters near the Willamette River are probably the best bets early in the season, because spring chinook usually start showing up there first," Hymer said. Meanwhile, anglers continue to reel in **hatchery steelhead** from waters ranging from the Cowlitz River to the John Day Pool and beyond. In general, the steelhead in the lower tributaries are winter-run fish, while those above Bonneville Dam are left over from last year's summer run, Hymer said.

"Hatchery-reared late-run winter steelhead are still moving up the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers and should be available to anglers for weeks to come," he said. Columbia River anglers can also retain one **sturgeon** per day in the lower Columbia below the Wauna powerlines or in the Bonneville, The Dalles or John Day pools. Anglers can also retain a fish per day Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays from the Wauna powerlines to Bonneville Dam. Fishing strategies vary from area to area. Hymer said boat anglers fishing the Bonneville Pool have done well by anchoring above the deeper holes and plunking with smelt, squid, sand shrimp, or roll-top herring. In the lower river, anglers have had some success fishing for sturgeon that gravitate toward the warmer waters flowing from the Willamette River. Fishing for smelt (eulachon) is closed to humans, but sturgeon still follow them up the Cowlitz River as far as Castle Rock, where anglers are waiting for them. Fishery managers are scheduled to set new seasons for sturgeon Feb. 8. Until then, most seasons and regulations listed in the 2010-11 Fishing in Washington pamphlet will remain in effect until then. The exception is that angling is closed on the mainstem Columbia at Sand Island near Rooster Rock State Park through April 30. Until then, all angling is prohibited from a line between the upstream end of Sand Island to a marker on the Oregon shore, downstream to a line between the lower end of Sand Island and a marker on the Oregon shore. **Trout** anglers should be aware that Battle Ground Lake and Kline Pond are both scheduled to be stocked with 2,000 half-pound rainbows from Vancouver Hatchery in February. But fishing could be just as good on 13 other regional lakes that were stocked with tens of thousands of trout in January. "Those fish - particularly the bigger ones - tend to stick around for a while when the weather is cold and anglers don't spend as much time on the water," Hymer said. "That will change once the weather breaks and fishing picks up." The weekly trout-stocking schedule is available on the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/plants/weekly/>. **Hunting:** The **waterfowl** hunting season wraps up statewide at the end of January. Hunters, who have through Jan. 30 to hunt ducks and geese, 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. WDFW is accepting enrollment applications through Feb. 15 for its **Master Hunter program**. The department enlists master hunters to participate in controlled hunts to remove problem animals that damage property or threaten public safety. For information, see WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/masterhunter/> or call 360-902-8412. **Wildlife viewing:** Have 15 minutes to spare for bird science? That's virtually all it takes to contribute to the **Great Backyard Bird Count**, an annual survey of birds sighted throughout North America over a four-day period. This year's bird count is scheduled Feb. 18-21, when birders of all levels of experience are invited to count the number of birds they see in a 15-minute period and enter their tally, by species, on the bird count website (<http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>). Participants can conduct their count in their own backyards, in a neighborhood park or anywhere they choose. Meanwhile, WDFW biologists have been conducting a bird count of their own. In

recent weeks, regional staff members have spread out across southwest Washington to participate in the national midwinter waterfowl survey, the primary source of population information for these birds. One team counted nearly **13,000 water birds** between Bonneville and John Day Dam on the Columbia River. Among them were 100 tundra swans, sighted in the Columbia River Gorge, most around Franz Lake. Many birds were also counted at Beacon Rock State Park. Rather see **raptors** ? The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will hold its first "Eagle Watch" event Saturday, Feb. 5 from 1-4 p.m. at The Dalles Dam Visitor Center. Agency employees will make spotting scopes and binoculars available at the free event so visitors can get a close-up view of eagles roosting at Westrick Park, at the west end of the powerhouse across the river from the visitor center. At 2:30 p.m., a park ranger will present "Birds of the Columbia Gorge" about bird adaptations and how to use a field guide. For more information please contact The Dalles Lock and Dam Ranger Office at 541-506-7819 or visit <http://www.nwp.usace.army.mil/recreation/home.asp> .

[pagebreak:Eastern Washington] Fishing: Of all the mid-winter fishing opportunities now available in the region, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) fish biologist Chris Donley recommends fishing Lake Roosevelt - the huge Columbia River reservoir off Grand Coulee Dam. "Lake Roosevelt's **kokanee** fishery is usually pretty good at this time of year," Donley said. "Large kokanee, measuring 20 inches and more, are caught near the surface by trolling small flies and plugs in four-to-six feet of water. It's also the start of the lake's fishing season for **walleye** , which are starting to stage at the mouth of the Spokane River to make their annual spawning run up the river." Anglers also continue to pull **rainbow trout** out of Lake Roosevelt, Donley said. Night fishing for Roosevelt's three-to-five-pound **burbot** should be productive, too. Even bigger burbot, up to 10 pounds, can be caught in Sullivan Lake in Pend Oreille County. Burbot are nocturnal predators, so night fishing is most effective, said Donley, noting that burbot are now gathering to spawn. "If you find one you usually find others," he said. Depending on temperature fluctuations, ice fishing should remain good at several winter-season or year-round fisheries in the region. Spokane County's Hog Canyon Lake and Stevens County's Hatch and Williams lakes should continue to provide **rainbow trout** catches through the ice. Action at Lincoln County's Fourth of July Lake seems to have slowed, and ice conditions may be questionable. **Yellow perch** fishing through the ice should continue to be good at Spokane County's year-round Eloika and Silver lakes and Stevens County's Waitts Lake, which closes Feb. 28. Sprague Lake might be a good bet for rainbows, but reported "iffy" ice conditions in late January are a reminder that anglers need to be cautious. Look for ice-fishing safety tips at http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/ice_fishing/ . Whitman County's Rock Lake provides open water fishing on rainbow and **brown trout** for the hearty angler who can brave the wind chill. Snake River tributaries, like the Grand Ronde, Tucannon, and Touchet rivers, are usually the place to target **steelhead** in February. Joe Bumgarner, WDFW fish biologist, said the Grand Ronde in particular is improving, although more creel checks will just be getting under way during the month of February to determine actual catch rates. WDFW fish hatchery crews are gearing up to get catchable **rainbow trout** stocked this month in waters that open March 1, mostly in the southeast corner of the region.

Wildlife viewing: The 14th annual **Great Backyard Bird Count** (GBBC), Feb. 18-21, is a way for wildlife enthusiasts of all kinds across the continent to help scientists learn more about bird populations, distribution and movements in late winter. Led by the Cornell University Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society, and Bird Studies Canada, with sponsorship from Wild Birds Unlimited, GBBC participants count birds anywhere - in backyards or at wildlife refuges - for as little as 15 minutes a day or as long as they wish during the four-day period. They tally the highest number of birds of each species seen together at any one time, and report their counts through an online checklist at <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/> . As the count progresses, anyone with Internet access can explore what is being reported from their own towns or anywhere in the United States and Canada. They can also see how this year's numbers compare

with those from previous years. The count is conducted in February to provide a snapshot of how birds are surviving the winter and where they are located just before spring migrations begin in March. One place in the region where **waterfowl** are usually found during February is on the flooded parts of farm fields in Whitman County and southern Spokane County. Kurt Merg, WDFW wildlife biologist, said these "sheet waters" consistently harbor large groups of migrating pintails, widgeons and other ducks and geese. "These are great places to drive through, and with binoculars or scopes from the roadside, observe early courtship behaviors of these birds," Merg said. If you don't know one duck from another, pack a bird field guide or use your mobile online device to check out "Ducks at a Distance" (<http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/birds/duckdist/index.htm>), a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Guide to Waterfowl Identification. Other wildlife watching at this time of year can be closer than expected as winter-weary animals seek easier travel corridors or forage. WDFW Wildlife Biologist Woody Myers advises motorists to slow down on roads through **deer, elk** and **moose** country and wildlife viewers to maintain respectable distances from animals. "It is still winter throughout the region," Myers said. "Keep your distance from wildlife that are likely experiencing stress from persistent snow cover, cold temperatures and limited forage."

[pagebreak:Northcentral Washington] Fishing: With warming air and water temperatures, **steelhead** fishing picks up a bit at this time of year on the upper Columbia River, said Bob Jateff, a district fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Most of that action is above Wells Dam on the mainstem Columbia River and in sections of the Methow River.

Steelheading also picks up with warming trends on the Entiat River, where a few fish are usually caught at the mouth. The Wenatchee River has been slow, but fish can still be caught in the mainstem Columbia River between Rock Island and Rocky Reach dams. Fishing for **whitefish** on both the Similkameen and Methow rivers also can be good, said Jateff, noting that fly anglers using small weighted nymphs under a strike indicator seem to do best. The whitefish daily limit is 15 with no minimum size requirement. Selective gear rules are in effect for whitefish in areas that are currently open for steelhead. Ice fishing for **rainbow trout** has been good at several Okanogan County lakes, including Big and Little Green, Davis, Rat, and Sidley.

Sidley Lake, near Molson and the Canada border, is the scene of the 7th annual **Northwest Ice Fishing Festival** on Feb. 19. The day-long event is hosted by Molson Grange and sponsored by the Oroville Chamber of Commerce. Ice fishing is conducted from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., with registration fees of \$20 per adult and \$10 for youth 14 years of age and under. Prizes are awarded for biggest and heaviest fish caught. Food, music, skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling and dog sledding are also available. For more information contact Robin Stice at Eden Valley Guest Ranch, (509) 485-4002, or info@edenvalleyranch.net. Another popular ice-fishing spot in Okanogan County is Patterson Lake near Winthrop, where anglers can hook rainbow trout and **yellow perch**. In Chelan County, ice fishing for rainbows, perch and other fish at Roses Lake near Manson was good earlier in the winter but warming trends have reduced ice thickness and safety. Chad Jackson, WDFW Columbia Basin district fish biologist, said most lakes in the south end of the region that are open were either treated last fall and have no fish in them yet, or are covered with unsafe ice. "Stay tuned for more fishing coming to the Basin in March," Jackson said. **Wildlife viewing:** The 14th annual **Great Backyard Bird Count** (GBBC), Feb. 18-21, is a way for wildlife enthusiasts of all kinds across the continent to help scientists learn more about bird populations, distribution and movements in late winter. Led by the Cornell University Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society, and Bird Studies Canada, with sponsorship from Wild Birds Unlimited, GBBC participants count birds anywhere - in backyards or at wildlife refuges - for as little as 15 minutes a day or as long as they wish during the four-day period. They tally the highest number of birds of each species seen together at any one time, and report their counts through an online checklist at

<http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/> . As the count progresses, anyone with Internet access can explore what is being reported from their own towns or anywhere in the United States and Canada. They can also see how this year's numbers compare with those from previous years. The count is conducted in February to provide a snapshot of how birds are surviving the winter and where they are located just before spring migrations begin in March. Rich Finger, WDFW Columbia Basin district wildlife biologist, said the local big waters - Moses Lake and Potholes Reservoir - are usually the best bet for seeing lots of the earliest **waterfowl** migrants, such as Canada geese and pintail ducks. **Bald eagles** can also be readily observed in the same areas where they're taking advantage of the influx of waterfowl. Up in the other end of the region, WDFW Sinlahekin Wildlife Area Assistant Manager Justin Haug reports good opportunities to see both wintering and migrating raptors. He recently photographed a **northern pygmy owl** near Blue Lake. Other species usually seen or heard mid- to late winter include **northern saw-whet owl**, **western screech owl**, **great horned owl**, **red-tailed hawk**, **northern harrier** , and **bald** and **golden eagles** . The Methow Valley's annual "**Nature of Winter Snowshoe Tours** " are available every Saturday during the month of February, plus Sunday, Feb. 20. Local naturalists lead the tours about winter ecology, wildlife and tracks, snow conditions and more. These family-friendly tours leave at 11 a.m. each Saturday from the North Cascades Basecamp in Mazama, which co-hosts with the Methow Valley Sport Trails Association (MVSTA). MVSTA snowshoe trail passes (\$5) are required and available at the North Cascades Basecamp or Mazama Ski Shop. Reservations are not required; space is available on a first-come, first-served basis and limited to 10 participants. Call MVSTA at 996-3287 or email events@mvsta.com for more information. **[pagebreak:Southcentral**

Washington] Fishing: Anglers continue to reel in hatchery **steelhead** from portions of the Columbia and Snake Rivers, although the prospect of catching **sturgeon** close to home will undoubtedly prompt some to switch gears. Starting Feb. 1, the McNary Pool - also known as Lake Wallula - will reopen for retention of white sturgeon that measure 43 to 54 inches from their snout to the fork in their tail. Centered near the Tri-Cities, it draws anglers from throughout the region, said Paul Hoffarth, a regional fish biologist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Open waters extend from McNary Dam to Priest Rapids Dam, and into the lower Snake River upstream to Ice Harbor Dam. "From the Tri-Cities, you can reach the fishery in 20 minutes in either direction," he said. Hoffarth said the opening at Lake Wallula should take some pressure off the fishery under way at Lake Umatilla (John Day Pool), where anglers have been chiseling away at a 165-fish annual quota. "That quota has been reached very early in recent years, so anglers should go soon - and keep an eye out for updates - if they plan to fish Lake Umatilla." For additional information, see the 2010-11 *Fishing in Washington* pamphlet, available online at

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/regulations/> . Meanwhile, **steelhead** fishing has been up and down, typical of the winter fishery, with some of the best catches reported in the Ringold area, Hoffarth said. In the Tri-Cities area, the fishery is open through March for retention of hatchery steelhead from John Day Dam upstream to the wooden power line towers at the old Hanford town site. 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 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:** The **waterfowl** hunting season wraps up statewide at the end of January. Hunters, who have through Jan. 30 to hunt ducks and geese, 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. WDFW is accepting enrollment applications through Feb. 15 for its Master Hunter program. The department enlists master hunters to participate in controlled hunts to remove problem animals that damage property or threaten public safety. For information, see WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/masterhunter/> or call 360-902-8412. Wildlife viewing: Have 15 minutes to spare for bird science? That's virtually all it takes to contribute to the **Great Backyard Bird Count**, an annual survey of birds sighted throughout North America over a four-day period. This year's bird count is scheduled Feb.18-21, when birders of all levels of experience are invited to count the number of birds they see in a 15-minute period and enter their tally, by species, on the bird count website (<http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>). Participants can conduct their count in their own backyards, in a neighborhood park or anywhere they choose. Meanwhile, WDFW's winter feeding program is now under way at the Oak Creek Wildlife Area, where hundreds of hungry **elk** and **big-horn sheep** have descended from the high country to ride out the winter weather. The animals are now on view from the visitor center 15 miles northwest of Yakima, where they gather to dine on alfalfa hay and pellets. Volunteers from the Wildlife Education Corps are on hand to talk about the elk and the history of the wildlife area. 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.